

# PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

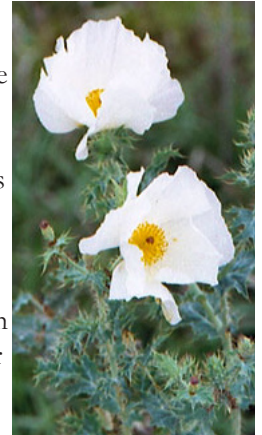
Karen Hummel



It is March 1 on Konza Prairie as I write this. It seems as if winter will never end. But spring will come, as it does every year. The grasses will emerge. Spring blooms will grace the hills. Fast forward with me to 6:30 p.m. Sunday evening, June 1, and envision our annual Konza Wildflower Walk on Butterfly Hill. I like to think of these annual hikes as botanical scavenger hunts. Jovial hikers join Konza docents in groups of 10 or so per docent. Each group covers Butterfly Hill at a leisurely pace, enjoying the wide open spaces, sunshine, and identifying plants along the way. What might you see when you join us for the Wildflower Walk this year? It varies, as each year is unique, but we can share our recollection of where we have spotted a few of our floral friends in past years.

**Hulbert Center Headquarters area:** In the upper garden, look for the tall prickly poppy with its large, papery white, six-petaled bloom with yellow stamens. The large false blue indigo bush may be blooming, with its purple flower spikes. In the lower garden, you may find violets, purple poppy mallow, and four o'clocks blooming.

**Bison corral area:** The trumpet vine, planted long ago by a settler, often hosts hummingbirds sipping nectar from deep orange-red flutes. On the hill across from the bison corral, a buffalo gourd vine trails large arrow-shaped leaves along with large five-petaled orange male and female flowers. From the bison corral, the steep trail crosses the Cottonwood limestone to the meadows above. This area is often filled with leadplant. Dried leadplant leaves were used by Native Americans to make a tea and for smoking. This bushy perennial with roots as deep as 16 feet is palatable to livestock and a sign of healthy grazing land. Many of the wild prairie plants have deep roots to help them survive drought conditions and severe prairie weather.



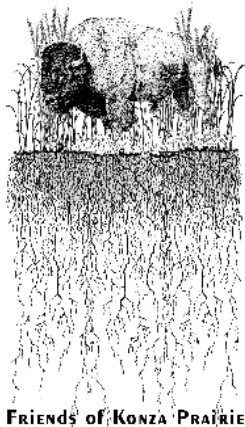
*Prickly poppy*

As you hike along the bison fence at the foot of Butterfly Hill, watch for ground plum and wild parsley. If past bloom, these plants still sport edible red plums or interesting umbel seed heads. You may recognize these plants as old friends.

Can you identify the grasses along the trail? Last year the big bluestem and Indian grasses reached heights of 10 feet or more. Big bluestem can bloom as early as June. Look for the "turkey foot" seed heads. Indian grass may be forming its characteristic "feather" top, but will not bloom until fall. Little bluestem grows in clumps up to two feet tall with narrow leaves. The stalks are purplish and flattened at the base. Switchgrass reaches heights taller than little blue, but shorter than big blue or Indian grass. It blooms in late summer, with its open, lacy seed heads.

Amid the grasses, look for purple coneflowers, golden aster-like prairie groundsel, the white daisy-like fleabanes, foxglove penstemon that look much like the ones you may have in your garden, and more. This year's Kansas Flower of the Year is blue-eyed grass. You will likely find it masquerading among the short grasses, peering forth with bluish or white buds or small six-petaled blooms.

*(Continued on page 3)*



FRIENDS OF KONZA PRAIRIE

Research

Education

Conservation

Tuesday, April 22, 7 p.m.  
Beach Museum of Art, KSU  
See page 9 for more information

Sunday, June 1, 6:30 p.m. Wildflower Walk

Sunday, Sept. 21, 7:30 a.m. Konquer the Konza Race  
See <http://manhattanrunningco.com/konquer-the-konza-25k-2/>



April 2014

@ Bluestem

Bison



## DIRECTOR

John Briggs



It's early March and as you know, this winter has been cold! Today, the seventh, is the first day of spring burning, and the burn crew of the Konza Prairie Biological Station (KPBS), lead by Dr. Gene Towne, is beginning the spring burn season at the small research and demonstration plots by headquarters. There was still snow on the ground earlier this week but we are hoping those days are behind us and that we get enough good weather to finish our spring burning by the first of May. As I have noted in other messages, we burn approximately 4,000 acres each spring, taking 12-14 days to conduct those burns. We have strict requirements for burning based upon weather conditions, and individuals who know Kansas weather understand how difficult it is to have days with low but steady winds with the correct humidity levels. It takes patience and experience to conduct our burns, and I am proud to say that our burn crew has both! As in years past, you can keep track of our burning progress, or lack of progress if the weather is bad, on our on-line burn map <http://kpbs.konza.ksu.edu>.

The annual KPBS Burn training/refresher/workshop was held on Feb. 22 at KPBS. Approximately sixty individuals attended, including seven undergraduates (with no special effort directed toward them!). The coveted Crimson Torch awards were given to individuals and the lab that contributed the most to the burning program in the following categories:

- Docent – Myron Calhoun (a frequent winner but with Chod Hedinger on his heels)
- Graduate Student – Shelly Wiggam-Ricketts (the first non-Biology graduate student to win this category)
- Research Lab – David Hartnett's Lab
- Undergraduate (first time this award was given out!) – Rebecca Zheng
- All of these people plus many others are vital to our burning program. All winners were there to receive their coveted award, except for Rebecca, who is studying abroad in Australia!

As most of you know, we are dependent on volunteers to conduct our burns, and I want to thank everyone who helps with our burning program.

I am not able to help on the burn crew as much as I would like due to the ever increasing amount of paperwork that I need to do as the Director. Right now I am completing the paperwork that documents the fees we have in place on KPBS. As most of you know, KPBS receives some funding from the State of Kansas to support the station, but those funds are not adequate to cover the extensive expenses associated with our burning and grazing program. Thus, we have a series of fees that help recoup some of the expenses that benefit the long-term research that is ongoing on Konza. These fees come mostly from highly competitive grants that KPBS researchers are awarded. They understand how valuable the large landscape experimental design that the late Dr. Lloyd Hulbert created over 40 years ago has proven and are more than willing to pay fees for the privilege of working at the site. However, we need to justify our fees, and that takes a lot of documentation, which is where I come in! I tried to alleviate the paperwork for the scientists so that they can have more time for their research. I am very fortunate to have Barb Van Slyke on-site, who tracks and documents our expenses and income (and her position is funded from those fees!). In addition, Ken Buyle and Rebecca Bohnenblust in the Division of Biology provide much-needed assistance in completing the paperwork. Finally, Dr. Brian Spooner (Division Director) has been a strong supporter of KPBS and has spared KPBS from many of the on-going budget cuts that are happening on campus. I cannot thank the Division of Biology enough for all of their efforts.

I also want you to know that based upon the funding climate in the State of Kansas, things are continuing to not look good. Thus, the importance of FOKP and the financial support we get from all of you cannot be overstated. I would like to thank you for your continued support to FOKP. You are the reason we have an Environmental Educator, and I am very proud of the hard work by the FOKP board members. The next time you see one, please thank them! As always, please contact me at [jbriggs1@ksu.edu](mailto:jbriggs1@ksu.edu); 785-532-0140 if you have any questions or concerns about KPBS as we try to continue to develop as one of the finest biological field stations in the world.

*John M. Briggs, Professor of Biology  
Director of Konza Prairie Biological Station  
Kansas State University  
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Manhattan, KS 66506  
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*Blue-eyed grass*



*Lead plant*



*Prairie penstemon*



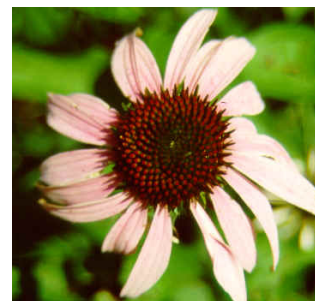
*Ground plum*



*Wild four-o'clock*



*Purple poppy-mallow*



*Purple coneflower*

Hiking to the top of Butterfly Hill, don't forget to count the limestone layers you cross. Each layer represents a time in the Permian geologic period when this portion of the continent was under water, as a shallow sea. The limestone is composed of millions of tiny sea creatures who lived their lives and drifted to the seabed, continuing their existence in the ground under our feet and the limestone buildings we enjoy.

At the top of Butterfly Hill, take a moment to enjoy the view with all of your senses. Hear the chatter of people botanizing and socializing, see the slant of sunlight, and feel the wind ruffling your hair. The landscape and skyline are remarkable. At your feet, you will see the Threemile limestone layer where brilliant rose verbena blooms among the limestone. Do you see any butterfly milkweed? That's the star of the walk, about a foot tall with lance-like deep green leaves and clusters of bright orange blossoms.

The windswept, bare area to the right, close to the power lines, is a favorite habitat of Missouri evening primrose, with its showy yellow blooms. The next section of trail takes you along the fence line separating Konza Prairie from adjacent ranchland. Descending across the Cottonwood limestone, you find the rainfall manipulation plots and, beyond them, the Hulbert fire demonstration plots. Notice the elderberry thicket in the lowland to the right and left in the low patch. These may be in bloom with large clusters of white blossoms.

Ahead to the right are numerous data collection/transmission devices used to record and transmit weather and climate-related data. Konza Prairie is one of the original sites designated for Long Term Ecological Research. These instruments and many others located throughout the 8600-acre research area support the efforts of researchers from KSU and other universities in the United States and abroad. This ongoing study effort has resulted in a body of research data dating since the 1970s and is a vibrant and important aspect of the mission of Kansas State University.

The Hulbert Fire Demonstration Plots are a source of rich botanical diversity. Notice the differences in the plants you find in the various plots. Returning to the ranch house and Hulbert Center, you might find ground cherries with their yellow bell-shaped blossoms. Some may have started developing the seed phase with the protective "Japanese-lantern" papery shield.

You may not see all of these plants, and you may not see them in the locations we have described. You will certainly see many others we have not mentioned here. Mark your calendar now, and come join us this June 1, Sunday evening from 6:30 until sunset, and enjoy this year's botanical scavenger hunt.

*All flower photos by Mike Haddock*



## FROM THE STONE HOUSE...

Jill Haukos, Environmental Educator



### Springing into Phenology

After a long and challenging winter I think we're all ready for warmer, sunnier weather and a chance to get outside. Nature gives us subtle clues hinting at the change of seasons and I've seen some of the first ones just this week. Skeins of thousands of snow geese have been flying very high in a northward direction for the last two days and the birds are letting us know that they're serious about leaving this time. Red-tailed hawks are doing their courting high above the prairie – a sure sign that nesting and eggs will be following soon.

Borrowing from Cornell University's website "All About Birds" – here's what we're seeing over the prairie:



"Courting red-tailed hawks put on a display in which they soar in wide circles at a great height. The male dives steeply, then shoots up again at an angle nearly as steep. After several of these swoops he approaches the female from above, extends his legs, and touches her briefly. Sometimes, the pair grab onto one other, clasp talons, and plummet in spirals toward the ground before pulling away."

On Konza, our avian spring herald is the killdeer. We find ourselves listening carefully for the distinctive call of the killdeer to finally get the message that we've made it through another winter. As of March 7<sup>th</sup>, we hadn't heard a killdeer yet. In 2013, we first heard the bird on March 4<sup>th</sup>; in 2011, on February 20<sup>th</sup>; in 2006, on March 13<sup>th</sup>. In case we didn't already suspect it, I believe this will be a "late" year – at least in comparison to the last seven years. We can expect later dates for flowers blooming, for the arrival of migrating species, and for the first song of the chorus frogs.

It's funny how years vary. Except it isn't happenstance – it's science. The study of the periodic plant and animal lifecycles is "phenology" and our phenological data gives us information on what is happening on Konza and can provide clues as to what is happening elsewhere. Konza docents regularly contribute data on the first time they see a flower bloom during the year or when the first bison calf is spotted. The phenological lists are maintained by Valerie Wright ([ywm@ksu.edu](mailto:ywm@ksu.edu)) and may be found here on the KEEP web site: <http://keep.konza.ksu.edu/ecology>. The more people who participate in the collection of this data, the better the data. This is a classic example of Citizen Science and is your chance to provide valuable information pertinent to researchers and citizens around the world.

Docents meet every Saturday morning to walk on Konza to make note of the plant species they can find on the prairie. Some people go along to take photos or to simply go for a hike in a different area than the Nature Trail. During these times one can make note not only of blooming plants but also of the animal and fungal life. These notes are important and may be the only record for when a species is seen on Konza. Let me know if you'd be interested in joining a group – call (785) 587-0381 or email [Konzaed@ksu.edu](mailto:Konzaed@ksu.edu).

Here's hoping that spring gets here sooner rather than later and then I'll see you on the prairie!

Jill

**Karen Hummel** is an invaluable asset to the Konza Environmental Education Program (KEEP). Karen has been immensely active as a docent since she began docent training in 2006. She has lead countless nature hikes, SLTER activities and assisted with many special events. Karen served as chair to the docent committee in 2011 and is currently serving her second year as president of Friends of Konza Prairie (FOKP).



### **What motivated you to become a Konza Prairie docent?**

My husband, Steve, called to my attention a notice in the Manhattan Mercury, advertising the 2006 Konza docent training. We enrolled, and participated in the 2006 docent training. Steve and I hiked the Nature Trail once or twice a week during the training. We also occasionally accompanied Earl Allen, Nancy Goulden, Patrick Gormley, Charlie Given, and others on Earl's Saturday excursions. Steve contracted a severe case of poison ivy, so we discarded his boots, bought steel-toed waterproof boots, and persevered. We were selected as docent trainees of the year 2006.

### **What are some of your hobbies and interests?**

Steve and I have three children and eleven grandchildren. They are my primary interest. I am also concerned with protection of the environment, advancement of educational opportunities for youth of all ages and grade levels, and promotion of anything that will awaken us to observe and experience our environment and achieve our potential as humans.

As a child, I trained as an artist, primarily doing portraits. As a retiree, I tried my hand at pottery. It was fun. But after awhile I thought "What will I do with all of these pots?" I didn't think they were good enough to sell on eBay, so I stopped taking lessons.

I do the layout for the Kansas Native Plant Society newsletter, and am interested in learning about regional flora, their identification at all stages, and historical uses. I read everything I can find about regional geology and history. In addition to training and docenting at Konza, I enjoy training and volunteering at the Marianna Kistler Beach Museum of Art. Steve and his sisters helped with the new Meadow project there.

### **What has been the best part of being a volunteer at Konza Prairie?**

There are so many joys of being a Konza docent. First, there are the relationships with other docents, faculty and staff, members of FOKP, teachers who return year after year, bus drivers who return with the school groups and love the prairie. There is a sense of community and mutual appreciation.

Second, it is joyful to share the prairie experience with children and adults who are surprised by the immersion experience, get a sense of the natural environment, and want to come back again after a single nature trail hike.

Third, I love the idea that young kids participating in science activities or hikes on Konza may become interested in pursuing a career in STEAM: Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, Math! Kids need to learn to observe, think, create, persevere. In the words of our hero Bill Nye, the Science Guy, these kids can "Change the world!"

### **What brings you the most joy in your life?**

Two types of things bring me joy. The first is the absolute joy I feel being with family and friends, or thinking about family and friends, or texting to family members or friends or checking Facebook, or other options and knowing we have so many ways to stay in touch. The bottom line is that family and friends give me joy.

The second joy is when I see something happening, or a decision made, that appears to benefit the planet. I consider Konza docenting a small contribution to benefit the planet, and I do it joyfully.

# Docent Roundup 2013

Docent Roundup is held at the end of every year to allow us to reflect on the previous year and to acknowledge the contributions of the volunteers who helped to make the year successful. Let's all congratulate our newest docents and outstanding docents.



## New Docents for 2013:

Left to Right: Hallie Hatfield (Asst. Environ. Educ.), Bob Lewis, Jan Adams, Greg Adams, Mary Breneman, Jim Copeland, Jill Haukos (Environ. Educ.)

Not present: Paula Ebert, Matt Sanderson, and Barb Stork

## Docent Trainees of the Year:

Docents in training who volunteered the most time and energy directly to the Konza Environmental Education Program, even as they were going through training:

**Jan Adams**  
**Greg Adams**



## Quality Docents:

Those who assisted with at least 3 activities and attended at least 3 in-service educational events during 2013:

Front row: Mary Breckon, Nancy Goulden, Susie Johnson, Mary Breneman

Middle row: Byron Burlingham, Jan Adams, Larry Loomis, Betty Burlingham, Colleen Hampton, Doreen Towne, Cindy Quinlan, and Diane Barker

Back row: Ken Stafford, Greg Adams, Gary Breckon, Bob Lewis, Jim Morrill, Ted Hopkins, Jerry Freeze, Charlie Given, Jim Johnson, Joe Mosier, Earl Allen, and Karen Hummel, Nancy Calhoun

Not present: Joye Gordon, Paula Ebert, Dru Clarke, Mike Clarke, Chod Hedinger, Ann Murphy



# Docent Roundup 2013

## 2013 Konza Prairie Teacher of the Year:

A teacher who tirelessly promotes the tallgrass prairie ecosystem to her students and regularly brings them to Konza Prairie to experience the area and participate in hands-on science activities:

**Terry Healy**



## Master Docents:

Those docents who have been a Quality Docent for at least 5 years. There were two new Master Docents added in 2013:

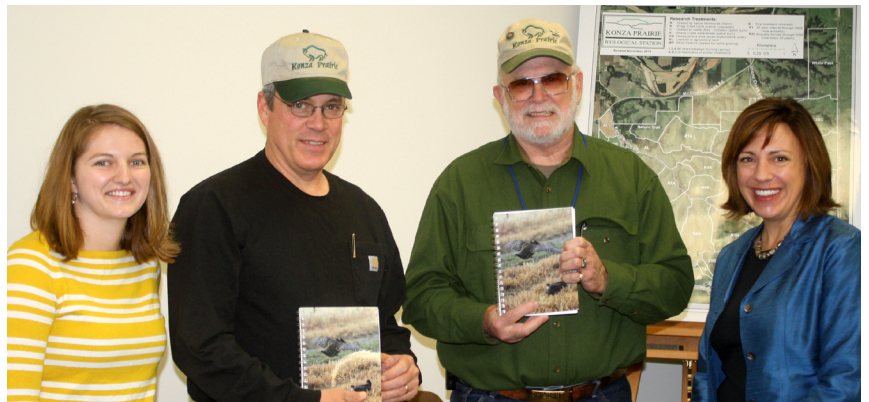
**Cindy Quinlan  
Susie Johnson**

## Prairie Chicken Docents:

Docent volunteers who led prairie-chicken viewing tours in 2013:

**Jerry Freeze  
Chod Hedinger**

Not present:  
Doris Burnett, Clancey Livingston



**Wildflower Docents:** Those docents who led tours for the 2013 FOKP Wildflower Walk:

Greg & Jan Adams

Diane Barker

Gary & Mary Breckon

Earl Allen

Shauna Dendy

Jerry Freeze

Joe Gelroth

Charlie Given

Nancy Goulden

Darren & Shelly Gunderson

Mike Haddock

Gary Harter

Karen Hummel

Susie Johnson

Keith & Ruth Miller

Don & Janet Phillippi

Cindy Quinlan

Sue Smith

Ken Stafford

Doreen Towne

# Docent Roundup 2013

## Beyond the Call of Doodie Docents:

Docents who went the extra mile by assisting in the care and maintenance of the Nature Trail composting toilet:

**Jerry Freeze  
Joe Gelroth**



## Kansas Master Naturalists:

People who went through 40 hours of in-class training and donated 30 hours of volunteer time to become knowledgeable about a wide range of topics relating to the natural world of Kansas. These volunteers may now donate their time and expertise at a wide array of sites throughout Kansas:

Back row: **Diane Barker, Karen Hummel Greg Adams**  
Front row: **Colleen Hampton, Jan Adams, Jim Johnson, Joe Mosier**

## In a Pinch Docents:

Docent who were able to quickly respond to calls for assistance at a moments notice:

Betty & Byron Burlingham  
Nancy Calhoun  
Dru Clarke  
Joe Gelroth  
Ann Murphy

## Docents with the most activities:

Docents who donated their time for the highest number of activities in 2013:

Chod Hedinger – 21 activities  
Joe Mosier – 23 activities  
Greg Adams – 24 activities  
Jan Adams – 27 activities

## Docent of the Year:

That docent who donated the most hours and energy to activities with the Konza Environmental Education Program in 2013 – she participated in 45 activities for a total of 69.5 hours:

**Nancy Goulden**



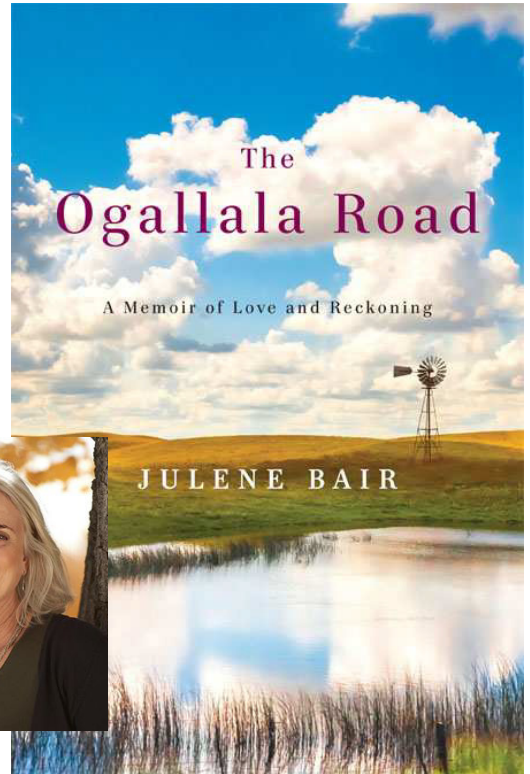


Julene Bair and Katie Kingery-Page

APRIL 22, 2014

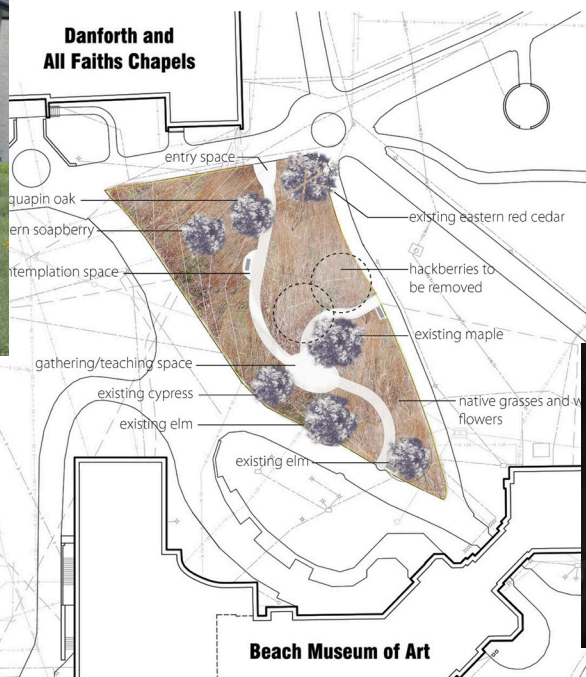
TIME: 7 p.m.

PLACE: Marianna Kistler Beach Museum on the campus of Kansas State University



Julene Bair, this year’s Spring Program speaker, grew up in western Kansas and has written about plains and prairie people and ecosystems ever since. “When I went to graduate school at the Iowa Writers’ Workshop,” she says, “I thought I would be writing stories about my experiences in 1960s San Francisco or my bold adventure in the wilds of the Mojave, but no ... No matter where I’ve lived or what I’ve done for a living since, I keep coming back to Kansas in my writing. Why? My most fundamental identity came from those prairies...”

Her first memoir, “One Degree West: Reflections of a Plainsdaughter,” recounts the social environment of small-community ranching and farming families at the 100<sup>th</sup> meridian. That human world is certainly shaped by the land those plainsmen and women and their children worked, but “The Ogallala Road” especially so through their efforts to re-cast it as cropland rather than prairie. In her new book, Bair returns to that familiar territory even more deeply, considering the damage her community’s livelihood does to the underground freshwater sea, the Ogallala Aquifer, from which they extract water for irrigation. In recognition of Earth Day, Bair returns again to Kansas from her home in Longmont, Colorado, to read from her work and discuss her history with shortgrass prairie, a story that is “A Memoir of Love and Reckoning.”



Her reading joins Katie Kingery-Page, licensed landscape architect, who will speak about “The Meadow,” a recently installed landscape of native plants outside the Beach Museum of Art. “The Meadow” bridges art and science research occurring at the university, offering a place for informal learning and contemplation by a diverse public. Katie is the primary architect of “The Meadow.”



The two presentations will recognize both the unique beauty of grassland ecosystems and landscapes, and the losses they continue to undergo – and how those forces affect the fundamental identity we all carry as inhabitants of the prairie world.



## Youth-Full Perspective

Claire Larkins

Well, I am ready for spring to come! Our chickens do not like the snow, especially the younger ones we got last spring who have never

been in it before. We have a bantam chicken that is especially flighty. When my dad opened the door of the coop one morning after it had snowed, she got a little confused and flew out and on top of the coop and wouldn't come down. When my dad went out later to try and get her down, she flew high up into our nearby elm



tree! Dad had to take a small rug and toss it up near her several times to get her to fly out of the tree and back down. It was pretty funny to watch!

Our chickens' egg production has been better than usual for winter. We have been seeing some coyotes around, but thankfully they did not get any of our birds. We have even had some raccoons and possums in the chicken yard and in the coop, but we didn't lose any birds to them either this winter. We have one chicken that is able to fly out of the yard. Well, okay, we have several that can, but one chicken in particular does not like it when the coop is disturbed or threatened by a strange animal. If that occurs, the next night, and for several nights after, she will roost in the garage, up high where we cannot reach her!

One morning I woke up to a very strange chicken cackle, and we assumed that "Feisty," the one who sometimes roosts in the garage, was in bad trouble. We ran outside to find her walking around and acting fine. Apparently she didn't think we got out there early enough to open the coop up, and so in her own way was trying to "crow" to get us up and out the door to feed her!

It's time to think about the county fair, and I have taken chickens each year, but we're not sure about this year. Last spring we got two different types of bantams, the one I mentioned earlier, which is a Golden Sebright, and also a White Silkie. We took the Silkie to the fair last summer assuming it was a female bird, but after the fair he started to crow! As far as roosters go, he is pretty funny, not to mention kind of funny looking.

The chickens like roaming around in our garden, but soon we are going to close the garden gate and start preparing it for planting. I see buds on the trees outside our kitchen window, the Konza fire crew has started burning, and the bison, which had huddled in the trees for the freezing temperatures, have moved back into the hills for the most part. By the looks of our chickens' activity these days, I think even they seem to sense the coming of spring. I hope they are right!





## “Life on the Konza Prairie”

Choral concert by Northview Elementary Fourth Grade

On January 30, 2014, a group of talented fourth graders from Northview Elementary in Manhattan gave a concert depicting life on the Konza Prairie. They sang original songs about the colors of the prairie and the songs of the birds, and dressed in costumes of their own making representing birds, grasses, trees, and even fire.

This was all the inspiration of their music teacher, Mrs. Laurie Davis, and we thought it would be interesting to hear what her inspiration was and how this project came to be. We also thought it would be interesting to hear from a person in the audience. Here we present the thoughts of Laurie Davis, Northview Music Director, and Ann Murphy, KEEP Docent and concert attendee.

**Laurie Davis:**

**Q: What was your motivation to do a concert like this?**

A: I was motivated to prepare this concert for three reasons: 1) I found an article in one of my professional music magazines about collaborating with classroom teachers to create a music program. This particular article concerned a program created about a local nature park. This inspired me to find out if any of our grade levels studied any of the local nature spots. The fourth graders study the Konza Prairie each year as a unit and take a field trip as well. The many wonderful experiences I myself have had with my children and my friends spending time on the Konza Prairie in all the different seasons seemed a perfect vehicle for a fourth grade program.

**Q: Where did you get the idea to have original music?**

A: I teach a lot using the Orff-Schulwerk style, which encourages improvisation and creating original music. My fourth graders are expected to learn how to count rhythm patterns in 6/8 time during this school year, so I was able to meet that standard by having students create one of their songs using 6/8 patterns. As far as I know, there are no songs written about the Konza Prairie specifically, so it seemed appropriate that we would create some!

**Q: Why did you decide to have the students help write the lyrics?**

A: I provided the resources, but the students researched several topics in small groups: medicinal plants on the Konza, edible plants of the prairie, and the colors of the prairie. There is a whole website called “Kansas Wildflowers and Grasses”, in which the plants are pictured and sorted by colors and seasons. The students also looked at fire on the prairie and its purpose. We practiced bird sounds of the birds that live on the prairie. That ended up being one of the songs we did. *Listen to the Birds of the Forest Sing* was an existing song to which we added our birdsong. The other songs were about edible plants, *Welcome to the Prairie Table*, medicinal plants, a rap song called *Life's Full of Pain*, and Konza colors, *Colors on the Konza*. The grasshopper song and the fire song were instrument sounds imitating the fire and grasshoppers.

The students enjoyed dressing as trees, grasses, flowers, fire, and as animals so they could populate the prairie when they came on stage. I think my favorite thing along with the students was the “fire” at the end. All the animals had to run away, the trees disappeared and didn’t come back, and the other plants came back when the fire was gone.



**Q: Have the students talked about their experiences at Konza?**

A: The students shared their favorite things about their Konza field trip, and we also shared favorite parts of the creation process. Some of them had never been there before. I think getting to go in the fall was great, as all the colors are so lovely at that time. I encouraged them to take trips to the Konza during other seasons with their families. I'm hoping these Northview families will enjoy the Konza prairie now that they are aware of it.

**Ann Murphy:**

We were a bit late to the fourth grade students' concert. As we walked into the auditorium, the lights were low and the music peaceful. The auditorium stage was occupied by inquisitive animals exploring their surroundings, trees standing their ground, waving grass, colorful flowers, and flying birds. We were looking at the fourth grade students' creative interpretation of the prairie. There was a lot of gentle movement. Was that fourth grade energy or the wind blowing on the Konza prairie? The "prairie" was complete.

The "prairie" was organized and began to sing *Welcome to the Prairie Table*. The background music was wonderful. There

was a lot of information in the song. There were at least a dozen plants identified for the menu of our next meal.

The "prairie" took a breath and sang *Konza Colors*. Again, there was a lot of information in the song. Numerous plants were mentioned and yes, the colors on the stage were the colors of the prairie. The fourth graders noticed the colors. They had paid attention to the Konza environment.

Next, the birds of the prairie got their turn to be recognized by the fourth grade. It is hard to imitate the sounds of the prairie birds but the students gave it a good try and we got it.

Next the audience learned how the prairie can help ease pain. That must have been quite a classroom discussion. Hair loss and rheumatism probably are not everyday topics for fourth graders, but they gave it their best. There was truly some moaning and groaning. In the song *Life's Full of Pain*, we learned which prairie plants can help various bodily afflictions. Many prairie plants were mentioned. Some history must have been part of their preparation because we were given the name of the plant used to heal ax and knife wounds.

Then we came to burning the "prairie". The fire moved across the prairie flattening the grasses and forbs, but soon the grasses and flowers return to the beautiful prairie again.

All was well on the "prairie." The students did considerable research and showed that they know the prairie. I commend the students and the teachers who have taught them and given these young people an opportunity to know their prairie environment.

The presentation by the fourth grade students showed what a docent hopes will be the outcome of a day with the children on the tallgrass prairie of the Flint Hills in Riley County Kansas. We want the children to have a positive, meaningful relationship with a docent and experience nature. We hope to provide a field experience that connects classroom learning with the real world. Every child should be naturally curious about the environment. With their knowledge and experience gained in the classroom, on the Konza, and now on the stage, they can continue to notice their environment, and develop their scientific and creative inquiry. We hope they will feel the value of this part of their world and learn to treasure it. If children are becoming more disconnected from the natural world, then we work to correct that concern.

As a docent, I say it is just plain good fun to interact with the children out on the prairie!



*Photos by Jill Haukos*

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