



taft times




FALL 2009

Northern Illinois University Lorado Taft Field Campus

Oregon, IL

The Fall of the Tall Grasses



Lorado Taft and the Eagle's Nest Art Colony saw a very different landscape in the early 1900s than we see today. Instead of woodlands there were fields upon fields of tall-grass prairie. At Taft Campus today, 2 of our 140 acres consist of tall-grass prairie. In the past 100 years there has been a 99% reduction of this ecosystem across the Great Plains, making it truly one of the most endangered in the world. Forests have replaced these grasslands due to permanent populations of people. Settlers in the early 1800s started controlling or stopping wild fires, so they could protect their homes and other structures, which allowed for woody species to replace the prairie vegetation. The shade created by trees makes it much more difficult for grasses to capture much needed sunlight for growth. With no preservation, Taft's remaining prairies could turn into forests and we could lose the history and important lessons that can be found in exploring our grasslands.

Two examples of these lessons include understanding the importance of periodic burning and seed collecting to sustain biodiversity and beauty. Periodic burning helps prairies by removing trees, dead grasses and flowers from previous seasons creating open space for new growth. Prairie plants are adapted to withstand fires because their growth point occurs slightly below the surface and they have deep root systems. In the early spring, one of our prairie plots between North Field and the Instincts for Survival Field was burned and the results were dramatic. First leaving an ashen field, there was nothing above ground except for the nutrients that fertilize the soil. By summer's end, this prairie plot was a greener, taller area than the adjacent unburned plots. This spot will thrive and benefit from the burn for the next couple of years, as the most abundant diversity comes after a fire.

Seed collection is done in the fall after the plants have flowered and produced seeds to harvest. This process takes a lot of people to complete because it is done by hand, usually one species at a time. The seeds are then cleaned and planted in the winter or early spring and, eventually, the benefits of all the hard work can be seen. Since the majority of prairies in the Great Plains and on Taft Campus are fragmented, there is a need to have the seeds be exchanged from one local fragmentation to another. Seed collecting and planting is therefore a vital step in increasing biodiversity of grasslands and thus biodiversity of the animals that rely on these unique and rare species of plants.

As fall approaches, we begin to notice splashes of color popping up and quickly fading along roadsides. Let us remember that many of these roadsides are remnants of the prairie that once stretched across the plains. The next time you are on campus, take a moment to explore our prairies and our natural history, whether it be out in North Field, in front of the Dining Hall, or along the sidewalk near the Chimney. Students can learn more about different aspects of prairies in many of our classes such as Pioneering, Native Americans and Service Projects.

Shader, Neil. "On Earth Day, Endangered Ecosystem still lacks protection." *Wetlands, Conservation, Waterfowl, Duck Hunting - World Leader in Wetlands Conservation - Ducks Unlimited*. Ducks Unlimited, 21 Apr. 2008. Web. 23 Sept. 2009. <<http://www.ducks.org/news/1560/OnEarthDayEndangered.html>>.



<http://www.niu.edu/taft/> | FRONTPAGE

Introducing... THE TAFT STAFF 2009-2010!

We are excited to begin another wonderful year here at Taft! We have many returning staff and a few new additions! Here's a look at who you might meet during your trip this year :



From left to right: Becky Paulson, Laura Ritenour, Dominica Rogers, Claire Landgren, Erin Lappen, Melanie Costello, Hannah Lavold, Kim Tranel, Emily Klein, Autumn Foutch



Melanie Costello, Outdoor Education Coordinator

Hometown: Sycamore, Illinois
 Education: B.S. Biology, Mankato State University
 M.S. Ed. Outdoor Education, Northern Illinois University
 Interests: Prairie Restoration, Pioneer Life
 Future Plans: To work at Taft for many more years and build her dream home with her husband



Becky Paulson, Assistant Outdoor Education Coordinator

Hometown: Eau Claire, Wisconsin
 Education: B.S. Biology; Minor: Environmental Science; University of Wisconsin - Eau Claire
 Interests: Orienteering, Survival
 Future Plans: Run her own outdoor education center



Emily Klein, Assistant Outdoor Education Coordinator

Hometown: Grinnell, Iowa
 Education: B.S. Agriculture Education & Communications, Iowa State University
 M.S. Education, Curriculum & Instruction w/ emphasis in Environmental Education; Florida Atlantic University
 Interests: Outdoor Adventure Sports, Nature Trail Design, Helping kids learn through hands-on outdoor experiences.
 Future Plans: Continue teaching kids and raise some of her own





Autumn Futch, Senior Education Program Specialist

Hometown: Bridgeport, Michigan
Education: B.S. Fisheries and Wildlife, Michigan State University
Interests: Historical Interpreting, Plant ID, Biodiversity, Wetlands
Future Plans: Work throughout the Great Lakes doing wetland outreach programming



Hannah Lavold, Senior Education Program Specialist

Hometown: Lodi, Wisconsin
Education: B.S. International Agriculture and Natural Resources, University of Wisconsin - Madison
Interests: Bird-watching, Photography, Arts & Crafts, Hiking, Orienteering, Cross Country Skiing
Future Plans: Earn teaching certificate; teach in Appleton, WI; will be getting married next year!



Claire Landgren, Education Program Specialist

Hometown: Rochester, Minnesota
Education: B.S.; Major: Environmental Studies, Minor: History; Oberlin College
Interests: Fungus, Flower ID, Astronomy, Pioneer Cooking
Future Plans: Work in a natural history museum as an exhibit developer



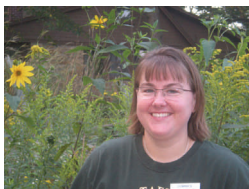
Erin Lappen, Education Program Specialist

Hometown: Chanhassen, Minnesota
Education: B.A. Biology and Environmental Science, Cornell College
Interests: Weather, Animals, Snowboarding
Future Plans: Teach internationally



Laura Ritenour, Education Program Specialist

Hometown: Angola, Indiana
Education: B.S. Agriculture; Major: Wildlife, Minor: Psychology; Purdue University
Interests: Tree ID, Tracking, Small Mammals, Waste Education
Future Plans: Obtain teaching license; work in zoo education



Dominica Rogers, Education Program Specialist

Hometown: Chillicothe, Illinois
Education: B.S. Geology, Illinois State University
M.S. Recreation, Park, and Tourism Administration; Western Illinois University
Interests: Geology, Weather, Hiking
Future Plans: Join the Air National Guard; work as an interpreter at a National Park



Kim Tranel, Education Program Specialist

Hometown: East Dubuque, Illinois
Education: B.S. Environmental Science and Spanish, Allegheny College
Interests: Natural History, Water Ecology, Eco-friendly Practices
Future Plans: Graduate school for sustainable agriculture or conservation biology

We welcome both Kim and Laura to our team and wish the best to those that have moved on in their careers!



Best Wishes Becky and Jeff!

Becky Peterson, Assistant Outdoor Coordinator, exchanged vows with Jeff Paulson on October 3, 2009.

We wish you both a lifetime of love and happiness!
Congratulations!



Congratulations!

We would like to congratulate Autumn Foutch and Hannah Lavold for receiving the Lorado Taft Campus Most Outstanding Program Specialist Awards! We are happy to have them both back for another year at Taft!

Zero Food Waste Hall Of Fame!

Everyone who comes to Lorado Taft works hard to reduce their food waste. We would, once again, like to acknowledge those schools who reached the promised land of zero ort in the past semester:

Thomas—*Delta*
St. Thomas of Villanova

Congratulations and keep working towards zero ort!

Teacher Tidbits:

You will now find many of our lesson plans on our website! If you would like to refresh your knowledge in a particular subject area, or have questions regarding a specific activity, log onto niu.edu/taft. Select Outdoor Education Program in the left menu, then Teacher Resources. You will then see a category called Demonstration Lesson Plans with a variety of classes listed. Here, you will find directions to facilitate many of our activities and a list of learning standards that each class meets.

Welcome back to school!
We hope you have great year and an exciting trip to Taft!



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Taft Times Contributors

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