

Discover the

Minnesota Prairie Landowner Network

Summer 2021

Photo: Des Moines River Valley Sunset, by Davis Harder.

Helping Each Other Manage Prairie
So, You Want to Plant a Prairie?
What is the MPLN Facebook Group?

Questions? Comments? Unsubscribe?
Send an email to Prairie.Protection@state.mn.us
or call Judy Schulte (DNR) at (507) 637-6016

The Minnesota Prairie Landowner Network is a partnership project of the Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan with specific support from the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, The Nature Conservancy, and Becker Soil & Water Conservation District.



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Helping Each Other Manage Prairie



*By Judy Schulte,
Prairie Biologist,
MN DNR*

Thank you for taking the time to read the first mailing from the Minnesota Prairie Landowner Network (MPLN). For those of you who are not already a member of the MPLN's Facebook group, I thought I would take some time to provide more details on why the network was created, what the network aims to provide and why you are receiving this.

For the last 13 years of my professional career, I have been working with private landowners managing native prairie and other grasslands. Throughout this time, I have met and learned from hundreds of kind, dedicated landowners across Minnesota who have a wealth of knowledge and experience managing prairies. These landowners know the intricate details of their land's history and also have years of on-the-ground experience managing these lands.

Often, when I leave a driveway,

I wish I could introduce one landowner to another, but more often than not they live hundreds of miles apart making a coffee invite unrealistic. As I looked for alternative ways to make these connections, I started reaching out to others asking a lot of questions, gaining support, and eventually landed on the idea of the Minnesota Prairie Landowner Network. The Minnesota Prairie Landowner Network aims to connect prairie landowners to each other and anyone else that can provide help and support. It is a way to learn and exchange with others that may not be within your own local community on innovative ideas, tried and true techniques, shared challenges, and new opportunities.

Though this network is facilitated by conservation organizations with many prairie professionals across the state participating, we want YOU to drive the conversation, share your expertise, and ask your questions. We simply want to connect the dots between those managing prairies and hope this

knowledge sharing will help each of us along the way.

We sent this booklet to everyone in Minnesota that we identified as owning or managing native prairie. You can opt out of receiving this information at any time (see the inside cover for more details) or can decide to participate more by joining the Facebook Group (see the final article for more details). If you do neither of these, you will continue to receive these mailings when we are able to send them. We are not sure how frequent or in-depth these mailings will be, honestly it depends on if you see value and want to take part. Right now, we are thinking about a mailing like this each

year with an occasional postcard to share timely events or other information.

I hope you find this useful and sincerely want to thank you for your dedication and hard work to keep Minnesota's native prairie healthy for our children, grandchildren and wildlife!

Judy Schulte is a Prairie Biologist for the MN DNR. She has spent the last 14 years working across the state with both private and public land managers on prairie conservation and management. Judy grew up and returned after college to live on her family farm near Bird Island, MN. She is the third generation and her two sons are the fourth generation to live on the family's farm.



Judy's two sons are the 4th generation to live on her family's farm. Photo by Judy Schulte.

So You Want to Plant a Prairie?



*By Phil Doll,
Private Lands Biologist,
Becker SWCD*

My wife and I both grew up living in the country – I grew up on a dairy farm and she grew up on the banks of a river at the end of a mile-long driveway. Once married, we ended up living in town for ten years, but we always knew we wanted to get back to the country to raise our family, and we got that chance three years ago. Along with our new home, we were now the proud owners of ten acres of cropland. The cropland was being farmed by our new neighbor. Past crops included oats, soybeans, corn and alfalfa. The land is quite sandy with most larger fields in the area being irrigated. So, without the irrigation, our farmland was marginal and I knew that I wanted to restore the cropland to prairie. Now, I needed to decide what path to take. Should I take on the project on my own or try to enroll in a conservation program to help with the costs? I decided to explore conservation programs.

When it comes to conservation programs for private land, the biggest source of funding is the farm bill. The farm bill is a massive piece of federal legislation that gets renewed by congress usually every 5 years. It contains provisions on everything from farm credit, rural development, food and nutrition programs, agricultural research and of course conservation. If you ask most people what conservation programs are available in the farm bill, their answer will probably be ‘CRP’. CRP, or the Conservation Reserve Program, was first introduced in the 1985 Farm Bill. When you enroll in CRP, you receive a yearly payment, usually for a term of 10 or 15 years, and in exchange, you agree to convert farmland to vegetative cover. CRP has been very popular over the years enrolling as many as 37 million acres at the program’s height, however it is not the only farm bill conservation program available. Other programs include the Wetlands Reserve, Grasslands Reserve, Conservation Stewardship Program, and EQIP, short



"Oat stubble" on the prairie restoration. Photo by Phil Doll.

for Environmental Qualities Incentive Program.

EQIP was first introduced in the 1996 Farm Bill. EQIP has become a very popular program with farmers and landowners because of its flexibility. It can be used to address one resource concern on your farm or many. Need help with planning and installing a wind break? EQIP can be used to address that. Need help controlling erosion? EQIP again can be used. Need help developing a rotational grazing system? You guessed it, EQIP. Along with technical planning assistance, EQIP also provides cost-share to install your conservation plan. After reviewing farm bill programs for my situation, I narrowed it down

to EQIP and CRP, and ultimately went with EQIP.

Since this was my first time participating in a farm bill program as a landowner, I needed to complete some paperwork with the local Farm Service Agency staff to get started. Next, I worked with local staff from the Natural Resources Conservation Service to develop a plan that would address the resource concerns that I had for my land – primary of which was converting my cropland to prairie habitat that would benefit pollinators, grassland birds, and other wildlife. Then, I submitted my EQIP application and I waited to see if my application would rank high enough to receive

funding. It took a couple funding cycles over the course of a year before my plan was accepted which brings us to where I am now. I have a plan and funding in place ready for me to begin implementing my prairie restoration this summer.

And now the real fun begins – I get to plant my own prairie! I've been involved in reconstructing prairies for many years as part of my job. Through both state and federal conservation programs, I've been fortunate to help private landowners restore thousands of acres back to tallgrass prairie and wetland habitat. It's been the highlight of my career. As fun as it is to help others, it's now my turn and I cannot wait. Now I get to enjoy the entire process knowing that the final product will be right out my own front

door. I can confidently say that I'm ready for the challenge. But at the same time, if there is one thing that I've learned about prairie throughout the years, it's that any single person cannot possibly know all there is to know about our favorite ecosystem. That's where the Minnesota Prairie Landowner Network comes in - advice and answers from experts and peers like you are just a few clicks away.

Through his job, Phil helps private landowners protect and restore the natural resources on their properties by utilizing available programs, cost-share, or offering technical advice. Additionally, he's a member of the Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan State Work Group as well as a board member for the Minnesota Prairie Chicken Society.



Landowner Resources

- Looking for help managing your prairie? A great place to start is your local Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD).
- The Minnesota Prairie Landowner Handbook will be published by the MN Department of Natural Resources in July 2021.

If you'd like a copy of the handbook,
email prairie.protection@state.mn.us
or call Judy Schulte at 507-637-6016

What is the MPLN Facebook Group?



By David Minor,
Corps Member,
Conservation Corps MN
& IA

As Judy noted in the first article, the Minnesota Prairie Landowner Network (MPLN) was created to allow landowners across the state to share knowledge and information with each other. This started with the creation of an online Facebook group in July of 2020. So far, over 450 landowners and prairie professionals have connected and started sharing photos, questions and resources about prairie in Minnesota.

What do the conversations in this group look like?

Marybeth Block, one of the landowners in the Facebook

group, posted this question (below) in the group. It sparked a conversation with several other members of the group and generated a lot of comments and ideas that she could take back and think about for the restoration project she is working on. “As a landowner of recently restored prairie I find the Prairie Landowner Network a valuable resource. As a prairie-lover I appreciate that the group connects me with like-minded members,” she said.

Questions like this, on a wide variety of topics, are being posted by members of the Facebook Group regularly with each post receiving help and ideas from fellow landowners. Members are even going beyond questions, often sharing links to



Screenshot of Marybeth's question to the Facebook group.

new resources and information that they have found useful. *Join the group to share your expertise and ask your questions!*

How do you find this Facebook group?

The easiest way to find the Facebook group is by using a browser (Google Chrome, Safari, Internet Explorer, etc.) to go to www.facebook.com/groups/MNPrairieNetwork. Another way you can find it is by searching for “MN Prairie Network” on an internet search engine (www.Google.com) or by searching directly on the Facebook app or website.

Once you find the MPLN Facebook group, you will be

able to see all the posts, photos, questions, and comments that people have shared. However, you will not be able to post and comment until you have joined the group. If you already have a Facebook account, you just need to sign into your account and select the option to join the group. If you do not have a Facebook account, you will need to first make one in order to join the group.

How do you make a Facebook account?

To join the MPLN Facebook group and participate in the discussion, you will need a Facebook account. If you do not have a Facebook account, you can make one for free by going



In April, this prescribed prairie burn photo by John Stelzner was chosen as the photo of the month to be used as the group's cover photo.

to www.facebook.com and selecting the option to create an account.

When you sign up, you will need to provide a few things including a phone number or email so Facebook can contact you if something is wrong with your account. Be sure to have that information ready.

After you have a Facebook account and have joined the group, you will be ready to join in the conversation.

David Minor has served as a Conservation Corps MN & IA member placed with the MN DNR since 2019. He works on communications and outreach projects for the Minnesota Scientific and Natural Areas Program.



10 Questions this Network could Help Answer

1. What plant is this?
2. What seed is ready for harvest in my area right now?
3. How do I tell if my prairie is native or restored?
4. What seed mix is best for my property?
5. Has anyone had success controlling (*insert invasive species here*)?
6. What insect is this?
7. Burning is not an option this year for me, what alternatives have others tried?
8. What prairie related events would you recommend attending?
9. What books are most relevant to prairie management in my area?
10. What are the best management tools and equipment for (*insert project here*)?



Photo: Native Prairie Bank in Moulton County, by Fred Harris.

Historically, Minnesota had 18 million acres of prairie and oak savanna (yellow/orange area on map above). Now less than 2 percent of native prairie and oak savanna remains (shown in red), about 250,000 acres. Much of this is in private ownership. Prairie partners and professionals across the state recognized the need for a forum for landowners to connect and discuss important prairie management and conservation information with each other.

Let's talk #PrairieManagement!

Like • Reply • 16 min ago

**Join the conversation by going to
[Facebook.com/groups/MNPrairieNetwork](https://www.facebook.com/groups/MNPrairieNetwork)**