



Prairie Pod Transcript

Season 4, Episode 39: State Fair Episode

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Podcast audio can be found online at mndnr.gov/prairiepod

Transcript:

((sounds of birds chirping and wind blowing))

Megan: Hey Mike.

Mike: Hey Megan.

Megan: How are ya today?

Mike: Good, it's good to see you after the long fall and the early winter here.

Megan: I know and I've got my orange coat, right, so I feel very festive and visible.

Mike: Oh yeah, beautiful.

(Laughing.)

Megan: Thank you, thank you so much. Well we are breaking into your broadcast here to let you know about a very special episode that we recorded this summer when Mike and I were live from the Minnesota State Fair. You remember that Mike?

Mike: Live! Man that was, it was a lot of fun actually.

Megan: It was a lot of fun. It felt like a lot of pressure but it was a lot, it was a lot of fun.

Mike: I was a little nervous about it but yeah, it went well.

Megan: And we are so grateful to you, our listeners because we had so many of you show up and you were in the audience cheering us on.

Mike: That was really cool.

Megan: Sharing your love of prairie with us. That was just wonderful to see and so we have now, we have the audio here ready for you and we just wanted to apologize a little bit because while we were at the state fair, we had some audio technical difficulties.

Mike: There was a learning curve, there was a learning curve, yeah.

Megan: A little bit and so our IT people cleaned it up really fast, so we - -

Mike: They did.

Megan: - - have also edited this just a little bit so it's easier on your ears. If you get to about the first minute, all of that background noise that you're hearing will go away and the audio is crisp and clean, and clear and it's just going to be smooth prairie listening after that.

Mike: Yep, enjoy everybody.

Megan: Yeah, enjoy and if you want to check us out, live and see Mike and I in person, or I mean I guess not in person but virtually in-person right, you can check out the Minnesota DNR's Facebook page and go to the Minnesota Prairie Pod Live from State Fair episode in the videos tab.

Mike: There ya go, thanks, everybody.

((birds chirping and prairie winds))

Mike: We're on.

Megan: Oh it's happening, we're live from the Minnesota State Fair, welcome everybody, it's time for the Prairie Pod.

Mike: It's a big crowd, thank you.

(Laughing)

Mike: Megan, how ya - -

Megan: Well you know, it's kinda weird, 'cause normally we sit in front of a table when we podcast and it's just us in our houses, in our comfy pants, and so we're at the Minnesota State Fair today.

Mike: You're wearing, you're wearing comfy.

Megan: I always wear comfy pants, yeah. We're going to teach you some amazing prairie facts and the job for us is we gotta stay in these squares for all our people who are watching virtually, so we're going to do our very best but we're also going to try to interact with everybody in the audience. Woo hoo! It's, it's a really narrow square. So has anybody here listened to the Prairie Pod before? Anybody at all? Woo! Has anybody loved Prairie? Just, you just love it, you just love it a lot.

Mike: We love prairie - -

Megan: We welcome everybody here, prairie, woods, wetland lovers, you can come here that's all right.

Mike: You're much more tolerant than I am.

Megan: I know it's all right. So Mike and I usually talk about prairie together, our podcast airs in July, every Prairie Tuesday, and so this is a special live episode from the State Fair with some, prairie winds that you're hearing there. Oh Mike.

Mike: Thinking it's me, but.

Megan: The technology is always a challenge. You know, that's what you get to see here at Minnesota's great get-together. Is it me? No? All right, so Mike and I we have four different sections for you. It is me, it is me. Oh look at that, it's me. He turned my mic off, it's better. Woo hoo! Yay! All right! Everybody can hear me well. I have to make sure that I, you know, hold it away from me because I tend to be a close mic talker, not that kinda Mike, this kinda mic. We are socially distant, you're welcome. So let's get started. Should we talk some good prairie facts?

Mike: Let's talk about prairie.

Megan: Okay, Mike what do you love about prairie?

Mike: Let's first of all, I have a, I have a call I want to play. This is a prime example of what I love about prairie.

Megan: Oh okay, it's happening.

Mike: Well you know we talk about all the, all the benefits of prairie but a big one is just hearing this when you walk out in the morning.

((sounds of birds chirping))

Megan: It's so beautiful.

Mike: Did you get that. Did that come through?

Megan: Did everybody hear that? You could hear that? What is it?

Mike: Okay, that's a western meadowlark.

Megan: It's a western meadowlark.

((sounds of birds chirping))

Mike: Anyway.

Megan: Nice.

Mike: If, if you didn't get that Google western meadowlark, because it's beautiful. That's a, that's a prime example of what you hear when you walk out on the prairie. It's also – okay, this is sad.

Megan: All right.

Mike: I'll start, I'll start with the sad stuff. All right?

Megan: Well we gotta start sad to lift you back up, that's all right, go ahead.

Mike: Yeah. We'll start out sad.

Megan: Okay.

Mike: So grassland birds and pollinators.

((sounds of birds chirping))

Mike: Nice.

Megan: That's beautiful.

Mike: They are declining more in prairie than in any other ecosystem. So our grassland birds, our pollinators, and they're, they're crucial, they're so important and even if you aren't a fan of prairie, okay, I was kidding earlier when I said you should leave.

Megan: (Laughs) You can stay.

Mike: Even if you're not a fan of prairie, our grassland birds and our pollinators serve such important roles and they are disappearing on us. So that's, that's the message I wanted to get, make sure I got across. What I love about prairie, I am a wildlife guy, so number one is wildlife.

Megan: Mm-hmm.

Mike: They're, yeah, again, grassland birds are super important, our pollinators prairie serves as a very important source of habitat for our pollinators and we all know what happens if our pollinators are gone.

Megan: What happens?

Mike: Something weird like, like apoplectic happens.

Megan: Oh that's not good. I don't like that, no.

Mike: Like society starts – shuts down.

Megan: Like chocolate goes away like that, that bad?

Mike: Exactly.

Megan: Oh like coffee goes away?

Mike: Coffee and chocolate.

Megan: Apples?

Mike: Which is essentially - -

Megan: Say it ain't so Mike. Broccoli, we don't need that.

Mike: Essentially the same at the apocalypse when those things happen.

Megan: Oh my gosh. I don't like that. It's very sad.

Mike: Yeah.

Megan: So we, we didn't introduce ourselves very well.

Mike: Oh.

Megan: Mike is a non-game wildlife biologist. He was trying to identify plants for some nice state fair goers earlier. He identified a mountain ash as a sumac, so we got some work to do.

Mike: My heart was in the right place.

Megan: We have, his heart was in the right place. I'm a regional ecologist. I'm based out of New Ulm. Mike is based out of Lake Sakatah State Park and so we cover southern Minnesota, but prairie is for everybody and we've got lots of prairie in the state and we want to share lots of things with you. So we've got four sections that we're going to go through, so right now, again, this is Megan and Mike, live from the state fair on the DNR stage and we are going to keep talking about what we love about prairie and then we'll ask some of your questions and then we'll move onto a LET'S SCIENCE live activity complete with a prairie snake race. You are not going to want to miss that. Mike and I are going to pretend to be prairie snakes and try to beat each other in a race across the prairie aka the stage. Imagination is required for this race.

Mike: That's going to be a display of athletic prowess right there.

Megan: Athletic prowess. It will be.

Mike: Yeah.

Megan: It will be athletic prowess. Let's see it, it might be the longest race ever 'cause I was practicing and it took me 10 minutes to get from one side of Mike's square to the other, so we could be here a while. It could be great. And then after that we're going to give you some places where you can find prairie and take a hike because we are in Minnesota and we are blessed to have so many public lands where you can get out and explore. So okay, that was our intro. I did it sort of backwards, but it's fine.

Mike: That's fine.

Megan: It's fine.

Mike: It works out.

Megan: Everybody take a big deep breath with me now, even if you're online and you're in the safety of your home with your comfy pants on just do it just real big. (Big breaths.) Hold it, don't hold it too much, don't die on me. Don't die on me. Cameraman don't die. Okay, now let it out. (Breath out sound.) Did you thank a prairie for that breath? Well you should because prairies do that. They're giving us clean air everyday. They're giving us clean drinking water, flood control, drought control, their original at healthy soil. How deep do you think prairie roots go? Man in the back, how deep? Just yell out a number. I know you're just on a bench. How many feet?

Audience: Six.

Megan: Six. That's a great guess. That's a great guess.

Mike: He's pretty good.

Megan: Yep, some do go six feet higher, higher.

Audience: 10 feet.

Megan: 10 feet, higher, or I should say deeper right, 'cause they're not like flying.

Mike: Right.

Megan: Woo, that would be terrifying. No, they're like deeper, right, deeper, deeper than 10 feet. How many feet do they go? Any guesses on like Caleb? No? Nobody online yet? 15 keep going, even deeper.

Audience: 25 feet.

Megan: 25 feet even deeper. I know this is getting nuts isn't it? 27 feet deep, it's how deep some of our prairie plants can grow. That's what we're talking about. That is roots, Minnesota! Prairies do their best. So prairie roots that is three times the size of an NBA basketball player if you just like stuffed 'em you know into, no, we won't do that.

Mike: There are no 9 foot tall basketball players.

Megan: You just like lay them down, six foot seven times three man, six or seven times three, 27 feet. Okay, my math is bad but just go with it, right? Okay, it's four times or something. Yeah, it's more than four times the size of an NBA basketball player. It's fine. We're just here to love the prairie, we're not here to check my maths, okay? All right. Mike give me some more things - -

Mike: Maths ((chuckles))

Megan: - - that you love about prairie.

Mike: Well okay, one important thing to talk about - -

Megan: I'm ready - -

Mike: - - okay, first, you keep leaving the bad news up to me.

Megan: I'm really sorry about that. Yeah, I did do that. Yeah.

Mike: But no, that's okay.

Megan: Sorry about that.

Mike: It's what I'm good at. Invasive plants are, in all of our ecosystems.

Megan: They are.

Mike: In, in the state honestly, and in prairie, they're in a spec- because there's so little prairie left, in Minnesota we have less than 2% of our remnant prairie remaining.

Megan: My word. How much did we have before?

Mike: I don't know.

Megan: A third of the state, Mike. A third of the state, 18 million acres down to 235,000. That is a shame, isn't it?

Mike: Yeah.

Megan: That's a shame. Keep going.

Mike: So my point is when invasive species get into those remnant prairies, that's an especially large problem for us right now.

Megan: It is. It is.

Mike: And so conversely, our prairies are incredibly important sources of our native plants, which are vital for us. And a big reason they're so important for us, all of our wildlife species, all of our pollinators, and, and just all of our ecosystem services, at least many of them, are associated with these native plants.

Megan: They are.

Mike: Yeah.

Megan: Mike, what's, talk to me a little bit about your favorite thing to do with the prairie and how much revenue that brings in for the state.

Mike: Okay, well - -

Megan: Do you need a hint?

Mike: It's a leading question. I enjoy birding, I'm not sure it's the favorite thing.

Megan: Okay, sorry.

Mike: I mean, running and frolicking is probably number one.

Megan: Wow.

Mike: Yeah.

Megan: I'd like to see that sometime. Could you demonstrate some running and frolicking, no? Okay.

Mike: But yeah, I enjoy birding. So I actually, I couldn't find data right before the podcast what Minnesota generates. Nationwide, it's over 100 billion dollars in revenue.

Megan: Billion? 100 billion dollars?

Mike: Yeah, are generated from birding.

Megan: Whoa.

Mike: Prairies are an important place for birding because many of those birds are rare and uncommon. And it's just, again, it's a beautiful place to be. Sometimes you got mosquitos to deal with sometimes but like often you don't, the sun's, you know, it's just a beautiful place. So also another very important source for, for prairie is hunting.

Megan: Oh, yeah.

Mike: In Minnesota, it's a huge generator of hunting dollars and just for people to enjoy hunting. They do it on prairie.

Megan: Primarily pheasant hunting, waterfowl hunting, that kind of thing.

Mike: Those two.

Megan: Deer hunting a little bit.

Mike: A little bit, yeah.

Megan: I like it. All right. Way to go with your cash dollar assessments, I'm proud of you. That's good. Money. There's money in our prairies. Speaking of money, so prairies can also support sustainable agriculture. How do you think they do that? How do prairies and agriculture go together? We're here at the Minnesota State Fair, I had some ice cream with corn in it earlier, we're certainly growing corn, what does corn have to do with prairie? Any guesses? Anybody know? They were trying to leave but then I asked him a question. See, that's how we keep you here. Everybody's looking at you now. What are you going to do? Even the people online are looking at you, I tell you what. It's really, it's nerve-racking. I know. No, agriculture and prairie go hand in hand because prairies are the original at soil health. What are we growing a crop in? I just said it. Soil, she's got it. We're growing crops in soils. In Iowa, they've got this fantastic program called the Prairie Strips Program where you put strips of perennial vegetation in between cropland. And even though you're taking some land out of production, it actually makes the farm more profitable because those prairie roots are intercepting water, they're building soil structure, they're trapping nutrients, they're building carbon, woo. They're doing all that. They're making you money. And you can also graze some prairies. It's not right for every prairie but prairies are disturbance-based habitat, they rely on grazing, fire, and climate, all those three things are part of what makes a disturbance in a prairie. I was going to say what makes a prairie disturbed, but that's not right. What makes a prairie disturbance? That's what we want to go with. It's okay to laugh. We're scientists, we laugh at ourselves all the time. You can leave now if you want. I mean, I prefer that you stay, but I'll stop directing the crowd to look at you if that's, okay, here, I'll just do this. Making sure she's here. All right. There's also cultural connections to the prairie, right, Mike?

Mike: Indeed.

Megan: There are so many ways a lot of times people say to me, well, we're in Minnesota and we love our trees, right? We're a forest state. Well, we're a prairie state too. Welcome to it, people. We love prairies, we love wetlands, and we are connected to it. Can you imagine a Minnesota without a Laura Ingalls Wilder? Can you imagine a Minnesota without a Pipestone National Monument or a Jeffers Petroglyphs? I can't. I don't want to. And luckily, I don't have to 'cause you can play a role in keeping prairie here. Anything else we should tell them before we start letting, you know, we be quiet and they ask us questions?

Mike: I wanted to just say I think prairie for grass-fed beef.

Megan: Oh, you do. You made a lot of chili last winter. That's what I heard.

Mike: Well, and I just had, what did I have earlier? Bison bites?

Megan: Yeah, you did. You had some bison bites.

Mike: There's another animal that requires grass.

Megan: Important prairie grazer, right there.

Mike: Prairie and bison go together.

Megan: Prairie and bison do go together.

Mike: And so thank you, prairie, for those bison bites.

Megan: There you go. Well, wow, I'm just filled with gratitude right now. I got to even flip the page, I'm filled with so much gratitude. See, we normally do this behind a desk and we do it behind a desk. Are both of my mics on now? That would be fine. Twice the, twice the Megan.

Mike: Yeah, that's unnecessary.

Megan: Sounds terrifying doesn't it?

Mike: We need a, we need a public service message I think.

Megan: We do. So the whole reason why we are here today on the stage right now at 1:00 is because of whoa, whoa, of hurricane gale winds. No? We just take my other mic off. That's what we're going to do. Well, we're here today because of our partners in the Division of Forestry. So DNR is all about partnership, we're all about the work that we do together, just ignore what I'm doing with my left hand, just pay attention to the words that I'm saying, and before you know it, I will only have one mic on my body. Did you see that? That was dual tasking. Mike can't do it. He can't do it, he's not good at it.

Mike: I can't dual task.

Megan: I know, but I just did. Proving once again, no, I was going to make a joke. Can't make that joke. I'm at work. Anyway, let's move on. So we have to thank our partners in Forestry because they gave up their spot on the stage and right now, they are out with many of our DNR staff and they are doing a bang-up job fighting wildland fire, and so it has been a tough fire year in Minnesota. Everybody knows we're kind of in a drought. I know it doesn't seem like it today, so as you're moving equipment around your farms, your homes, any kind of property, just be aware that we have dry grass and it's very easy to set that grass on fire. So our partners in the Division of Forestry wanted us to bring you this fire prevention message and that is one of our special commercials for the day. And we'll keep having more commercials. Did we move to our next section? Should we?

Mike: Yes, let's do. Yes.

Megan: Okay. So now it's time for your questions to be answered by us. Are you ready? Do you have questions? Okay. Let me caveat that. Your prairie questions to be answered by us. We cannot give you directions or anything else. It's okay, everybody. It's technology. We're adapting. Look at us being flexible. Just like the prairie. Thank

you very much, tech support. Way to go. Give them a round of applause, everybody. Way to go, tech support. Thank you. Good job. All right. Well, I know. You are old school. Lots of jokes I can make there but I won't.

Tech: We have a question from Facebook.

Megan: Alrighty. What's the question, sir?

Tech: So Claire Plank Gahler on Facebook asks is there anything we can do to help prairies in Minnesota? Great question.

Megan: Claire, that is a great question. Mike, you want to take it or you want me to take it.

Mike: Okay, I'll just offer one quick thing.

Megan: Go for it.

Mike: I'm saying it again and I'm sorry. Grass-fed beef. It's just an example, seriously.

Megan: Claire, did you know we were going to give you lunch recommendations 'cause we just did. Have some beef. It's from the prairie. Yum yum yum in your tum tum tum. Okay.

Mike: Wouldn't have to be grass-fed beef but the point is a key way to make prairie more viable in our, in our agricultural system is to make it earn money, and, and that's one example of how prairie can earn money for us is, is by grazing.

Megan: That's true, 'cause sometimes we don't think about all the things that prairie is doing for us, right? 'Cause if we're not out on a prairie, we forget that we're connected to it, we forget that we need that clean air that it's providing for us, that clean water, those healthy soils, we forget that stuff. One thing that I want to say that you can do is you can plant native prairie plants around your house. Woohoo, there's she stage, she knew I was going to get to it. You can plant native prairie plants. Every patch of prairie matters at this point, every bit of habitat. Mike didn't give you the numbers 'cause he didn't want to depress you too much, but in the last 50 years, we have lost half of our grassland birds, half. That is astonishing. The western monarch is headed for extinction, the eastern monarch is right behind it, I know you didn't know it was going to be this depressing, but we need you right now to get a shovel, a tiny one, and plant those native plants 'cause every prairie matters. You can also volunteer with the prairie enthusiasts, they are a fantastic group, you can join them, you can volunteer with the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources. Hey, we work there, you might even get to volunteer with us. We're fun, a little nutty, but I promise we'll be fun and we'll teach you a lot about prairie. So you can come out, you can help us reduce those invasive species that Mike was talking about. Who doesn't want cut brush on their day off? Huh? I'm just asking for a friend. Doesn't that sound like a good time? And it makes you feel good deep in your soul because you're doing something great for the prairie. That connection to the prairie, you're giving back, taking care of it. Those are good things you can do. More questions? We're ready.

Tech: Absolutely, we've got a bunch more. So Laura on Facebook asks what are each of your favorite prairie plants?

Megan: Oh, boy. Oh, boy. Oh, boy oh, boy oh, boy. Mike, Mike, you, do you want to take this one first?

Mike: I'll start with blazingstar.

Megan: Oh, yeah. See, woo, blazingstar fan. It's beautiful spike flower.

Mike: It's just it's so cool and it immediately jumps out in a prairie, and lots of pollinators use it.

Megan: Monarchs love it. They refuel on that. They need milkweeds to lay their eggs, they need blazingstar to make the migration.

Mike: That's a good plant and it's a very, it's a very plantable plant.

Megan: It's plantable, I like that

Mike: In your, in your backyard.

Megan: Hashtag plantable.

Mike: Yeah.

((Audience member yells: front yard too!))

Megan: Yeah, you plant it everywhere where people can see it. We want people to see prairie and say what are you doing. Why does your yard look like this? And then you can have a great conversation with them and say I am helping, I am helping the prairie survive. Favorite plants, I mean, there are over 500 different kinds of prairie plants. So to pick just one is a struggle, but if I had to, I'm going to give you four. Okay, so prairie dropseed, it's a tiny bunchgrass, its seeds smell like buttered popcorn. Welcome to Minnesota land of popcorn.

Mike: I'm not sure about that.

Megan: It's great, it smells, it's wonderful, it's delicious, it's, it already finished blooming, but it's just beautiful, it's good for edging around your house. Another one butterfly milkweed, one of our very few orange prairie plants. It has clear sap, how weird is that for a milkweed? Also, you can find tons of little monarchs on it and big monarchs too, caterpillars and adults, that's a good one. I am a big fan of purple prairie clover also. It is a small prairie plant. I'm noticing that all the plants I'm picking are short. I don't know if that has anything to do with anything but just saying, I'm 5'1", so I feel like it's fine. Short prairie plants need love too. So purple prairie clover smells like pines and orange. When you crush the leaves, it smells amazing. It just grows really small and it's got orange pollen, bumblebees love it, queen bumblebees can be found just packed with orange pollen. It looks like they've got two sacs of orange pollen that they're carrying around. This is how bees fly. Yeah, that's how they do it. And so they're flying around, it's amazing, now what was my fourth one? I got to think about this. I am going to go with Junegrass. So Junegrass is another early prairie plant. Its, its stem at the base of it is so

soft, it feels like velvet. Who doesn't want that in their house? It grows upright, so it's a great German plant. I live in New Ulm, so you know, that's where all the New Ulm people watching, you're welcome. Mention of Germans. Mention of straight plants. Okay. Anyway, moving on. Those are my four. I picked four. There's lots, and if you check out Minnesota Wildflowers website, you can find a ton more prairie plants.

Tech: We've got two more Facebook questions. So Bob Bolan says what is your favorite prairie plant and why is it big bluestem?

Megan: Yes, this feels like a leading question.

Tech: Yes, but Laura asks, or I'm sorry, Jennifer asks please let me know where we can see prairies in Minnesota.

Mike: That was definitely a leading question. Did you tell her to ask that?

Megan: No, I didn't. I'll take big bluestem and if you want to take prairies. And we have a whole Take a Hike section we should mention, so I'm just saying Megan and Mike.

Mike: That's what I'm saying, that question, yeah.

Megan: We are going to cover where you can see prairie a little bit later. You're just going to have to hang on, which means you're going to have to keep watching. Doesn't that sound like a great time? I think it does. I think it sounds like a great time.

Mike: Absolutely.

Megan: Okay. Why is my favorite plant big bluestem? Here's the thing about big bluestem for those of you who don't know. I constantly am telling our wildlife managers to stop planting big bluestem, and so it's a running joke big bluestem is great, it is a great prairie plant, and it works perfectly in a remnant prairie. But when we're trying to rebuild prairie, it's very aggressive and it can take over a planting, particularly if we don't have cows. Cows or bison or some other grazing animal are great at helping us manage big bluestem and helping us manage different kinds of structures on the prairie. So I do love big bluestem, it's one of these plants right now that is purple and blue, it's majestic, it has a little turkey foot shape to the seeds, it's just that iconic prairie plant.

Mike: Easy to identify for people like me too.

Megan: Yes, it's easy to identify, it's blowing in the wind, it turns a little bit bronzy towards the end of the season, it's very, very nice. So I do love big bluestem, but I don't plant a lot of it in my restorations.

Mike: Bottom line is it doesn't need a lot of our help compared to the other plants.

Megan: It's going to grow. It's going to be there. So we, we want to plant it but we want to plant it a pinch, a little pinch. What other prairie - - oh, a prairie question. Oh, yeah.

Tech: We have a question from the crowd. This is Alex.

Megan: I'm ready. Hi Alex.

Alex: Hi, I have a question. What is your favorite prairie animal?

Megan: Oh, boy. I'm going to let you start. Prairie animal, go for it.

Mike: Okay. Well, I'm, I like birds a lot. Upland sand piper mainly, well, there's many reasons. The upland sand piper has a call that sounds like a wolf whistle. I can't do it while I'm smiling because it requires me to whistle (Making sounds) It goes, like that.

Megan: Could you do it again for the people in the back? (Making sounds) Nice.

Mike: Like that.

Megan: That's good.

Mike: And so yeah - -

Megan: Give him a round of applause. He just imitated a bird.

Mike: They like, they kind of follow you around the prairie, they're really fun birds.

Megan: They follow you around? That sounds creepy.

Mike: They do kind of follow you around.

Megan: They're the stalker of the prairie world. What a good bird for you to like, Mike. Good job. Really proud of you. Way to go.

Mike: Upland sand piper. Yeah, that's mine. What's yours, Megan?

Megan: I don't know. I was trying to think. I let you go first because I was like my mind is blank, all I can think of are plants. I'm going to go with Dakota skipper. That's what I'm going with. It is a Minnesota endangered skipper, it's a tiny prairie butterfly, it's like yay big, they are orange, and what did you say, black? I think orange and black. They land on purple coneflower, and when they're sitting, they put their wings, this is their wings, right? They put their wings in such a way, Mike imitates things with sounds, I use my whole body. You're welcome. So they have wings like this and they sit like a little fighter jet. And then when they're, they're only flying as adults for two weeks on the summer, in the summertime, so two weeks in June usually, and they're just flying from flower to flower to flower to flower looking for a mate, and they're just like tiny airplanes in the prairie. And you could easily miss them if you weren't looking 'cause it's those little things that make the world go round. So that's, I think I would have picked Dakota skipper.

Mike: Yeah, they're, they're super cute.

Megan: They are cute. They're little adorable butterflies.

Mike: I don't think, I don't say about many things. I say that about Dakota skippers. They're very cute.

Megan: Okay. Thank you very much, Alex. Good job. Way to be brave.

Mike: Yeah, thanks for asking a wildlife question. Appreciate that.

Megan: All right.

Tech: Yeah, so we have one more question here. And what kinds of prairie plants can we plant in our yards? That's Renee Burkness on Facebook.

Megan: Oh, my gosh. You can't plant so many different kinds of prairie plants, like all of them.

Mike: That's a question I have too.

Megan: Just plant all of them. Just plant all of them. So first thing I would do is check with your local ordinances because some cities and some counties have restrictions on how high plants can be. And if we're talking about things like big bluestem, they are easily six feet tall. I have blue bluestem planted in my yard, there's little bluestem, there's prairie dropseed, which is very short, purple prairie clover, butterfly milkweed, Junegrass, plains oval sedge, Bicknell's sedge, I'm just like throwing out all kinds of plants right now. I'm going through a kind of like my yard, anise hyssop is a good one, there's also white prairie clover, which I enjoy very much, oh, what's happening? You're out of your thing.

Mike: What's the matter?

Megan: Get in your box, Mike. If I had to, I had a penny for every time I have to tell him that, I tell you what. I could retire right now. But why would I do that when there's so much prairie left to see. If you want even more ideas, we are in a beautiful state of Minnesota where we have just under 2% of our prairie left, we have a fantastic amount of native plant suppliers in the state who will ship you plants, you can check out the DNR's website for DNR landscaping with native plants, and we've got a whole list of native plant suppliers there that you can go to, it's divided up by region, so whether you're in northwest Minnesota, northeast, central, southeast, southwest, there's a prairie plant for you. So there are all kinds. We've got to move on to our next section or we're not going to have time to race.

Mike: Yeah, a quick public announcement.

Megan: Yes, please do. It's time for our commercial from our partners in the Division of Forestry.

Mike: So this is, this is an announcement about fire and prairie. So fire is a crucial form of disturbance in our prairies, right?

Megan: They are – necessary.

Mike: And, and so, we just want to make a key distinction between prescribed fire that we do to manage prairies and then, and then un-prescribed fire that occurs in our prairies. I think this, this.

Megan: We call that wildlife.

Mike: Wildfires, there you go.

Megan: Unprescribed.

Mike: Unprescribed.

Megan: Technical term for wildlife.

Mike: 98% of fires in Minnesota are human-caused, so that's an important thing. We all can do something to prevent wildfires. Only 2% are lightning, and so that's, that's a key, you know, historically lightning was our probably our primary, you know, before European settlement or actually Native Americans did start fires.

Megan: They did, they absolutely did to help manage the prairie and to help move bison.

Mike: Yeah, anyway. This is, it's just an example of how many fire, the fire problem we have to deal with nowadays is primarily human-caused.

Megan: It is, and we're, we call it a problem because we're trying to protect people and infrastructure. So in our fire zones, that's where now we have homes, and so we're, that's why we have so many brave DNR folks out right now serving on wildlife firefighting crews, and they are helping the people of Minnesota make sure that they can keep their properties safe. And we have gotten some lovely messages from you. They are working very, very hard, it's very physically demanding, and so if you can send them a nice note, and by them, I mean the DNR. Send us a nice note about the work they're doing because they love to hear that. It just fuels them forward. See what I did? Fuels them forward as they're working a fire.

Mike: Nice.

Megan: Nice, I know. Okay. We're going to move on to our next section. So normally, when we do the podcast, we do something called, hit it, Dan.

(Music playing)

LET'S SCIENCE: To The Literature!

Science!

Mike: Science was my part.

Megan: Yeah, you did great. It was great. We do something called Let's Science, and you just heard our little jingle there. We get to that in the podcast and that is where we typically recommend a book, a blog, or a paper. But in this season, we are in the fourth season of the Prairie Pod, and in this season, for the first time ever, we had one of our guests recommend an activity for kids, and we liked this activity so much that we thought we got to bring it to the Minnesota State Fair if we're going to take it anywhere, we're taking it here. So everybody who's walking around and you're not sure what snack you're going to eat next, if you want to laugh at some people pretending to be snakes, this is your moment. It's about to happen on the DNR stage. So Mike and I are going to line up, Dan is going to call the race, we have our finish line here, we have our starting line here, Mike and I are going to be two different prairie snakes, he's going to show you a picture of these snakes, ready? Which one do you have first?

Mike: Okay, so this is going to be Megan, this is, this is the mighty bull snake.

Megan: That's nice, that's really nice.

Mike: A beautiful snake of our prairie.

Megan: I'm a beautiful snake.

Mike: And she's the bigger by far the bigger of the two snakes too, which is the reverse of real life. And this here is the eastern hog nose snake. There's also a, a plains hog nose snake in the state. Both of them use prairie and aren't they cute? I think they're just, they're kind of adorable?

Megan: They're very adorable.

Mike: Yeah.

Megan: And so for folks who are thinking ooh snakes, that was a bold choice, you're right. It was. It's also going to be a bold choice to wiggle on the ground after all the fried food I've ingested today, but we're going to do it because it's the moment. We want you to learn about how valuable and important prairie snakes are. Prairie is about all the pieces I can't tell you how many times somebody says to me, Mike, okay, that's a cool plant, what to do? So like shoot rockets out of itself or what, you know, what is it going to, what's it going to do? What it's doing is making the prairie whole just like your car, needs wheels and an engine and a seatbelt and all those good things, so does the prairie. We just don't know which piece is which, so we want to make sure we keep all of those pieces and snakes are a critical component to our prairies, they help with lots of things. They eat rodents for goodness sakes, for goodness snakes. I borrowed that from our nongame wildlife biologist, Lisa Gelvin-Innvaer. Okay, we're ready. It's going to happen. Are you ready for this?

Tech: All right. So do we need to do some introductions here on it would be to my right, to my right it would be Megan the bull snake. By the way, she's a species of special concern, weighing in at a whopping 6 pounds and 3 to 6 feet in length, it is the bull snake. All right. And then to my immediate right the cuter of the snake, the eastern hog nose snake, half a pound, weighing in at and 2 to 3 feet long. So this heavy bodied snake mostly eats toads. Oh, well played. All right. So let's take our places, snake competitors. So what they're going to have to do, they're going to have to put their arms by their sides and wiggle like a snake from point A to point B. All right. So this is the content you are here for at the Minnesota State Fair. Wait, no, no cheating, no cheating. All right snakes, are we ready? Of course, we're socially distanced, we're masked up, all protocols are in place. Contestants appear to be ready, give me a flick of the tongue if you're ready. Oh, wait. They're masked up. That won't work. Okay, on your mark, get set, go. All right. Okay. And they're neck and neck, they're neck and neck, but wait, we have, the hog nose snake has to show the different colorations ranging from yellow, gray, brown, olive, and black. Oh, wait, but the, but the bull snake has to climb a tree to search for rodents because they eat birds and baby mice. Oh, and did you know in the spring they use their tongue a lot to search for a mate. They stick their head up, they stick their tongue out, they're smelling the air with their tongue, and did you know the females sometimes excavate a nest chamber in sandy soils. And the hog nose snake is taking a rest. Why is that? I thought this was a race. Okay, he's. Okay. And by the way, did you know the female bull snake in mid to late June, there is a load of eggs that need to be deposited in the soil. Okay. The race is almost over but the bull snake has to shed

her skin. No, no, okay, the race is won by the bull snake. Congratulations by a nose. All right. Do you guys need a hand up? No? All right. Let's give them a hand. Congratulations on how to demonstrate A going forward but B, how our snakes move on the prairie. So I appreciate it.

Mike: I want a video replay of that.

Megan: It'd be the longest video replay of all time. Five minutes to see who actually won.

Mike: No, for the finish, yeah. I'm going to contest that.

Megan: That's a workout.

Mike: I had to, I had to play dead. The bull snake or the hog nose snake plays dead.

Megan: It does when it feels threatened, which it clearly did because the bull snake was beating you, man.

Mike: Yeah, I did feel threatened.

Megan: And you felt real threatened. That is one of their adaptations, so they actually play dead and they'll even actually regurgitate some food from their mouth a little bit.

Mike: Which I do frequently.

Megan: Wow, that's too much information for a podcast. I got to tell you I'm out of breath. I can feel as I was racing, they talked about you being a heavy bodied snake. I could feel myself getting more heavy bodied as all the fried food made its way down. All that wiggling. I tell you what. That is a struggle. That could be a new workout video. Everybody brought to you by the Minnesota DNR, the LET'S SCIENCE snake activity. Oh, so normally.

Mike: Congrats, it was a good race, Megan.

Megan: Thank you. Oh, I'm sorry, we should have shaken, we should have in real life we would like, you know, snake, snake bump, - -

Mike: Snake bump.

Megan: - - and then just be like hey, good race, man, good race. So one of our wildlife managers gave us that activity and she said that it was a great thing to do if you're at home and you're bored, and you want to learn more about how snakes move, and I feel like we just learned a lot about that. Does anybody want to try it who's in the crowd? Anybody? Anybody want to try? Oh, we've got somebody. Anybody race against you? Maybe this lovely lady there? You guys want to try? Come on up here, give them a round of applause. Woohoo. All right. Now, here's how this works. We're going to step down, each of you are going to lay down on your respective spots, you go over there, that's perfect. Now, what you have to do when we say go, is you're going to wiggle with your hands at your sides the whole time, your feet as together as you can make it, and you're going to go all the way to the finish line. I will move my mask out of your way, and while you do it, Mike and I are going to be giving you cues, right? So at one point, which

snake do you want to be? Do you guys have a preference? No preferences? You got to be a prairie snake, I'm sorry. I know. We can't be king cobras.

Mike: How about a rattlesnake, rattlesnake?

Megan: A timber rattlesnake.

Mike: He wants to be, he wants to be venomous.

Megan: Okay, he's a timber rattlesnake.

Mike: He's a timber rattlesnake.

Megan: We have them in the bluff prairies of southeast Minnesota. Do you want to be a bull snake? All right, I was an excellent bull snake, so this is, you know, you got to live up to my, the record I just set. I think it was 10 minutes and 2 seconds to go 20 feet, so you really got to, you're going to need to keep up with that 'cause it's a steep, steep snake Olympic record. You guys ready? Ready for this?

Mike: Yeah, there you go.

Megan: Go.

Mike: Go.

Megan: Wiggle, squirm, worm, we've got our two prairie snakes moving, you can use your hands a little if it would help you move faster. You're doing it. You're doing so well. We've got the timber rattlesnake, he is leading. Bull snake is catching up, she's moving, she's wiggling, it's hard, isn't it? You're out of breath, how much food did you guys eat today?

Mike: Good job. Come on bull snake.

Megan: It's a mistake. It was a mistake. Keep going, you're so close. You can use your hands a little bit, move yourself, oh, look at you scoot, they're scooting, they're so close, you're still in this, bull snake, you got a record, you got a record, oh, she's, she's gaining on you, she's gaining, she's got you by a nose, she's got you by a tongue, it's going to be a nail biter, oh timber rattlesnake got the end, just missed it, but I think you beat my record, so congratulations. Good job. Way to go. Excellent job, prairie snakes. How much time did you time it? We're going to go with that was easily under two minutes, yeah, mm-hmm, good work, good work, good work, prairie snakes. Less than five? Okay. All right. Thank you. That was excellent. That's what Mike and I were hoping originally would happen so that we wouldn't have to do it, so I'm really glad that you guys showed up. You could have been here 10 minutes earlier but, you know, I'm still glad you're here.

Mike: We had to work off some of that fried food, Megan.

Megan: That's true. It is true. Well, somebody asked earlier on Facebook Live, so if you're just tuning in, this is Megan and Mike here, we're live at the Minnesota State Fair talking about prairie doing our first ever live Prairie Pod podcast, you can catch us on iTunes, Google Play, Stitcher, Podcast Addict, or our website at mndnr.gov/prairiepod,

and we are about to tell you the places that you can go hiking. Do you want to start or you want me to start?

Mike: Sure, no, I'll start.

Megan: You start. I need to catch my breath. I'm really out of breath from that snake race.

Mike: Yeah, that's what it takes, that's what it takes to beat the bull snake. No, I'm sorry, I was the.

Megan: Don't try to take my crown.

Mike: I was the hog nose.

Megan: You were the hog nose snake. You were playing dead for half the race. You were clearly feeling very threatened by a prairie bull snake.

Mike: It was a cuteness contest, you know, I probably would have won.

Megan: All right, fair enough.

Mike: Okay, so two, two, I'm going to just quickly give you two very cool prairies. These are actually both pretty accessible from the Metro from the folks that are in Metro Area. One is called Gray Cloud Dunes. So we went there just a few days ago, a few weeks ago I guess for, for a pollinator training. It has, it has very nice prairie there, some really cool and rare pollinators, rare insects, and good birds. A cool place, it's a pretty accessible from the Metro. And the other one is Kellogg Weaver Dunes in the southeast. It's, it's in my biased opinion one of the, one of the nicest examples of a large prairie complex in the eastern part of the state. It's, it's, it's dry prairie, sand prairie, it's what I really about that is that it's easy to walk through, Megan.

Megan: I know you like that. I just saw your snake race. We know you like when it's easy to walk.

Mike: Anyway, it's, it's, it's beautiful, lots of rarer plants and animals there, and yeah, two places I, I really suggest that people visit.

Megan: They're wonderful places to take a hike. I love it. Two more places to take a hike from around the state. We have Felton Prairie in northwest Minnesota. It's one of our biggest gravel prairies and I mentioned the Dakota skipper earlier. The Dakota skipper is one of our endangered prairie butterflies and this is one of the last places that it occurs naturally in Minnesota. So go visit in June, visit in July, visit any time. It's just a glorious expanse of prairie with excellent vistas. And then if you want to go all the way down to southwest Minnesota, you can check out Blue Mound State Park. So Blue Mound State Park is another fabulous prairie, it has bison there, we mentioned bison earlier, it's part of the Minnesota Bison Conservation Herd, so we have bison at Blue Mound, we also have bison at Minneopa State Park, and we're expanding our area throughout the state so that we can try to bring bison back to the prairie because that is where they belong. Blue Mound, what I like about it is all of these glacial erratics, that's kind of a fun word, right? What does that mean? It just means that when the glacier

receded, it dropped out a lot of big rocks and it left those rocks there and you can go visit them and see them. It's one of my favorite places.

Mike: It's got the teepee you can camp in too.

Megan: It does, it has our state parks are absolutely wonderful and they're so good for the soul too. All of our public lands are. You can check out your public lands because you, you, you, you, you, you, you, you, you all of us are public landowners in Minnesota and you can go to the DNR's recreation compass and you can find a place to explore your beautiful public lands, get that peace that prairie is offering you every single day. Right?

Mike: Well done, Megan.

Megan: Thank you.

Mike: This is what I found we should do every podcast this way.

Megan: We should do every podcast this way. I don't know if I could do every podcast with that much exercise in the middle. I'm not sure about that. But we, it's been a joy to be here on stage, we hope, thank everybody who's listening online, we thank everybody who's in the audience. Can we all just say, you know, this podcast was produced by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources under the Minnesota Prairie Conservation Plan. It's going to be edited by Dan Ryder and produced by the fabulous Jed Beecher. Everybody all at once say prairie.

Mike: Prairie.

Megan: Woo! Thanks for being here. Enjoy the great Minnesota get together and get outside and explore you public lands, Minnesota.

Mike: Thanks, everybody.