



Prairie Pod Transcript

Season 6, Episode 56: Prairie Art and Expression

Hosts: Megan Benage, Regional Ecologist; and Marissa Ahlering, Nature Conservancy in MN, ND, and SD, Lead Scientist

Guests: Gwen Westerman, Poet & Textile Arts; Eliza Blue, Musician; Kristi Fernholz, Photographer; Ross Hier, Painter

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

Transcript:

((sounds of birds chirping and wind blowing))

Megan Benage: Hey Prairie Pod listeners, I'm Megan Benage, regional ecologist with the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources.

Marissa Ahlering: And I'm Dr. Marissa Ahlering, lead scientist with the Nature Conservancy in Minnesota, North Dakota and South Dakota.

Sara Vacek: I'm Sara Vacek, wildlife biologist with the U.S. Fish Wildlife Service, based out of the Morris Wetland Management District.

Mike Worland: And I'm Mike Worland. I'm a wildlife biologist with the Minnesota DNR Nongame Wildlife Program.

Megan: We are part of the Minnesota Prairie Conservation Partnership and we're here to help you discover the prairie.

Marissa: Discover the prairie.

Sara: Discover the prairie.

Mike: Discover the prairie.

Megan: Hey, welcome back to the Prairie Pod, man, have we got a special episode for you.

Marissa: I know I am super, super excited about this episode actually 'cause even as a scientist like I mean the arts and the inspiration of the prairie and art is – I don't know, it feeds my soul, so I'm excited.

Megan: 100%. I mean also the science of restoration is an art. I can't tell you how many times that I'm out there on the land and somebody's like well how do you know that? It's like ah 'cause I been here. (Laughing) Sort of doing this, because the lands been telling me these things for years and years, and years. You just get this like intangible sense of what's going on and maybe what the land is telling you it needs and it's not because you looked at reams of data and it's - - you know, it's just this like innate knowing that you get when you're really connected to the land and what you're doing, and you're paying attention and I think there's beauty in that and there's art in that.

Marissa: Oh 100%, I mean when we're out there doing restoration it's yeah, it's creation, it's definitely, there's an art to it, so I am with ya there.

Megan: I love it, so we're going to talk about ways today that the prairie can energize you and inspire us. If people are wondering on the podcast when you listen to Marissa and I talk and you're like wow, those people are very happy and they sound like they've got a lot of energy. Yeah, because we work in the prairie because the prairie gives that to us freely because it's such a wonderful place to be, and so we're lucky because we have four incredible artists that are joining us today in this conversation. They all work in different mediums but they've all been inspired by the prairie in some way and this is just a really special episode where we get to hear how prairie as a landscape, as a home, and transcends to this inspiration in our art and the things that we're leaving and want to share with others. See it's nice.

Marissa: Mm-hmm. Absolutely.

Megan: 100%.

Marissa: Well let's jump right in. We, we need to hear from these artists. We're going to start in no particular order, Eliza let's start with you. Well, you want to introduce yourself and describe your work as an artist?

Eliza: So my name is Eliza Blue. I am a folk singer and a writer and I live with my husband and our two kids, on a sheep and cattle ranch in western South Dakota.

Marissa: Thank you, Eliza, so glad to have you here with us today. Kristi would you like to go next?

Kristi: Sure, I'm Kristi Link Fernholz. I'm a fine art photographer. I live on a small farm along the Minnesota River in western Minnesota with my husband and almost graduated daughter from high school. I also work at a small planning organization in my region called the Upper Minnesota Valley Regional Development Commission. Yeah, and I'm surrounded by the prairie and I love it.

Megan: I would love that too. I'm gonna come over, it's gonna be nice. Gwen, how about you?

Gwen: My name is Gwen Westerman; I live in south central Minnesota, along the Maple River, and have wide open spaces to the south and the west and can see thunderstorms coming from Worthington. I can't imagine not being able to see the horizon. I'm also a poet and a visual artist, mostly working in fabric and my written work and my fiber work also depict the prairies and the plains.

Megan: And we'd be remiss if we didn't mention that Gwen is also Minnesota's first native poet laureate and so that's a huge honor and it's a huge honor to us, to have her here with us today, to share her knowledge and wisdom as she often does. Ross, how about you?

Ross: My name is Ross Hier. I live in Crookston, Minnesota with my wife Leila and our two dogs, who I hope won't cause any issues here this morning. I grew up in Jackson, Minnesota, in the southwest, so I'm a prairie kid and like Gwen, you know, if we're driving in the arrowhead through Ely or something, I am extremely nervous if I can't see the horizon. And I worked for the State of Minnesota for 35 years, as a wildlife biologist and was privileged to work on the prairies here in northwest Minnesota. And since then I've always worked with visual arts and my favorite being transparent water colors. So that's what I do now.

Megan: It sounds like you're doing retirement right, Ross.

Ross: Yes.

Megan: I'm just working to get there. Gwen, go ahead.

Gwen: I'll be in trouble if I don't mention my husband and my dog. (Laughter) Since everyone else mentioned their families, so I live in a hundred year old farmhouse with my husband Glenn Wasicuna and our dog, Poppy.

Megan: Wonderful. See the record's all clear now. (Laughs) Now you've done it, you've done your part. Oh goodness, so we're going to jump right in here and talk a little bit about nature, or specifically the prairie, right, as an inspiration for art and we're just going to this whole podcast this is just going to be a free flowing conversation with all the artists, but we'll round robin the question so that everybody gets an opportunity to share. So we're going to start with would you say, I guess we don't want to assume this, right, but would you say that the prairie has inspired any of your art or is there a better way to describe how prairie figures into your work and Gwen we're going to start with you.

Gwen: I grew up in Kansas and Oklahoma, and have been in awe of the prairie for as long as I can remember, the tall grass prairie in the central plains of Kansas and I was surprised as I moved farther north ward that those rolling prairies continued all the way up in to southern Manitoba, which is where my husband is from. So there's something about the way the land, the shape of the land moves, the way the wind moves and storms move across the prairie that has been an inspiration for me in that when I create my fiber art, I've incorporated the plains and figures of horses and bison through all the

different seasons. And my poetry also has a lot of references to driving along on those back roads through the, through the prairies and listening to the meadowlarks sing or seeing the sunflowers in the field. So it's part of me and it comes out in my writing and in my visual art.

Marissa: That's amazing. Thank you for sharing that. Ross would you like to go next and I think also we should mention that Ross was also the recipient of the Northwest Minnesota Artist of the Year last year, which we didn't mention in the introduction, so wanted to mention that as well. But Russ do you want to share with us how prairie or if prairie has?

Ross: I'm not sure you need to mention that kind of stuff.

Marissa: Well.

Ross: I have, I feel like a sibling to Gwen. Growing up in Jackson County, there wasn't a tremendous amount of prairie left by the time I was, you know, 8, 9, 10 years old. I'd say I was gifted with, you know, great observational skills and our leader alluded to it earlier that if you walk a prairie, it just, it goes into your soul and you become a prairie person. You know, you're either an open land person or you're a water person or a tree person or others, but everything I do, every day of my life is really tied to the thoughts of prairie and I have a very massive Native American library, and I often say I would love to be back. Being back to the probably the late 1600s, early 1700s before too much influence by European people, but it would be a brutal lifestyle just because of you're living by your wits, but I'd be so envious of what just the average indigenous person understood about the prairie because they were immersed while they were one with it. I mean, you often hear people separate plants and animals from humans. I, I don't believe in that. I mean, we're all tied into the same thing on this planet, so yes, the prairie is totally in my blood and what a beautiful gift it is to all of us.

Megan: That's wonderful. And, and ecology would agree with you there, Ross, that we, we're absolutely part of this system and without being part of the prairie system, you know, we don't have basic things that we need to live like water, clean water, air, healthy soil, all of those things, and we sometimes forget that if we live in town and we can't be as immersed in the prairie as we might have once been if we were living at that time. So it's an important point? Kristi, how about you?

Kristi: I also, I grew up in this area, so I grew up in wide open spaces, and so always have loved that, that, yeah, the space and the sky. In my photography work, I've always been inspired by shapes and light and how the light quality hits the subject. But when I'm out in the prairie, there's, it lends for me a different and a deeper meaning because I think about how those, how long the plants have been in the location that I've been in. There's something about that wild beauty versus something that humans have landscaped. I mean, they're just out there and there's, they're just incredibly beautiful just in each in their own right, and there's so much diversity. I think about the little plants and their perseverance and overcoming these challenges. I mean you find this tiny little plant in this little gravel pit that's, that you wonder how, how has that still, you know, blooming year after year. It, it, I just, I find that really inspirational, and I'm always finding new species, the prairie is always full of surprises. So it just, when I'm out there taking

photos, it just, it, it's exciting. I mean, you wouldn't, you wouldn't think about it that way but it's just walking through the prairie. It's, it's just exciting to see what I might stumble on next, and that, that's kind of where I have an emotional response to the prairie and, and just that, that it's been there long before any of us. And that I really appreciate that.

Marissa: I, so yeah, understand where you're coming from with that and I've, especially this whole like finding plants in, in, you know, in gravel pits or in all sorts of places I think we just totally underestimate sometimes like the resilience and capabilities of these, these beings, these plants and animals, so yeah. Thank you, Kristi. Would you like to go next, Eliza?

Eliza: Well, it sounds like I am going to be the misfit of the group because I actually was born in Detroit, Michigan, and grew up among the trees. We lived mostly in cities and suburbs, but we would go up to Northern Michigan by the Lake Michigan, and so to me, that felt like home. That was my home landscape. I would agree. I think people do kind of fall into categories of maybe tree people or, or water people or prairie people. So it's been the surprise of my life to have ended up now here on the prairie, and I also, where we live in western South Dakota, is actually classified as shortgrass prairie, which, you know, being from the east, eastern part of the state, I, or of the country, I didn't realize that there even were two kinds of prairies. I thought prairie is prairie and I, I'd driven enough in my life as a touring musician that I'd sort of seen a lot of the different geographies of this country. But I didn't understand that when you cross over the Missouri River that you are, you are crossing into a very different landscape. So moving out here to the shortgrass prairie, which not only is very open, it's also considerably drier than the, the tallgrass prairie, which is why our grasses are shorter, but what's really interesting about it is that our landscape sort of as you're saying, Dan, our landscape is much more similar to how it would have been a thousand years ago simply because there's a lot more grazing land and open range here still because we just don't get enough moisture to support the kind of agriculture we see on the eastern part of our state in South Dakota and in western Minnesota. So I feel like it's been this enormous revelation and gift to get to be a part of a landscape. And granted, there's still a lot of human machinations happening with them, you know, rotational grazing and things like that, but the way humans have been interacting with this landscape is, is just, it's a lot more similar to what would have been happening with grazing room, and it's a thousand years ago. So I, I feel like I came here and I didn't plan to stay long, and I fell in love first with sheep, and then, and then with my husband, and, and my love for the prairie has grown over time as well. And for me, it, it, it's because I have this opportunity to speak for a place, I'm kind of going to, I'm scared I'm going to get emotional about this, I think I am. So sorry in advance if I'm getting a little choked up, but I, I was an artist before I came here. I played music. I wrote that it wasn't until I came here that I realized what my calling was, which was to tell the story of this place that where we still, where we still are getting to have this relationship that is so ancient, and you can do it anywhere. I mean, even landscapes that have, you know, had a lot of human hands involved in, in creating them, I think there's still an opportunity to be part of that interdependent relationship we've been talking about, but it really is an unbelievable gift for me as a person who came from cities and suburbs to get to feel what wildness is like and to experience the scale of wildness that we have out here where so much of the land is

allowed to exist without human intervention. So that is definitely the biggest inspiration for my life and for my work as an artist.

Megan: I'm just like puzzling over that phrase. I like it. Where wildness lives. That's such of a good way to think about nature and how connected we are to it and those experiences when you can just be. I love it. So you've kind of all described this in a way, in a way, but you haven't necessarily described the pivotal moment that brought prairie into your art. So is there like a particular experience or story that helped bring prairie into your art, and Gwen, we'll just go right back to you.

Gwen: Yes. There, there is. Prairie had been part of my poetry and my writing for quite a while because I write about what I see. But for my fiber art, it was I guess kind of jettisoned in a new direction from traditional quilting patterns, star quilts, and other kinds of quilt patterns to more representational art. I had a grant from the Minnesota State Arts Board to visit places and incorporate Dakota language and song into the art that I created. So I went to Blue Mound State Park and went to the highest place where you can stand, and took a photo, took photos 360 degrees around this high point where I was standing, and I was just, I was just overcome with the vastness of the space and how the horizon seemed to disappear into the sky. When I got home, I looked at my photos, and in every single photo I took, there were wind turbines on the horizon. And I was surprised because I didn't notice them when I was there, so the first piece I made was about the bison at Blue Mound, and the words of an old, old Dakota song that says (inaudible, speaking Dakota) 20:18. There are many things chasing me but I still live. And so I made my first landscape quilt with the blues and the greens of the prairie and sky and incorporated a large bison into that, and then the words of that song underneath along with the wind turbines in the background. That kind of went off into the horizon, and ever since then, it's how many different stories can I tell in that visual format. Let people be moved by the colors in them, the rolling lines of the prairie and the indistinctness between the horizon, between the sky and the land.

Marissa: That's beautiful. I, and I, I've seen, I don't know if I've seen that one but I've seen some of your, your textile art, your quilts, and they're so incredible, and I think similarly like I really love the, being able to see the horizon, right? The big wide open space, and so it's so hard to capture sometimes, but I feel like you've done it so well in, in the, the textile art format because I feel like, or at least me and maybe Kristi, you can speak to this later, I take a picture of the prairie and it just does not do it justice, right? But I feel like your, your quilts and your art have captured that, that space and that vastness so well, so thank you. That's for sharing all those beautiful.

Kristi: Thank you.

Marissa: Yeah. Maybe we'll just go in the same order. So Ross, would you like to go next? Is there any particular moment that really brought prairie into your art for you?

Ross: I don't think a moment that brought it to my art because I, I started painted watercolors when I was probably 12. I'm 66 now. I still don't think I understand them, and I certainly, you know, my mother has some of my old, old paintings and of course, they're very rudimentary but there's this drive to put something had to come out of me and be placed somewhere for people that aren't creative visually, you know, everybody

has a gift mathematics, physics, whatever it is, but mine is certainly tied to two things on the prairie. The grassland cover but more importantly in my early years, the wetlands, and I grew up as a duck hunter, I still hunt ducks a little bit, but the one thing that I've always felt sorry for people that live east of, say, well, the beach ridges of Minnesota, the beach lines in Lake Agassiz, they do not get to partake in migration, and yeah, it's tough out right now were in, still in the grasp of winter but I saw horn larks the other day, they're kind of the forebearer of things starting to move northward, but watching migration, you know, cranes moving either up and gone or moving in and then down to the ground, Canada geese, whatever species you want to describe, to me that's truly resurrection, and I'm not a religious man church-wise, but if I didn't have that in my life every day every season, I wouldn't be who I am. And so my visual arts just kind of morphed from wanting to record, you know, vast landscapes with scenes of birds moving across, and when I do a lot of paintings like that, sometimes somewhat abstract, sometimes very detailed, but it always entails this constant movement and change on a prairie landscape. And so as I went into my work career, of course, I was immersed in all of this, worked on ducks for over a decade before I became a land manager, and what a gift it is to us in the prairie to have this seasonal movement of creatures that where do they go, you know, now we know more about it but it must have been such a mystery to early mankind. They understood that these birds had to go somewhere before winter, but it, it had to fascinate them, you know, in their own minds and in discussions and teepee lodges or, you know, other, other abodes over on the prairie, so I think that's, that conveys it pretty much.

Megan: I like it. Migration. The movement of wildlife. Don't worry. Even those of us who live east, you know, migration is sort of shifting a little bit with climate change and I get really excited about the monarch migration, Ross, like I get pretty pumped about that. They're still moving through. Kristi, how about you? What, what particularly was there an experience, a story? I mean, I know or we know that you, or people are going to know that you have, you're sort of, your house is sort of in the middle of all of this public land and you have your own prairie that you manage there, and then this big complex around you. What was the moment that prairie really spoke to you or inspired your art?

Kristi: Yeah, it's probably that moment that you're kind of describing. Growing up I've always loved traveling.

Megan: You mean I stole your moment?

Kristi: No, no, no, you're okay, you're okay. (Laughter.) But I think, I think that's where I, I think that's where I'll end up landing. You know, as I was learning photography, I mean, I loved traveling, I loved being in nature, I love hiking, that's the reason I, I think that's why I loved photography so much is that I get to be out in nature and using photography to, to look at the world in a different way, and so I've always, I've always enjoyed nature photography. And so, you know, I grew up in this area but lived in Duluth, lived in eastern Wisconsin for a while, and it was probably when we, we moved to this farm all of a sudden I'm surrounded by this remnant incredible prairie and especially as I had small children, I realized I couldn't travel and go that many places. So, I mean, I, I started photographing the world that was right in my backyard. I had learned about prairie plants because I actually worked for a photographer that

photographs for The Nature Conservancy, Richard Hamilton Smith, in my younger years, so I spent hours researching and labeling his slides, so I had gotten to learn about a lot of the prairie plants and understanding some of the different prairies. So I, I started to recognize some of the plants and started looking them up, and then really started highlighting them and, and wanting, wanting to sort of dig in and learn more about them. I've photographed in the winter where I used winter, I have a series called winter sketch, and so I kind of used the snow as my canvas and just whatever's left of the prairie as sort of little sketchbooks that was in my darkroom years even. And then I have a series kind of soon after that that was called From the Driveway. So here I am, you know, with two small children. All I could do is go down my driveway and just kind of veer off a little bit and, and, and catch little pieces of the prairie and so that's, that's kind of what was right there for me. And I just, I found that I love celebrating the prairie with my, with my photographs, and some of them become kind of portraits and just looking really at each plant, and I just, I, once I started doing that, it's just it's become something that I just keep going back to, so.

Marissa: That's great. I love From the Driveway. That's awesome. I wish, I wish I could do my driveway is a little too suburban for that but that's, that's very cool. Eliza, is there a moment for you that, that really dug in the prairie?

Eliza: Well, I would say no. I mean, I think that it really has been sort of these ever widening circles. So it really, like I said, really started with getting, I brought home two bum lambs from a, from a rancher friend the first spring that I lived here. And that was my first experience land, hands on experience with livestock. And from there, I just, you know, I, it started really with this amazement with the birth and death cycle that is a really big part of definitely working in agriculture, definitely working with livestock, but I think also just as you get more tuned into these systems that of the land and seasonality, you just start to tune into these, these birth and death cycles that again I was totally unaware of growing up in cities and suburbs. So that was probably, those were the first big awakenings and I think shifts in my work, but on a very practical level, I started writing once I decided I was going to stay and I got married, we had our first little guy came pretty soon after and so I knew I wasn't going to be touring anymore or at least not like I had been. So I started writing a column for our little local paper basically just to have a creative outlet, and it's called Little Pasture on the Prairie, so this is, I'm actually next year will be my tenth year of writing this column, and just by having this, this opportunity once a week to just kind of check in with, with what was happening on the ranch, what was happening again with the seasons, I think that partly just, you know, my awareness was increasing, but it was also having this, this log that really kind of pushed me to then be aware of what was happening so I could, you know, describe it to my readers. And that is such a treasure to me. It was kind of a spur of the moment decision to start writing it. I just thought it would be fun, and it's turned out to be, it just the gift of my life I think to have this, to have this writing practice now that turned into a book and has led to all kinds of other interesting opportunities, unexpected opportunities, but just started as simply as, you know, sitting down once a week to describe what was happening in the landscape around me.

Marissa: Yeah, that's beautiful.

Eliza: Just sitting and noticing, right, taking the time to notice and reflect.

Marissa: Yeah, exactly.

Eliza: It's great.

Marissa: So our next question, and I'm wondering maybe we go in reverse order this time, so maybe Eliza starting with you, but I'm wondering, you know, I have listened to a lot of your music, which is phenomenal, I totally so enjoy it, and especially your song with the prairie plant names, I just love that one. Many of them but that one is, is pretty fun. But I guess I'm just wondering like in your music, is there, or, or in your writing, either way I guess, is there a particular feeling or a message that you're trying to convey about prairies or, you know, just I guess in general in your work? Or is that at the forefront?

Eliza: Well, you know, it's interesting and I, I'm, I'll be excited to hear what, what everyone else has to say about this too because I think that there's, you know, you can come to your art and your creative process with an agenda, but a lot of times the, the art, or the whatever the, the work is has its own agenda or so it seems, and so often yeah, I have come, I have come to whether it's, you know, sitting down with my guitar or coming to the page to start writing with a pretty good idea of what I want to say and by the end, it's, it's taken me somewhere completely different, which is that relationship is, is probably one of my favorite parts of, of getting to work as an artist. So yeah, I mean, I, like I said before, I feel like it's, it's really important to me to be sharing these stories of this place where the, the other than human life is such a huge and prominent part of our daily lives as the humans that, that live here because we are, I mean, where I live, I think it's our population density is like one person per square mile or it might even be less than that. We're technically qualified as frontier, we aren't even rural here, they moved us back from rural to frontier at some point because there's just, yeah, not very many human beings, which, which again is, is very different than a lot of people's experiences, but is, is an exciting opportunity to just get to be such a small, a small part of, of the everyday happenings. So yeah, I think that is what I try to bring most often, and then I also, so I have to say, Marissa, like I, I, we've met before in real life and I was, I was starstruck then and I still am, like I, I, I toured and performed a show called Songs From the Soil in which I quote you, and so yeah, when I first got to meet you, it was really exciting because I feel like I would love as, as much as possible to be able to share the stories that, that you and your colleagues, I mean, the work you're doing I just, I think it's wonderful, and so yeah, whatever I can do to help share your stories, I really want to do.

Marissa: I am very humbled by that, believe me, because I find your music so inspiring and all of the prairie art that you all do so inspiring, so you know, when we can have collaborations that, that's totally awesome, so thank you for that.

Megan: Marissa, you're a star in so many ways. You never know, you just say something about soil and that it's going to be a song. It's wonderful. (Laughter) Kristi, how about you?

Kristi: So particularly feeling I suppose, I don't know, my photos are pretty peaceful, you know, that's usually it's grass or a flower, it is the main topic and I just, I try to simplify my photos quite a bit so there's kind of that very peaceful. I mean, there are a few storm clouds, maybe more lately than, than previously. There's been a lot of storms going through our, our neck of the woods, but, or our neck of the prairie, but, but I think what I'd like to do the most is I like to share with the world this space and these places that, are not, those paths are just not well traveled, right? People are not trudging through some of these pieces of prairie that they're not easy to walk through, so it's I feel like it's my part of my calling is to just show everybody what the, the beauty is out in the middle of this prairie. And also to just share with people how worthwhile the prairie is, right? It's, it's, there's, there so much going on out there and there's so much, there's just so much beauty and it's, it's, it's worthwhile, it's worthwhile keeping all the, the remnants that we have and to preserve it and to enhance those prairies, so. That's probably what I'm thinking about as far as prairies.

Megan: I really like your Side Oat Series and not just because it's nice alliteration, but because I think side oats is this unassuming grass that we don't even often get it credit for being a fully foundational prairie plant, but it's so aptly named. We always say that botanists are real commonsense type people because why is it named side oats? Because it's so little seeds look like oats and they're on one side of the stem, so these are very commonsense people who are naming these plants, right? But I just love like your black and white of the side oats, you've got all of these different ones where the, has all these different purples and reds, and that's just like an example of one plant, right, that has all of these different sides and facets to it. - -

Kristi: Yep, that's a grass - -

Megan: - - I just, when I was a kid, oh go ahead.

Kristi: I was going to say it's the grass too that's blooming, right? It's got little flowers and it's, yeah, I love that part.

Megan: I know, and you don't often think of like, well, maybe I shouldn't say you don't often, but most of the time people photograph flowers in the prairie, like, you know, forbs, and so to see like a whole series on a grass is just wonderful because they are what makes prairie, prairie, and they do have flowers, and little florets, and they are beautiful in their own right. I just love the black and white that you have because when I was a kid, I, Wizard of Oz was one of my favorite movies. In fact, so much so that my grandma would call and she would ask to speak to Megan, and I would refuse to answer the phone because I wanted everyone to call me Dorothy, just like a whole, it's a whole phase I was going through. And so my grandma called one day and she was like oh hi Maggie, how are you? And I just like left the phone there and so I'm dating myself here, but this is pre-cellphones, this is fully landline, and so my mom comes several minutes later, like five minutes later, she picks up the phone and she's like mom, who are you talking to? Grandma was just talking away, I'm gone. She called me Megan, you call me Dorothy, (laughing) so just anyway, this picture, this black and white just has, gives me those very Wizard of Oz, kind of vibes, right, in the beginning, and so it makes me think of my grandma, makes me think of home, but it just makes me think of like these special moments, so I like it.

Marissa: Ross, you know, you've talked a little bit about maybe, you know, your inspirations and things, but and full disclosure, I, Ross has done a couple of beautiful watercolors for me and my two favorite prairie sparrows, which I am super excited and honored to have in my house, but I would love to hear a little bit from you too about like what are you thinking about or like do you have a, a feeling or message you're trying to convey in, in, in your watercolors, in your work?

Ross: Sure, Marissa. I think I, you know, Eliza alluded to it that there's basically I'd say two approaches an artist start their craft. You know, early in life where, you know, I entered some duck stamp contests and that kind of stuff, and there was, you know, how do you gain contentment? To me, other than my love of my wife and my, and my, you know, family and friends, contentment is such a gift to a human being, and it really didn't come to me until my mid-40s. Because you think there's got to me, you know, there's got to me more to life, and so later in my years, I basically just started painting for my own enjoyment, and I found that actually that turned people on to my art more than if I was really trying to please some individual or, or some group of people, and ever since then, you know, when I see as an example, I was eating lunch on the prairie one day, you know, just laying down eating, it was on Tympanuchus Wildlife Area just east of Crookston, and it was late summer, so there were a lot of bottle junctions blooming around me, and I always looked at that plant and wondered, you know, who the heck pollinates that thing. I mean, the flower is closed, and all of a sudden (makes bumble bee noise), you know, a bumblebee came and landed on one of those, and literally just like Schwarzenegger the top open and, and went in and there's a, wow was I lucky to see that and now, maybe not the only thing that pollinates bottle junctions, but I went home that night and painted, you know, just an individual junction with a bumblebee going into it and that painting I never, you know, still in my pile of watercolors that I don't think I'll ever try to sell it or give it away because it was a moment that I got to share for myself and it's a selfish outlook sometimes, but, you know, so I do try to, you know, inspire people with art of prairies somewhat is educational, you know, another thing I did years ago is called first light, and it came from an experience where you have tall blazing stars. I was out there right at dawn, it's chilly, it's damp, and there are all these monarchs hanging on, you know, had overnighted on these liatris and, you know, the light was just hitting the top, and so it was like illuminating the two lower ones were darker looking monarchs. And again, getting back to what all of us have talked about, unless you immerse yourself in some given habitat, you don't get in on these gifts that nature gives us every single day. So I do try to convey that in our artwork and try to turn people on to prairie a little bit through that. It's hard, you know, it's a hard habitat to fall in love with. Obviously, jealous of Kristi, she sounds like she can just, you know, like Sara Vacek and her husband can just walk out their backdoor and there's miles, miles - -

Marissa: Yeah, she lives just right on the other side of the river.

Ross: - - miles of beautiful tallgrass and, you know, I have to drive a, 8-10 miles, it's not terrible, but to have it in your backyard, you look out with a cup of tea in the morning, you're seeing the things that I'm describing and how lucky you are, so I think I can tell that each of us through our art gifts have touched a lot of people. You know, we have a

poet laureate in our midst for crying out loud. That's like a, like that makes me emotional, you know, and so.

Megan: I know right, Ross. For crying out loud, we got a poet laureate. (Laughing.)

Ross: That's enough from me on that.

Megan: Oh goodness. Well, you should also know that you're right on, that bumblebees are the only bee that's strong enough to pry out a bottle junction flower and pollinate it. So you, you got to witness its main and only group of pollinators because bumblebees have those big beefy arms. Okay, they're legs, but you know, they can pry it open. The strongest of the native bees. Gwen, Ross cued you right up, I just wanted to make that point about bottle junction, but how about you? What do you think?

Gwen: When I'm out on the prairie, I'm out there for myself, and I've tried taking photographs just with my phone, which is sometimes good, but it's still, it never captures what I really am seeing. So in terms of a message or a feeling, I never really know how my work is going to affect someone. They can come back and after looking at one of my landscape quilts and tell me how that story impacted them and tell me what they saw, and I'm grateful and sometimes overwhelmed with how particular and specific this response is from, from people. And it can be the same way for poetry as it is for visual art, and I, and I always make sure I, I tell them that I appreciate that they shared their stories with me because it, it means a lot when somebody will talk to you about your songs or your paintings or your photographs or your visual art, that it moves them enough that they would say something. Sometimes what I had intended is not what people hear or see, and so that just tells me that there's, there's a deeper connection there with the way that I write about right away that I create visual art about the prairie. And it's a living thing. It's, it's another living thing, another living being in a whole series of other beings within it. So it, it grows and it lives and dies and breathes, it drinks, it basks in sunshine, and if people can respond to that message and see that prairie and all of its components and companions as living things on par with us as humans, that's, that's the best response I think. And you can't ever really control the message that you want to convey even when you use words how people can interpret it in their own ways, and I think that's the powerful aspect of, of art and our intentions as artists. We can't always know what the response is going to be, and sometimes it's overwhelming and humbling when we, when our viewers or our listeners or our readers share those responses with us.

Megan: I like how you're describing that, Gwen, because it's both a, using prairie as an inspiration for art is both a connected and an individual experience, where even you're hearing us talk today. We obviously love prairie. This is clear. Like we, we love it, but as Gwen's saying, we still have individual experiences on the prairie that have shaped us and made us who we are. I don't know that Kristi, for example, thought that somebody was going to look at her side oats painting and thinking about the Wizard of Oz. Maybe that wasn't what was intended but, but and that's just a little joke, but truly for me, it, it spoke to these very individual memories and moments that I have in my life as art does for all of us. But we're connected in it by this shared love of the prairie and this shared understanding of what it means to be connected to the prairie. So I just think that's really beautiful. We're going to ask you what's your favorite work of art that you've

created and, and why, and that's kind of how we're going to close it out today. What's your favorite one? And I know this is, I hate when people ask me this question. It's like when people say what's your favorite podcast episode? And maybe you secretly have a favorite. We can't tell people because then they'll be like well, what didn't you like about the other ones. It's not really they didn't like something about the other ones, it's more that you just something particular special happened in that moment. So I know it's hard to choose, it's also like we asked you to pick your favorite prairie spot, and sometimes people will say well, it depends on the day and the mood I'm in, because I have different prairies that I like to visit for different reasons to fit different needs. Regardless, we're still asking this question. You're not off the hook. So I was rambling to give you time to think. Kristi, we're starting with you, so.

Kristi: Oh, goodness. Yeah, that, that one's hard because some of the photographs I take I like right away, and then I don't like it, you know, five years later. I will choose, I have a photograph, it's black and white, so maybe it's, it's actually of my daughter, she's about 4 or 5 years old, and she's walking out on our driveway, and she's in a little tutu, and she's holding her bike, and there's kind of this big cloud in the distance, black and, you know, it looks ominous, it's not ominous, but it's, it's a little bit, it looks dramatic as the clouds can be on the prairie. And so yeah, she's just heading out into the world in her little tutu outfit with her bike, and she's ready to take on, take on the world, so I'll, I'll choose that one.

Marissa: That's great. And I, you're totally right. Like I feel like sometimes, that's one of the things I love about clouds on the prairie is like when the light hits them right, they just so incredible and they look so ominous. And sometimes they are, but oftentimes they're not quite as ominous as they appear. That's, that's beautiful, though. I'd love to see that. Let's go to Eliza.

Eliza: It's true. This is a really hard question. It's like picking your favorite child, right? I feel like one of the things that is interesting about being an artist, at least for me, is that you always have the feeling that you didn't quite, you didn't quite say what you meant or you didn't quite catch it. It kind of reminds me of some of the things Gwen was saying earlier. So it's, it is a very magical process anyway, the sort of alchemy of taking your lived experience and then trying to create a piece of artwork or a song or a piece of writing that then when other people are interacting with it, it, it, it becomes its own thing because they have their, or it becomes this thing that's separate from you because they have the viewer or the audience has their own experience of, of the work you've made. So it's I feel like it's a relationship like even an individual piece is like still an evolution, if that makes sense, because the meaning may change for you because it does take on a life of its own after it leaves your, your mind or your hands. So because I do a lot of performance of my songs, I, I, this, this show I do right now that I mentioned before, Songs From the Soil, that just keeps evolving because I keep adding new pieces to it, but it's kind of a collage of written work and poetry and songs, and I really love getting to perform that because it is every audience, it changes with every audience and it also because it's, because it's these different forms brought together, it feels like it gives me this opportunity to even somehow paint more broadly. I don't know, not paint obviously, but metaphorically paint more broadly the experience that I have here and the

experience of this place and how it's influenced and affected me. So, so that's what I would probably name, but yeah, that's a tough one.

Megan: I know. We put you guys in a pickle on purpose because we're just curious. It's okay. We could record this, you know, six months from now and you might have a, you all might have a different answer because sometimes it, that's how it works. Ross, we're putting you on the spot. You're not getting out of it.

Ross: Okay.

Megan: Your favorite one.

Ross: I, you know, a lot of my paintings are first of the title in my head. I mean, there's a painting I have yet to do that I thought of for probably 15 years called learning from the first answers, and it would be, you know, a Lakota man and his son or plains native person under a buffalo grove laying next to a shark tail dancing ground, you know, their ponies would be tied down, hobble below the hill, but I have not done that painting yet. But I have done many what I call shield paintings, and again, my, my feeble attempt to give a tribute to the first people that were on the prairies, but probably my favorite one is owned by a woman in Montana is a war shield called prairie chicken spirit, and her shield spirit, and it's the shield is in the middle and in the foreground is a, is a full blooming male prairie chicken with pasqueflowers at his feet, and then another chicken flying across the top of the, of the shield, and the meaning for me of that painting is, you know, those times the horse culture is gone but we still have prairie and we still have prairie chickens and, and people have tried to, you know, rub the prairie out, but it's very resilient and it's my hope that it'll be around for generations and generations.

Marissa: Thank you, Ross. Thanks for sharing that. That sounds, yeah, like a beautiful painting. Gwen, tough question goes to you.

Gwen: And I've had the longest time to think about it, which is probably worse than being first. (Laughing) My favorite piece right now will be when they finished a series of four, and it'll be four renditions representing the seasons on the prairie, so big sky, rolling hills, all colors of, of the season with a single oak tree because I've heard that there's nothing stronger than a single oak tree on the prairie. Well, maybe not nothing stronger, but to see an oak in the middle of the prairie represents strength and it stands, it stands alone. (Inaudible, speaking Dakota) 58:11 and that's my favorite right now because I'm working on it.

Megan: I love that. Ross chose something that he hasn't even made yet, and you showed something that you're working on right now.

Eliza: I, I was actually going to say I'm, I'm working on this folk opera and yeah, that's what I kind of want to say, but then I was like oh, but it's, it's like 10 years away from being done, so. (Laughter.)

Megan: I think it's great. So when Glenn, so when Gwen's husband Glenn was on the podcast for when the bison came home, we asked him a question when we moved to this Let's Science section where we recommend resources, which we're about to do, so a nice little segue here, what was his favorite book, you know, where people could learn

more about the prairie, and he said the one that hasn't been written yet. And so I feel that we're sort of channeling Glenn a little bit today as we're talking about this future thing that we're going to do, and that's absolutely fine. I thought it was a, a perfectly fair answer because in his what he was talking about was as his students and as these young Dakota people go and experience the prairie at Minneopa State Park, they're walking away with new experiences, newfound understanding of their identity as people, what, you know, how connected they are to this earth, to their relatives, the bison, and so he was excited about what they're going to do with that newfound knowledge, like what book they're going to write and what they're going to, how that's going to manifest basically. So I think we're just channeling Glenn a little bit today and I think that's all right.

Kristi: I think that's great too. I mean, as artists, we need to be not thinking that our best work is the work that we've already done, right? We need to like be excited about the next thing that we're doing, so I, I, I think that's a really great way to think about it.

Megan: Wonderful. We could keep talking about this all day long. We've got to move to our next section.

{{(music playing and sounds of birds chirping)}}

(Music playing)

LET'S SCIENCE: To The Literature!

Science!

Megan: This is the part of the podcast where we recommend a book, a blog, or a paper. And today, while certainly this is our Let's Science section, Marissa said it aptly earlier, it's really like Let's Art, but science and art are connected. So all this is really is, is we just want you to recommend how you something that you found useful in your journey as artists that helped shape you and they could be books, they could be people, you know, the world is your oyster here. I need to think of a better prairie analogy than like we need to coin a phrase like instead of the world is your oyster, like the world is your pasqueflower.

Marissa: I was going to say the same thing, I was going to say pasqueflower, of all the things, yes, the world is your pasqueflower. (Laughter.)

Megan: The world is your pasqueflower. Something, something, we're going to, we're going to come up with a good phrase. That's not it. There will be a prairie themed one coming soon. We'll first have to, as Marissa and I are scientists, we first had to research why they chose oysters, and then we can find an analogous prairie.

Marissa: Here we go, we just declare it. I mean I think we could just declare it.

Megan: We can just declare it. (Laughing) I like it. Marissa is like we have all the power, the world is your pasqueflower. Done. So Marissa and I couldn't help our curiosity and we did have to look this up. So for the record, the world is your oyster first appeared in Shakespeare's play The Merry Wives of Windsor, which was published in 1602. In Act II, a character named Falstaff says I will not lend thee a penny, to which Pistol replied

why then the world's mine oyster, which I with sword will open. And basically what it means is, is that you can do anything you wish or go anywhere you want in life because you have the ability to do so. And the pearl in the oyster is supposed to be symbolic for richness. So if you think about it, the world is your pasqueflower actually works because while you might not find a pearl in a pasqueflower, you can sometimes find a sleeping bumblebee because pasqueflowers close their petals at night and sometimes it's a good spot for a bee to rest and be safe. Pasqueflowers are also great because they're a sign of a healthy, resilient, diverse prairie that's of pretty high quality. So we're sticking with it, the world is your pasqueflower. Kristi, we're starting with you.

Kristi: All right. So I learned a lot of photography through 4-H and just photography classes, learning about composition, but I think I find inspiration not just from other photographers, but from other artists. So I'm going to recommend for inspiration for prairie artists that we have the Meander Art Crawl that is full of prairie artists in Western Minnesota, so there's just wonderful artists within that group. And then I also have been inspired by a collaboration of four different artists that I would encourage that I would encourage everybody to look into. Franz Richter, Gene and Lucy Tokheim from Tokheim Stoneware, and Karen Jensen. Gene and Lucy are in their 50th year of pottery and they, they've been working and living out in this area and worked collaboratively, collaboratively with, with Franz and Karen. Franz actually just passed away but has an incredible repertoire of prairie-inspired work, and Karen Jensen is a rosmal artist that I worked with, but if you look at their work and how it connects to the prairie and just how their art has come from the prairie, I think you'd, you'd find some inspiration from, from those. So that's, that's what I'll leave you with.

Marissa: Yeah, that's great. Lots more inspiration. Gwen, would you like to go next?

Gwen: This is a hard task to pick just one. So good job, Kristi - -

Marissa: You can share a couple if you feel like it.

Gwen: - - getting four in there. (Laughter)

Kristi: Yeah, I didn't, I broke that rule, so.

Marissa: Yeah, that's totally okay.

Gwen: I always wonder about people who have never experienced the prairie, the way, the way that I do being out in the open and how can they get just even the little bit of a sense of the grandeur and the, the vastness of, of the prairie at sunrise, at sunset, in the middle of the night when there's a range burn or an electrical storm. So I thought that my recommendation would be the photography books of Jim Brandenburg, who's done a lot of amazing images of, of prairie, of nature all across but there's just something about his work that seems to capture that mystery and that majesty of the prairie for me. And I loved it when he and Jane Goodall were in Nebraska with the migration of the sandhill cranes and he was taking pictures, and his camera was, his shutter was making noise and she looked over at him in the most scolding of ways that he was disturbing her with his shutter clicks.

Marissa: That's funny. That's funny.

Gwen: I know.

Marissa: Super funny. Ross, how about you?

Ross: Well, probably for me Karl Bodmer. I don't know if he has influence on me, but I'm in awe of his story. For those of you that don't know, he was a Swiss artist that Prince Maximilian, you know, got to go with him his trip up in Missouri 1820 through 1822 and I don't know how he did it, but he did these amazing paintings, you know, numerous ones of Mato-Topé, for Four Bears Mandan, you know, high powerful chief at that time. I mean, Mandan, he talks had been decimated by smallpox well before their trip, but he did these amazing watercolors of native people often in full regalia in the winter of 1821-1822, which by Mandan standards was told to be while the Missouri froze that winter, which didn't happen very often. Such that they could cross over, you know, back and forth but if, if you ever get to Crayton University in Omaha, his paintings are you know, permanently existed at the exhibited at the Joslyn Museum and the vibrancy of the colors I just I'm in awe of how he even did this under those kind of conditions. I can't imagine those earthen lodges had much light in them, so again, it falls back for me to some of the first peoples on this landscape and the wonders that Karl Bodmer got to see, and thankfully he recorded this. A lot of people talk about George Catlin, as a great native artist, his paintings aren't that accurate as far as accoutrements and different regalia and hairstyles and so if you can get down and see that, it's, it's life-changing I think.

Marissa: I'll have to go check those out. Thank you. Eliza.

Eliza: Well, I'm going to cheat a little bit because I have the pleasure of hosting a, a PBS show called Wish You Were Here, and we get to travel around and hang out with and play music with and hear stories from artists all over the Northern Plains. So, so there's pretty much everyone I've gotten to work with on that show has been a source of inspiration, which is why we, why we have them on the show. But to pick out one in particular, we did an episode with Evan Lock, who passed away last year, and he was a Lakota hoop dancer and indigenous flute player, and he after we recorded the episode, he and I became friends and collaborators. And so he's had a huge influence on just in the trajectory I guess I'd say not just of my artwork but of my life and really changing the way I understand my relationship with, with the place that I live. Again, sort of similar to what you're talking about, Ross, you know, as I didn't grow up here, so I don't have any illusions about it, it's just a very different relationship for me. I don't have cultural traditions; I don't have a heritage that comes from this place. So it's, it's a, it's sort of like a young love and oh, geez. Now I'm going to get emotional again. I guess it's I, I, it's how I started so why not be how I finish. But I before working with Kevin, I was thinking of myself sort of as this observer who was just watching the prairie through the seasons, watching the animals and the plants as they were growing and changing and dying and being reborn, and I was trying to record it. But Kevin taught me that, you know, and part of it also that it's a reciprocal relationship, and he came up to my house and was playing flute on the porch, and you can hear the birds singing back to him. And, you know, he would say yeah, I steal, I steal tunes from the birds all the time. In that moment too I could hear that the birds also could hear him playing, and they were, they were like oh, that's interesting, yes, oh, that's a good, that's a good song, and the wind even kind of

came up and it just made me realize that we're part of a song, we're part of a dance and a rhythm, and a conversation that's been going on since the beginning of time, and it's not going to end, and that we, we aren't just listening to it, we're part of it.

Marissa: That's beautiful, and yeah, it's so easy to get emotional I think about prairie and, and especially when we're talking about inspiration in art, so I totally understand.

Megan: It's also okay to be emotional about it like 'cause you're a real life person. (Laughter) So like, I mean, well, I hope we all are, but as far as I know, as far as I'm aware, I mean, emotion and feeling connected is, is part of that, is part of how we show what we're feeling, there's nothing wrong with that. Marissa, I think there's nothing I want to do more at this moment than probably go outside and visit a prairie by taking a hike with you and all of these wonderful people.

Marissa: Let's do it. Let's take a hike.

Megan: Ready? All right, Gwen, where are we hiking to today?

Gwen: Blue Mound State Park.

Megan: Why do you like Blue Mounds, Gwen? You did describe earlier standing on top and that was inspiration for one of your, your textile art, so.

Gwen: It's close to where rivers converge, travel ways converge, animal travel ways, human travel ways, and there's just something magical about that place, they're all magical, but that one especially. That's where we go today and they can visit the other ones later.

Megan: Love it.

Kristi: I love, I love Blue Mounds too. I, I, I think of it as prairie, prairie, prairie, prairie, cliff, prairie, prairie, prairie, prairie, prairie. Such a great place to go.

Megan: Kristi, are we going there too with you or where do you want to go?

Kristi: I was going to pick the Bigstone Wildlife Refuge. It's near Ortonville, it's really accessible, there's an audio tour, and there's some great trails, so that, I don't know, there's, there's some great prairie there, there's some cactus and some, there's, there's a lot of diversity there. I mean, it's, there's also state land south of there, goes by my house all the way down to marsh, through Marsh Lake to and along the Lac qui Parle Lake and it just follows the Minnesota River down. So there's a lot of public land from there but I think Big Stone Wildlife Refuge is just a really fun place to catch a sunset or, yeah, check it out.

Marissa: Yeah, both great places. Ross, where would you go?

Ross: Well I'd have to go to my beloved start on the north end of Tympanuchus Wildlife Management Area, which is named after that's the genus name for greater prairie chickens. Some people say Tympanuchus, I say Tympanuchus, but quick story behind a predecessor of Terry Wilson, of mine and Jerry Martin's who is still with us but retired many years ago, he was the first manager here at Crookston and he rolled around in bed for two weeks wondering if he should buy the first tract of Tympanuchus for \$18 an

acre. He thought it was a little high and thank goodness he did, this was in '63, so it's a while ago, but so Tympanuchus is about 1,000 acres state land, authority of TNC land that had to be restored, but it's quite nice. You wander through all the hillocks and broken beach ridges and cross little flowages, you go from dry prairie to wet prairie in 35 steps. You eventually get to the south end, you cross over the county road onto Thoreson Prairie Wildlife Management Area, and you climb up this very steep knoll, which is one of the few kind of cutoff beach lines, and you take your lunch there and you sit down amongst literally thousands of purple coneflowers in August, and you just sit and enjoy yourself looking north northwest towards Crookston.

Marissa: That sounds so delightful. There's a lot of diversity there. Yes, you painted a very nice picture in my brain, so check it out this summer. Eliza, where are you taking us?

Eliza: Well, I would probably take you to our pasture because I go hiking there almost every day. Currently, it's obviously privately owned, but we, we, we have dreams of starting a concert series. I don't know if it's going to happen this coming summer but I'm, I'm really hopeful by 2024 we will be able to start having some concerts out on the land, which would mean people would have the opportunity to visit, but we, where we live, you basically again if you're used to the kind of prairie that we think of as being the tallgrass prairie, which is traditionally flatter, where I live, it, it looks very different. It almost looks like foothills or sections of it look like foothills for the Rockies, so it's more similar sort of topography-wise to eastern Wyoming or eastern Montana, which we're very close to. So there's a place when you first come into our yard, it looks more flat, and you just, you know, see grass sort of in every direction, but then you go a little bit north and you come up on to these plateaus that then look out into the river breaks of the Grand River, and you can see, you know, 40-50 miles away pretty easily. It's very epic and windswept. So I, I think it's, yeah, that view is inspiring and awe-inspiring and I feel unbelievably lucky that I get to see it on a nearly daily basis. But if you are looking for someplace that is already open to the public, the Slim Buttes are about 35 miles away from us, and they are, it's National Forest land, and it's just unbelievably beautiful. It's kind of like a miniature black hills kind of set right into the prairie. So it's a, it's, you can travel down Highway 20, head, head, head west from Bison, South Dakota and Highway 20 and you basically run into the. So yeah, if you're on a road trip trying to get across the state of South Dakota, you will bump into them and I, yeah, highly recommend that as a good place to take a hike.

Marissa: I will second that. We talk a lot about Minnesota on this podcast, obviously, but I have spent some time in northwestern South Dakota, and it is epic is a great word to describe it. It's just incredibly beautiful in that part of the state. And you won't bump into it on purpose. You need to bump, well, you have to bump into it on purpose I guess is what I should say. You won't bump into it on accident. You really need to be going there, but it, I, it is beautiful, and the Slim Buttes area is just gorgeous, so yeah. Endorsement as well.

Megan: I like it. Now we got a vacation planned. I also particularly like that you all are describing, the places that we're going to take a hike today that when we first started this podcast many moons ago, our whole idea was that we wanted people to get excited

about prairie and about prairie vistas, and I particularly like that almost all of you described prairie horizon, prairie vista, this open sense of seeing and being. And so it just makes, brings my heart joy and warmth to know that what we set out to do, we're just describing it right here in Season 6. And it seems like a fitting way to close out this season, and I, it's hard to believe, right? But we, we have wrapped another season, another Prairie Pod, and so don't get too sad. There's lots of Prairie Pod episodes to revisit, relisten to. Don't forget to rate and review us in iTunes or on whatever platform you're using to listen. It helps us bring in more prairie peeps just like you. We hope very much that you still have many, many, many, many, many, many, many, many more days on the prairie. We're so glad that you listened. We're so glad that you listened, don't forget to get out there and #discovertheprairie especially in my favorite season as the bluestem turns purple, the Indiangrass gets golden, and the prairie dropseed starts to smell like buttered popcorn. All right. As always, you can find all the links that we talked about today on our website at mndnr.gov/prairiepod. This episode was produced by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources South Region under the Minnesota Prairie Conservation Partnership. It was edited and audio engineered by the fabulous Dan Ruiter and our web production team is led by the equally fantastic Bobby Boos, and not to be left out, our social media lead is Kelly Randall. What should we say to close out this episode like just what was our tagline? The world is your pasqueflower? Get out there and enjoy it, people.

Marissa: Yep, for sure.

((sounds of birds chirping and wind blowing)).