



NORTH AMERICAN  
**PRAIRIE**  
*Conference*

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IOWA • 2023



## ***A message from your Chair***

The evidence is clear. Interest and concern for prairie and grassland ecosystems is as strong as ever. When conference planning began again in summer 2022, we were very uncertain how many participants to expect and plan for in the budget. The number 350 surfaced and seemed like a reasonable goal. As I write this, the latest count is over 600 and the final count may reach 625 or more. Solid numbers for previous meetings are difficult to come by. The inaugural meeting in 1968 at Knox College attracted 120 prairie enthusiasts. The last three meetings in Iowa, in 1990, 2000 and 2010, were attended by approximately 530, 600 and 560 people respectively. Iowa's location in the heart of the tallgrass prairie seems to bring some advantages when it comes to participation.

That remarkable interest in prairie is well deserved and critically important. Grassland birds are among the fastest-declining bird species in the United States, with a 34% loss since 1970 (State of the Birds 2022). Insects are a major component of grassland ecosystems and research from around the world indicates grassland insect diversity is severely threatened. The phrase "insect apocalypse" has surface as a red flag for the observation that insects in general have declined by 75% in the last 50 years. A 2008 paper reporting on research in Illinois prairies concluded that snake diversity may have decline by as much as 70% since the mid-1800s. I could go on with more data for other taxa. Despite all the good work accomplished in protecting remnants and putting more prairie on the landscape in reconstructions, grassland biodiversity is still under siege. The importance of that biodiversity, both below and above ground, is compounded by its role in furnishing ecosystem processes and function that we know inform regenerative agriculture and provide mitigation and resilience in a world experiencing significant climate change. The Planning Committee understood these are important issues for prairie and grassland conservation. We have incorporated these and many other crucial issues into the conference.

We Iowans, like prairie folks in other states, are very proud of our prairie heritage. We love hosting the conference and inviting others to our home to share our prairie and its grandeur. It is our expectation that the tremendous knowledge, experience and simple plain love of prairie that has assembled here in Altoona will synthesize optimism, direction and confidence in going forward. Thank you for coming and being a part of this very special time and place.

*Thomas Rosburg*

***Chair of the 2023 North American Prairie Conference***  
Professor of Biology, Drake University, Des Moines, Iowa  
Botanical & Ecological Consulting

**P.S.** Our sponsors are instrumental towards making this conference a reality. Their support has helped this conference reach a larger audience. Please be sure to visit with them, express your gratitude, and thank them for their support.

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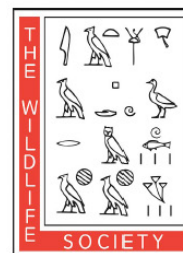


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