

# SIOSA

Southern Iowa Oak Savanna Alliance

MARCH 2009

## SIOSA Update

John Orvis, SIOSA President

After a long absence, we are pleased to once again be publishing a quarterly SIOSA newsletter. We hope these publications will keep you informed on the exciting programs and projects involving SIOSA, as well as, educating you with technical articles written by natural resource professionals.

A few major changes have taken place within the organization over the past year. Since we authorized the Board of Directors to be expanded from 5 to 11 members at our annual meeting last June, we have added 4 new (younger) members. We have also created a new committee

structure to better address the five major focuses of SIOSA (Habitat & Restoration, Outreach, Membership, Conferences/Programs, and Learning Center).

SIOSA continues to actively spread the word about oak savanna restoration and the work being done in south central Iowa. Board members have spoken about savanna restoration at ladies clubs, high school environmental science classes, forestry field days, fire workshops, and the 2008 Farm Progress Show. This effort seems to be catching the eyes of individuals across the country as Gregg Pattison re-

cently presented a program on savanna restoration at the Tri-State Forestry Conference at Sinsinawa, Wisconsin and the 2009 Iowa Prairie Conference just announced SIOSA will be sponsoring the event in Lamoni July 17-18.

We continue to strive for increased membership and active participation of our members. Our monthly board meeting are held at 7:00 PM on the 2nd Thursday of the month at the Decatur County Courthouse. We encourage anyone wishing to become a member or those interested in serving on our committees to attend.

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## 2009 Upcoming Events

### Snow Trillium Walk

INHF Property (SW of Decatur City)  
Saturday, April 4th

Join us from 10:00AM-12:00PM for a tour of an Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation property as we examine and learn about the very rare snow trillium.

### 2009 Iowa Prairie Conference

Graceland University, Lamoni  
July 17-18

The two day conference will highlight prairie and savanna restoration efforts in southern Iowa and northern Missouri. Tours will be taken to showcase several restoration success stories. Refer to the article following for additional information.

### 2009 SIOSA Annual Meeting

Slip Bluff Park  
Saturday, July 18th

The SIOSA Board of Directors will hold their annual meeting following the Iowa Prairie Conference at Slip Bluff Park located northeast of Lamoni. Join us for a barbeque and to elect officers for the upcoming year.

## 2009 Iowa Prairie Conference

Graceland University

Lamoni, Iowa

July 17-18, 2009

The 2009 Iowa Prairie Conference will highlight prairie and savanna restoration efforts in southern Iowa and northern Missouri. The goal of the conference is to show some of the quality efforts in prairie and savanna restoration in the region. The conference will include tours on Friday of the Kellerton Bird Conservation Area in Ringgold County, Iowa and the Dunn Ranch, a TNC preserve in northern Harrison County, Missouri. On Saturday, we will tour Slip Bluff County Park and Timber Hill Savanna in Decatur County, Iowa. The Timber Hill Savanna is owned by Bill and Sibylla Brown, who have been managing the property as savanna and prairie for over 15 years. All sites will offer great wildlife and plant diversity and stimulate good discussion on managing prairies and savannas.

The conference will include guest speakers and panel discussions on topics such as grazing for prairie management, fire, climate change, and “green” management of wildlife habitats.

A banquet is planned for Friday night with music and great food. The conference is being held on the campus of Graceland University in picturesque Lamoni, Iowa. Several opportunities will be available for camping, fishing, hiking, and biking in the area for those that wish to stay through Sunday.



Larkspur found at Slip Bluff Park following savanna restoration work.

Tentative Schedule of Events:

### Thursday, July 16th

5-7 PM: Registration opens for those wishing to arrive early. Posters will be set up and ready for viewing.

### Friday, July 17th

7-9 AM	Registration and poster session (Refreshments and drinks will be available.)
9:00 AM	Welcome and orientation
9:30-10:30 AM	Grand River Grasslands
10:45-4:00 PM	Tour of Grand River Grasslands
	Bus and walking tours of Kellerton Bird Conservation Area and Dunn Ranch
	-Prairie chickens
	-Patch-burn grazing
	-Iowa Wildlife Action Plan
6:00 PM	Banquet and awards
7:30 PM	Panel discussion
	-Managing prairie with grazing
	-Oak savanna restoration and fire

### Saturday, July 18th

7-8:30 AM	Registration
8:30 AM	Welcome and orientation
8:45-9:30 AM	Savanna and Fires: The Historical Perspective
9:45-4:00 PM	Decatur County savanna tours
	-Slip Bluff County Park (work in progress)
	-Dealing with debris
	-Savanna vs. woodland management
	-Timberhill Savanna
	-Annual fire (frequent, low intensity)
	-Plant response to management and disturbance
4:00-5:00 PM	Wrap-up and discussion

## Prescribed Fire on Your Land

Written by: Dustin Eighmy, Decatur Co. Conservation

Prescribed fire is a resource tool which can be used when managing your prairies, timbers, and oak savannas. Fire can be manipulated in a number of different ways to achieve desired management goals. It is up to you as a land manager to decide what your management objectives are and what you wish to accomplish through prescribed burning.

Native Americans first used fire as a tool to improve their farming productivity and enhance hunting success. By burning large parcels of native prairies, Natives were able to return valuable nutrients to the soil as well as keep invasive vegetation at bay. However, as pioneers began to settle and push the Native Americans from these areas the use of fire as a management tool was lost. This loss of fire has allowed the landscape to develop into what you see today.

Today, as land managers become more educated on the importance of fire as a management tool, prescribed burning is beginning to increase in popularity. Professionals are using fire for such things as: controlling undesirable vegetation, preparing sites for planting or seeding, reducing wildfire hazards, improving wildlife habitat, enhancing seed production, and managing native plant diversity/composition. Research has also shown that increased management success can be obtained by proper timing and fire intensity.



Starting a "backburn" during a prescribed burn at Littler River Lake.

The Natural Resource Conservation Service recommends the following for prescribed burning:

### Improving Wildlife Habitat

Vegetation Type	Burn Season	Burn Frequency
Warm Season Native Grasses	April 1-May 15	3-5 Years
Forbs	Sept. 1-Feb. 1	3-5 Years
Cool Season Grasses	March 1-April 15	3-5 Years

### Improving Forage Quality

Vegetation Type	Burn Season	Burn Frequency
Warm Season Native Grasses	April 1-May 15	3-5 Years
Cool Season Grasses	April 1-May 15	2-4 Years

### Controlling Undesirable Vegetation

Vegetation Type	Burn Season	Burn Frequency
Cedar Trees	September 1-May 20	3-5 Years
Deciduous Trees & Shrubs	April 1-May 15	2 or More Consecutive Years
Introduced Grasses	April 20-May 20	3-5 Years
Reduce Noxious Weeds	Before Flowering	As Needed

Prescribed fire is not something a land manager should take lightly. It is always wise to have a burn plan, check weather conditions frequently, and know the weather forecast for the entire day. It is also important to maintain quality fire breaks and keep any dead trees or brush piles at least 20 feet from your breaks. Before burning neighbors and local law enforcement officials needs to be notified. As a crew boss, it is also your responsibility to make sure everyone is familiar with the burn plan, knows all escape routes, and has the proper equipment to keep themselves safe.

Prescribed burning is a very effective tool when used properly and can be done safely if you follow your burn plan. To obtain burn plans or for more information, contact your local NRCS or county conservation board office.



Prescribed burn nearing completion at Slip Bluff Park.

## Sericea Lespedeza: A Potentially Big Problem for Iowa

Written by: Richard Erke, Decatur Co. Conservation

Once again there is another invasive plant making its way into Decatur County. This one, in my opinion is the worst of all. Its name is sericea lespedeza, or Chinese bush clover. Sericea lespedeza was first planted in the United States in the 1890's. It was generally thought to be a valuable plant for erosion control, hay, and wildlife cover. From these plantings, it has spread by animal and movement of hay contaminated with sericea seed to native prairies, shrublands, forests, and pastures. Normal management practices such as grazing, burning, and applying herbicides do not adequately control sericea lespedeza. The forage value of sericea for cattle is low and even deer do not particularly like it.



Sericea lespedeza in bloom.

Sericea lespedeza is a perennial legume with a coarse, somewhat woody stem (either single or clustered) that can be 2 to 5 feet tall. The leaves are composed of three spatula-shaped leaflets with a point on the end. Flowers are yellowish-white with purple to pink markings and appear from mid-July to early October. The flowers occur in clusters of 1 to 3 in the upper leaf axils and are 1/4 inch long. The seeds are 1/16 to 1/8 inches long and tan or greenish in color.

So what makes sericea so bad? Besides its low value to domestic and wild animals, sericea is very competitive and as I mentioned above, hard to control. Typically sericea will get its start in an area that is disturbed or over-grazed. Once it becomes established it will reduce or eliminate other types of vegetation and spread quickly. It is a prolific seed producer with some stems producing in excess of 1,000 seeds. Some studies have found that sericea can produce from 300 to 850 pounds of seed per acres. Although no data is available about how long a seed will remain viable in the soil, many researchers believe it to be 20 years or longer. Most of the commonly used herbicides for broadleaf weed control have no effect on the control of sericea. However, triclopyr applied in June and July and metsulfuron in September have proven effective. Spring burning removes dead growth, but has no effect on established plants. In fact, fire tends to increase seed germination, thus promoting new plant establishment. Fire can increase the effectiveness of herbicides if applied to regrowth the same year.

I am beginning to see a number of areas in Decatur County and southern Iowa that have severe infestations of sericea lespedeza. It is moving up from the south where it has already been declared a noxious weed in Oklahoma, Kansas, and soon Missouri and Nebraska. So what can be done if you find sericea lespedeza on your property? The best approach is early detection, isolation of infected area, and control of individual plants with approved herbicides before it becomes widespread on your land. A combination of grazing management (or mowing), burning, and applying approved herbicides offers the most effective control. There is plenty of good information on the internet about sericea lespedeza or you can contact the Iowa State Extension office, Natural Resource Conservation Service, or your local county conservation board for help.



Sericea lespedeza establishing itself on disturbed land.

## Project Spotlight: Orvis Prairie Restoration

When John and Sharon Orvis purchased a 310 acre tract of land in southern Decatur County in the spring of 1996, they gained possession of a property overrun with honeysuckle, multiflora rose, wild grapes, and honey locust. While most people would have written the area off as a lost cause, the Orvis' fell in love with the oak woodlands and native prairies hidden beneath. Ever since, John and Sharon have made restoring these unique ecosystems their passion.

In the spring of 2008, the Orvis' partnered with the US Fish & Wildlife Service to begin restoring approximately 15 acres of native prairie found on the property. This prairie had been both mowed for hay and grazed by cattle until the early 1970's when encroaching woody vegetation made both unfeasible. Since that time, there had been no management on the area which allowed the invading vegetation to choke out all desirable species and make walking nearly impossible.



Area overrun with undesirable vegetation prior to restoration work.



A Midwest Land Restoration crew clearing the site of debris.

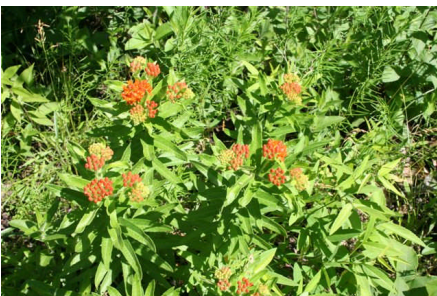
That spring, Midwest Land Restoration, who specializes in natural area restoration, was contracted by the Orvis' to begin the daunting task of restoring the native prairie. However, before work could begin there were a number of issues which needed to be carefully addressed to assure the success of this project. "We first determined that due to the enormous volume of undesirable vegetation present, the only way to protect the high quality red and white oaks scattering the site was to fall all timber by hand rather than using mechanical tree shears or forestry mowers. Our next challenge was in selecting suitable sites for burn piles where the extreme heat generated would not impact quality vegetation," stated Mark Erke, owner of Midwest Land Restoration.

Once these issues were resolved, the crew began cutting all undesirable vegetation from the site. The remaining stumps were then treated with a mixture of Garlon 4 and blue dyed basil oil to eliminate any regrowth. Finally, a Bobcat T300 tracked loader was brought in to pile the downed brush into strategically placed locations to be burned.

One year after the initial prairie restoration project, John and Sharon Orvis have been blown away by the results. Where multiflora rose once choked out all other vegetation, native species such as prairie ragwort, shrubby St. John's wort, butterfly milkweed, and wild strawberries now flourish. In areas previously dominated by honey locusts, Indian grass, big and little bluestem, and prairie dropseed thrive. "The gem Sharon and I saw when we purchased this land is really beginning to shine," states John.



Brush piles still smoldering after invasive vegetation had been cleared from the site.



Butterfly milkweed re-establishing itself on the site the following summer.