

Palouse Prairie Flyer

Newsletter of the Palouse Prairie Foundation

Photo by Matthew Dolkas

Autumn Equinox 2019

Respect your roots

Cell Towers in the Prairie

by David Hall

A second application by Weis Towers for a cell tower on Bald Butte south of Pullman has been submitted to Whitman County. The first application was denied due to its impact to Palouse Prairie habitat. The second location proposed for the tower would have seen some excellent Palouse Prairie destroyed as well. A permit for that location also was denied. There is some nearby land that does seem feasible for development.

An application for a cell tower on Kamiak Butte was anticipated. There is Palouse Prairie on Kamiak Butte as well. That application has been withdrawn.

Potential Palouse Prairie Remnants maps

by David Hall

Both Whitman and Latah County Planning Departments have maps of potential Palouse Prairie. The Palouse Prairie Foundation was instrumental in getting those maps produced. There is some potential prairie marked on the Whitman County map that is within Pullman City limits. All three planning departments have access to the maps and are supportive of protecting the Palouse Prairie and educating landowners who have prairie habitat on their properties.



The Palouse Prairie Foundation promotes preservation and restoration of the Palouse Prairie ecosystem.

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Steptoe Butte Prairie Reserve funded

by Joan Folwell

Three years ago, 437 acres of land on Steptoe Butte containing a prime Palouse Prairie remnant was "discovered" as it was going up for auction. It is home to a threatened species as well as the broad fruit mariposa lily which had not been seen in Whitman County since 1910. Two local couples were able to procure the winning bid. Their goal was to transfer the property to a state agency which could better maintain and protect such a large piece from development and make it available to the public.

This spring, the Washington State Legislature allocated \$1,239,000 for acquisition for private property on Steptoe Butte (*Whitman County Gazette*, May 9, 2019). The Department of Natural Resources (DNR) will take the lead to purchase this property (*Whitman County Gazette*, July 4, 2019) with input from Washington State Parks. These funds are currently in the Washington Recreation and Conservation Office and will be transferred in time. The owners have stated that they expect to be compensated only for their expenses. This includes the bid price, legal fees, insurance costs, loan interest, the State Park road easement fees, donations to botanists who have increased the property's species list and plant collection specimens, and donations to volunteer groups for weed control. This attitude may have been what prompted the local state representatives and state senator to vote for this funding. There are three cell towers on the property. Aside from other annual costs tied to the property, the owners have used all of the cell tower revenue to curb the advance of invasive weeds. BFI, a restoration company managed by Jerry Benson, has been contracted for the last three years for weed maintenance. They have reduced hound's tongue, and Canada and bull thistle. They have applied bacteria in a plot to try to evaluate its effectiveness in controlling ventanata > 3

The Wonderful Genus *Penstemon*, the Beardstongues

by Pam Brunsfeld

Penstemon is the largest genus of flowering plants native to North America with about 250 species that occur in North America. Every state except Hawai'i has at least one native species.

The genus was first described in 1748 and had traditionally been placed in the large figwort or snapdragon family, Scrophulariaceae. The latest treatment now places it in Plantaginaceae.

The name penstemon comes from the prefix pen, meaning "almost," and stamen, and refers to the sterile stamen, called a "staminode." This hairy staminode is the source of the common name, beardstongue.

At one time *Penstemon* was strongly recommended to be named the national flower of the U.S. Since each state had an official flower – none of them a *Penstemon* – Congress did not see fit to adopt a national flower.

Our native penstemons have blue, purple, yellow or white flowers, and the corolla is bilabiate or "two-lipped." The size of the corolla tube determines the size of the usual bee pollinators, with the lower lip of the flower acting as a landing platform.

Our local native penstemons are outstanding in xeriscape gardens. In fact, too much water is often the cause of their demise. While there are many horticultural varieties, following are some local species you might want to consider for your garden.

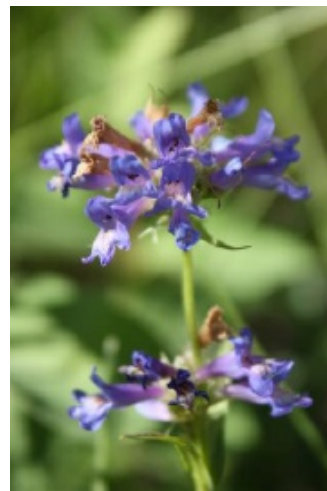
Penstemon fruticosus (shrubby penstemon). This species is an evergreen, low-growing shrub with large lavender-colored flowers that blooms in May. It is a favorite of all pollinators, especially bumblebees, most native bees and honeybees. This is my favorite penstemon, as it flowers before most others!



Penstemon procerus (small-flowered penstemon). As the common name indicates, the flowers are rarely more than one cm (1/2") long. The flowers of this herbaceous perennial are blue to purple, and it flowers at the end of the flowering time of *Penstemon attenuatus*. Although the flowers are small, this species can form impressively large mats making it impressive in your garden. It grows to about 40 to 60 cm (16 to 24") tall.



Penstemon attenuatus is a beautiful herbaceous perennial plant that grows up to 90 cm (35") tall. Taperleaf penstemon has beautiful, dark blue, often with violet tinged, flowers about 2 cm long. It flowers shortly after *Penstemon fruticosus* and does extremely well in the Palouse garden.



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Penstemons (continued)

Penstemon venustus (elegant penstemon) is an herbaceous shrub-like plant that flowers later than many of this genus. Its peak bloom is late June into July, and it has beautiful lavender-colored flowers around 2 or 3 cm (3/4 to 1") long. It is a runner-up to *Penstemon fruticosus* in beauty.



Penstemon confertus (yellow-flowered penstemon) differs from most members of the genus because of its pale yellow flowers. This plant can form a dense mat; in fact "confertus" means dense or crowded, referring to the dense inflorescence, and I would contend the plant itself. The plant is about 40 to 60 cm (16 to 24") tall with small flowers about 1.5 cm (1/2") long. It readily self-seeds but can be controlled by removing spent inflorescences.



Alternative Giving Market of the Palouse

The 2019 Alternative Giving Market of the Palouse is on the horizon. The Palouse Prairie Foundation again will be one of the non-profits represented at the Market.

The Alternative Giving Market is an easy way for the public to donate to Latah county-focused organizations. Each year they have about 30 local organizations represented at a gathering. The public can visit with representatives of as many organizations as they like, learn what they do, and donate to any. They will receive a card from each organization to which they donate that can be sent to family or friends indicating that a charitable gift – rather than a consumptive gift – has been made.

Donations to PPF primarily will go toward developing the Crock Memorial Palouse Prairie Pollinator Garden, and toward funding our mini-grant program.

The main event will be held 4 to 8 p.m. December 5 at the 1912 Center Great Room. Alternatively, one can donate online November 29 through December 14 at AGMPalouse.org

Steptoe Butte (continued)

and experimented to find the most effective way to kill dog roses. Dr. Richard Old has been most helpful by organizing volunteers to eliminate spotted and diffuse knapweed along the road. He and others have helped to eliminate poison hemlock.

Questions need to be addressed before the purchase can take place. There has yet to be an appraisal. The owners would like very much for the cell tower revenue to stay with the property for weed control instead of going into a DNR general fund. DNR has yet to decide whether the property will become a Natural Area Preserve (with the greatest protection) or a Natural Resources Conservation Area (which allows for low public impact).

Stay tuned for further developments!

Whelan Community Day

by Eric Anderson

A great time was had on June 15 for PPF's annual Whelan Cemetery educational talk and volunteer weeding party. More than a dozen community members came to listen to Pam Brunsfeld talk about the history of Whelan and the type of Palouse Prairie plants we find there. We then set out for Whelan for an afternoon of Pam leading botany tours, and members helping to pull some of the more nasty invasive species we find at Whelan. More than ten large garbage bags' worth of invasive weeds were pulled, and members walked away learning a great deal from Pam about the wonderful, beautiful native species we have at Whelan.

A major highlight included members getting to see the rare, threatened species Spalding's Catchfly (*Silene spaldingii*) in bloom! A major thank you to Joan Folwell for hosting the talk, to Pam Brunsfeld for all the knowledge she shared, as well as to those who attended and the knowledge and experiences they shared about Palouse Prairie habitat.

Thank you Eric for all of your work at Whelan!

PPF Mini-grant

The Palouse Prairie Foundation funded one mini-grant, to the Appaloosa Museum, this past year. They are planning to convert lawn behind the museum into a native plant garden.

If you want to apply for a mini-grant, complete and submit an application (available online on the PPF website).

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Renew your PPF membership for 2020



Palouse Prairie Foundation memberships are for the calendar year.

Please make your check payable to *Palouse Prairie Foundation*.

The Palouse Prairie Foundation is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization.

☒ Standard \$20 ☒ Family \$35 ☒ Sustaining \$50 ☒ Lifetime \$150 ☒ Donation \$_____

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* Our primary means of communication is by e-mail.

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