

The Newsletter of the Palouse Prairie Foundation

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<http://www.palouseprairie.org/>

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Copies of past issues of the Newsletter of the Palouse Prairie Foundation are available online on the PPF website at <http://www.palouseprairie.org/pppubs.html>

The **March meeting** of PPF is at 7 pm on March 14th and will be a presentation entitled “Twining and Dining: Nez Perce Plants” by Joy Mastrogiuseppe. Joy will talk about the many uses of the native plants of the area among the Nez Perce people. It will be held in the Edith Hecht Reading Room at Neill Public Library, 210 N. Grand Ave, Pullman WA. Access the parking lot from Olsen Street. Enter through the door on the east side of the building, near the parking lot.

The April or May meeting will be a business meeting at a location to be determined. The other will be presentation but the details are not worked out at this point. Watch the PPF website for details and possible changes.

The regular meeting date for the Palouse Prairie Foundation is the 2nd Thursday of each month. March 8th would have been the normal date but was changed to avoid a conflict with the Lane Family Lecture in Environmental Sciences.

Restoration Funding Opportunities

USFWS Partners for Fish and Wildlife has ongoing funding to implement conservation for Palouse Prairie. That would include rehabilitation/restoration of existing remnants, expansion of existing remnants, re-establishing native plants on retired agricultural fields, and might also include enhancing diversity of existing grass stands by planting native forbs and shrubs into the stand. This program is open to residents of both eastern Washington and northern Idaho.

For more information contact

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Latah Soil and Water Conservation District

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or

Juliet Barenti

USFWS Fish and Wildlife Biologist

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2007 Dues

The mission of the Palouse Prairie Foundation is to promote the preservation and restoration of native Palouse Prairie ecosystems in Latah and Whitman Counties through public awareness, education, literature resource, encouraging responsible local seed production, and acting as a leader or consultant in Palouse Prairie restoration efforts.

The primary source of funding to accomplish our mission is member dues. Annual memberships are \$20 a year (\$10 for students).

If you would like to assist us in preserving and restoring the Palouse Prairie by becoming a member or renewing your membership, you may mail a check payable to Palouse Prairie Foundation to:

Palouse Prairie Foundation
P.O. Box 8952
Moscow, ID 83843

If you have already joined or renewed for 2007, thank you for your support.

To find out more about Palouse Prairie and the Palouse Prairie Foundation, visit our website.

Ground-dwelling beetles on the Palouse

by Tim Hatten

Tim Hatten recently received a Ph.D. in entomology from the University of Idaho, where he studied the influence of tillage systems on ground-dwelling beetle species of Palouse cropland. Dr. Hatten also researched the potential of these cropping systems to conserve prairie-inhabiting insects. Managed habitats surrounding remnant native habitats, which are referred to as the 'matrix', are often too harsh and devoid of habitat for native species to survive. However, Dr. Hatten states that the matrix can vary in quality and structure, providing the resources necessary for some species to move between remnants, or providing the resources necessary for year-round survival.

Of particular interest to Dr. Hatten is the potential of conservation-tillage systems to conserve prairie insects. Conservation-tillage is less disruptive to the soil than is conventional-tillage, maintaining crop residue, soil organic matter and biota, all of which are beneficial for ground-dwelling insects.

To test the hypothesis that conservation-tillage systems are beneficial for prairie insects, Dr. Hatten sampled the insect fauna in five prairie remnants and in 12 agricultural fields. Half the fields were farmed with conventional-tillage and the other half with conservation-tillage. He found more ground-dwelling insects in the prairie than in the fields, indicating that Palouse prairie, though small in acreage, provides critical habitat for many species. Of the insects found in both the prairie and cropland, more prairie species were found in the conservation-tillage fields than in conventional-tillage fields. Moreover, Dr. Hatten found that the insect fauna found in conservation-tillage fields more closely resembles that found in the prairie than conventional-tillage fields. Taken together, these findings suggest that conservation-tillage is helping to conserve prairie insects and the many ecological functions that these insect carry out.

Hatten, Timothy D. 2006 Assessing the influence of agricultural practices, soils and native habitats on the epigeal beetle fauna of the Palouse. PhD thesis, University of Idaho, Moscow, Idaho. 196 pp. UI Library Main Stacks QL596.C2H38 2006.

Other recent publications regarding Palouse Prairie:

Jensen, Jacie. 2007. Palouse Prairie Weed Management and Commercial Production of Certified Palouse Wildflower and Grass Seed. Sage Notes 29(1):6.

Robson, Sara, and Jim Kingery. 2006. Native Plants for Idaho Roadside Restoration and Revegetation Programs. The Idaho Transportation Department, The National Institute for Advanced Transportation Technology, and the University of Idaho Department of Rangeland Ecology and Management. Online at http://itd.idaho.gov/manuals/Online_Manuals/Current_Manuals/Roadside_Revegetation/Roadside_Revegetation.pdf

Weddell, Bertie J., and David M. Skinner. 2007. Rare Plants and Invasive Species in Palouse meadow-steppe. Douglasia 31(1):20-22.

Two articles on the 2006 Plateau Conference also appeared in Washington State Magazine.

Sudermann, Hannelore. 2007. Foraged Foods: Serving up a Traditional Meal from the Columbia Plateau. Washington State Magazine, Spring 2007. pp12-13. Online at <http://washington-state-magazine.wsu.edu/stories/2007/February/foragedfoods.html>

Steury, Tim. 2007. Just Like It Was Yesterday. Washington State Magazine, Spring 2007. pp12-13. Online at <http://washington-state-magazine.wsu.edu/stories/2007/February/plateauconference.html>

Palouse Prairie Foundation Display

If you would like to have the Palouse Prairie display at a gathering or meeting, please contact us. The display consists of a free standing 4 panel poster explaining Palouse Prairie, and a myriad of printed information regarding the prairie. A smaller version of the poster is also available for more limited spaces. You can view the poster on the PPF website at <http://www.palouseprairie.org/display/>

Volunteers Needed

The Palouse Earth Day Alliance (PEDA) was formed last year to organize and coordinate events in Moscow, Pullman and surrounding areas on Earth Day. The plans include an opening event at the Palouse Empire Mall where groups can set up a display and talk to interested people about their group's activities. The event is March 31st and will run from 10:00 am to around 5:00 pm. PPF will have a table and the display at the event. We are still in need of people to staff the booth. If you are able to help on this, contact Dave Skinner at the phone number or email address below.

Ranunculus glaberrimus sagebrush buttercup

Sagebrush buttercup (*Ranunculus glaberrimus*) is one of the earliest spring wildflowers on the Palouse. Look for the bright yellow flowers in sunny, warm locations any time now. It is native to dry to mesic shrub-steppe, grasslands and forests of western North America from British Columbia south to northern California and east to North Dakota and New Mexico. Most species of *Ranunculus* are wetland plants. Sagebrush buttercup is one of the few that grows on upland sites. It survives by taking advantage of late



winter and early spring moisture and avoiding the drought of summer. This small perennial forb blooms in early spring, then senesces as the spring advances into summer and remains dormant thru the summer as a cluster of fleshy roots. The fleshy roots begin sending out adventitious roots with the arrival of late fall rains. Leaves appear in late winter and flowers are often seen in March and early April. Plants in cool locations such as north facing slopes may still be flowering in early May.

The leaves are mostly basal and often lobed. The perfect flowers are borne on short pedicels 2-4 inches above the leaves. The 5 petals are shiny yellow. Flowers with up to 10 petals are occasionally seen. Sagebrush buttercup reproduces by seed but there is no information on seed propagation. Given the cool season growth habit of the plants, it is likely the seeds need cold, moist stratification.

Two varieties are commonly recognized. Plants of lower elevations with the basal leaves ovate to obovate and usually shallowly lobed are called var. *glaberrimus*, while more montane plants with entire margins and elliptic to oblanceolate leaves are placed in var. *ellipticus*. The two varieties may intergrade and are sometimes sympatric.

Plants are considered poisonous but were sometimes used medicinally. Some species of *Ranunculus* can cause dermatitis. Despite the poisonous properties, deer and elk are reported to eat the plants, but usage is probably minor.

Some sources for more information on sagebrush buttercup:

Plant Profile from PLANTS Database

<http://plants.usda.gov/java/profile?symbol=RAGL>

Species page from the University of Washington Herbarium (WTU)

<http://biology.burke.washington.edu/herbarium/imagecollection.php?Genus=Ranunculus&Species=glaberrimus>

“Native American Ethnobotany” from the University of Michigan-Dearborn

<http://herb.umd.umich.edu/>

If you have ideas, suggestions, or contributions for the newsletter, please send them to Dave Skinner at abbie1 at pullman.com (you will need to replace “at” with the symbol “@” in the address line of your email program) or call him at 334-7009. Look for the next newsletter in June.