

THE PRAIRIE ENTHUSIASTS STRATEGIC PLAN 2016 -2018

**Final Version
Approved by TPE Board
December 15, 2015**

The mission statement of The Prairie Enthusiasts is: “We seek to ensure the perpetuation and recovery of prairie, oak savanna, and other associated ecosystems of the Upper Midwest through protection, management, restoration, and education. In doing so, we strive to work openly and cooperatively with private landowners and other private and public conservation groups.”

Organizational Background

The Prairie Enthusiasts is a multi-chapter organization working in Wisconsin, northwest Illinois, and southern Minnesota. The organization is managed by paid staff and governed by a volunteer Board of Directors. The mission is carried out by chapters and by several hundred volunteers. Each remnant we protect and conserve brings with it a responsibility for stewardship in perpetuity.

Strategic Planning Process Synopsis

The development of this plan was facilitated by a committee selected by the TPE Executive Director and President. The five members selected were: Scott Fulton, Marci Hess, Jack Kussmaul, Mark Leach and Jim Rogala, with participation by the TPE Executive Director. The process began with a review of the 2013-2015 Strategic Plan by the committee and chapter leadership. An initial draft, based on the review of the previous plan and an assessment of priorities of the organization, was developed by the committee and presented to the Board in July. The draft was reworked and presented to the membership for comment in September. A final draft incorporating comments from the membership was completed in November, and delivered to the Board of Directors in December.

Core Values

As part of the strategic planning, the committee decided to develop a set of Core Values for the organization, which previously had not been developed or approved by the Board of Directors. These were developed concurrently with the strategic plan, after initial input from the membership.

Implementation Plan

A plan to assure the strategic plan is effectively implemented will be developed by staff early in 2016. The plan will include detailed tasks for action items, responsible parties, and milestone dates. The 3-yr plan will be used to develop annual work plans for action items. The plan will include staff assignments, as well as suggested tasks for volunteers such as committees, chapter leadership, and general membership within the organization.

Core Values

Stewardship - We are responsible for restoring and maintaining ecosystem health on the lands we manage, integrating considerations of the past, present and future, using the best available scientific and practical knowledge.

Sustainability - We strive to insure the organization and its resources can fulfill the stewardship responsibilities we undertake in perpetuity.

Collaboration - We foster open, welcoming cooperation, teamwork and mutual respect between chapters, volunteers, members, staff, and outside organizations.

Education - We actively seek to learn and promote learning from the land itself and from each other, through open-minded observation, scientific research, best practices and hands-on experience.

Respect - We celebrate and honor the diversity of members, volunteers, donors and staff, and the contribution each person makes toward our mission.

Supportive - We provide consistent and adequate support for the enthusiastic work of our volunteers and staff.

Goals and Action Items

GOAL: We will increase the organizational strength and unity of TPE by increasing the strength and effectiveness of our chapters.

Action Items:

- Staff and one board member will visit each chapter in 2016 to:
 - Assist each chapter in identifying their greatest needs and biggest issues to be resolved.
 - Assess the expertise within chapters.
- Use the chapter needs assessment to identify focal support activities for the next three years, and identify sources of support (i.e., staff, committees, other chapters).
- Identify potential ways to improve the Board of Directors' make-up.
- Identify Board and Chapter leadership training needs and opportunities by 2017, and look for opportunities to provide training in 2018.
- Increase chapter to chapter communications and interactions, such as having experts from other chapters for educational or training events.
- Include a regular section in the newsletter highlighting committee activities and communicating new policies and procedures.
- TPE staff will provide increased support to chapters for identifying grant opportunities, grant writing and grant management.

GOAL: TPE will become an accredited land trust by 2018.

Action Items:

- Address all deficiencies identified in the Assessment
- Pre-apply for Accreditation in 2016
- Apply for Accreditation in 2017.
- Share with the membership and the conservation community the many ways becoming accredited is and will help TPE become an even better, more successful conservation organization

GOAL: TPE will protect properties using the strategic conservation plan to guide decisions and ensure all TPE properties will be cared for in perpetuity.

Action Items:

- Implement land protection policies and procedures, create a process for documenting following procedures, and document they are followed for all current and future projects.
- Utilize the land management worksheet to determine how land management costs will be met prior to new acquisitions.
- Assess, using quantitative and qualitative metrics, the effectiveness of the strategic conservation plan throughout the process of land protection, and update the plan based on the assessment.
- Develop informational materials (e.g., brochure) on land protection options.

GOAL: TPE will manage remnants and restore properties using best management practices determined through science and experience while ensuring TPE cares for these sites in perpetuity.

Action Items:

- Implement a property monitoring program.
- Use land management worksheets to calculate ongoing management costs for TPE properties, and use the results to assess TPE's long-term ability to care for the sites it owns.
- Implement all components of the Burn Policy including:
 - Help Chapters to develop and document burning expertise.
 - Create presentations for basic crew member training.
 - Create presentations for crew leader and burn boss training.
- Ensure the Land Management Committee begins to review all land management plans for TPE owned property and establish a process to update them regularly. Consider including qualitative vegetative assessments as part of the update process.

- Develop informational materials (e.g., resource webpages/blogs/FAQs) for land management techniques and anecdotes including seed collection/processing, planting, etc. Create a process and identify a means for management experiences and anecdotes to be shared by 2018.
- Use the property monitoring reports and the land management worksheets to develop a “TPE Management Dashboard” to provide visibility with the Board, Chapters, land stewards, staff and others about the management status of all TPE properties to facilitate clear decision-making about allocation of limited resources.
- Develop and finalize equipment safety policies.
- Provide information, and perhaps even services, to private landowners with prairie sites.

GOAL: TPE will have a diversity of funding sources to support its conservation and operational needs.

Action Items:

- Implement the Development Plan that is approved annually by the Board.
- Further develop and raise the profile of the legacy program.
- Investigate the potential use of corporate sponsorships.
- Generate a list of appropriate potential grant sources.

GOAL: Chapters, committees, and staff will work together to significantly increase opportunities for engagement with the TPE mission through improved communications, outreach and educational activities.

Action Items:

- Create a communication plan to guide staff and chapter leadership in the methods and processes to integrate attractive and user-friendly e-news, social media, and newsletter communications.
- Document the success of all educational events including the number of events, people attending, publicities, e-news templates, social media posts, etc.
- Train local chapters in how to use the website content management system and event calendar effectively.
- Develop a regular process for publicizing local chapter field trips and other educational events through media appropriate for the area
- Have staff assist local chapters to significantly increase the number and type of field trips and educational events per year. This will include presenting the “Prairie Enthusiasm” to public-invited audiences.
- Work with local chapters to increase involvement and exposure of school-age children and university students in TPE events and sites.
- Develop a program to offer site visits on private remnant prairies.

GOAL: TPE will retain current members and acquire new members who bring passion and volunteer support to our mission.

Action Items:

- Improve the membership renewal program by creating an annual renewal calendar. Renewals will be grouped together with 2-3 mailings per group for both current and lapsed renewals.
- Develop methods to recruit new members. These will include:
 - Working with chapter leadership to obtain signup sheets for field trips, events, and outreach activities to add people as non-member contacts.
 - Solicit the non-member contacts via e-news to become members, and conduct mailings to non-members to increase membership sign up.
- Staff will have weekly communication with chapter leadership about new members. Staff will assist chapters in welcoming new members and getting them integrated with chapter activities.
- Staff will report quarterly on membership renewal numbers to the Fundraising & Endowment Committee and the Board.
- Create presentations for public outreach that can be shared and modified by chapters as necessary.
- Identify a process for learning the top reasons a person joins TPE by 2017.
- Identify the skills and interests of members and volunteers using the new website portal or other means to be identified.