

**A PRAIRIE STORY: A COOPERATIVE EDUCATIONAL VENTURE
BETWEEN KIRKSVILLE SCHOOLS, THE MISSOURI DEPARTMENT OF
CONSERVATION, AND TRUMAN STATE UNIVERSITY**

*DR. LIN TWINING, Biology Department, Truman State University, 100 East Normal Street, Kirksville, MO 63501

KAREN ARMSTRONG, Missouri Department of Conservation, 3500 South Baltimore Kirksville, MO 63501

ABSTRACT: Once upon a time an environmental studies teacher longed for an outdoor classroom for her students, particularly one including a prairie plot. In partnership with the Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC) she developed a plan for such a site. An area on school district property was cleared, prepared, and planted with 6000 prairie grasses and forbs in the spring of 2000. Seeds for the project were provided by Frank Oberle and raised to seedling status. Volunteers, including Girl Scouts, and MDC employees did the first round of planting. From January 2001 through the fall of 2003 the MDC nurtured the establishment of the prairie by adding seeds and legume seedlings, and doing appropriate burns.

By Fall 2003 the prairie was ready for use by local school children. A task force, organized by Dr. Fore of Truman State, developed the first Prairie Fest experience for second graders in Kirksville public schools. Prairie Fest emphasized habitats and which organisms live on the prairie. Students visited the prairie site and observed demonstrations of birds, insects, mammals, and fish associated with the prairie. The following year (2003), and subsequently, Prairie Fest has involved students in an activity that looks at the diversity of the prairie. Pre-service teachers from Truman State lead small groups of second graders in identifying, quantifying, and graphing plant and animal diversity in a prairie plot. Upon return to the classroom, their teachers pool and discuss the data collected. The development, strengths, and weaknesses of this prairie partnership will be discussed.