

Platte River Prairies 2026 Field Day - July 11, 2026

SCHEDULE

(Session Descriptions and Directions on Page 2)

This is a free event for all ages, but please RSVP to katelyn.glause@tnc.org if you plan to attend so we can make plans and contact you if we have to adjust because of weather or other issues. Bring your own lunch, sunscreen, insect repellent, and anything else you need for a day in the sun.

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| 7:00 am | Pre-Session |
| | - Sunrise photography with Chris Helzer (bring any camera, including your phone) |
| 8:15 am | Welcome, introductions |
| 8:30 am | First regular session |
| | - Small Mammal Ecology (Mike Schrad, Master Naturalist) |
| 9:45 am | Break |
| 10:00 am | Second Session (Pick One) |
| | - Prairie Management and Ecology (Chris Helzer) |
| | - Prairie Restoration and Seed Harvest (Rohit Balay) |
| 11:15 am | Break (Lunch) |
| 11:45 am | Third Session (Pick One) |
| | - Prairie invertebrates (Chris Helzer) |
| | - Wetland walk (Sarah Kennings) |
| 1:00 pm | Break |
| 1:15 pm | Fourth Session (Pick One) |
| | - Prairie art with pressed wildflowers (Rohit Balay) |
| | - Plant identification (Gavin Schaefer) |
| 2:30 pm | End |

SESSION DESCRIPTIONS

Sunrise Photography - Chris Helzer will lead a short walk to photograph whatever we find. You're welcome to wander off on your own or stick close to Chris to talk about photo techniques, lighting, and other topics.

Small mammal ecology – Master Naturalist Mike Schrad will be live-trapping mice and other small mammals as part of a long-term research project. Accompany Mike as he checks traps set the previous evening and identifies, weighs, and releases what he catches. Mike will also teach participants about the lives of these amazing creatures.

Prairie management and ecology – Learn why prairies need people as much as people need them. Why do people burn prairies? How do managers use cattle to create habitat for all the animals that live in grasslands? How do they work to suppress invasive plants and foster a diversity of native species?

Prairie invertebrates - Most prairie animals are tiny invertebrates, each with their own fascinating life strategy. Chris will help you find, admire, and learn about some of these amazing creatures.

Prairie Restoration and seed harvest – Grab a bucket and harvest some prairie seeds to help The Nature Conservancy with a restoration project and learn about current and past restoration efforts. This year we are harvesting seed to add plant species to a few degraded prairies that have lost some of their species diversity.

Wetland walk – Sarah Kennings will lead a tour that will explore a restored wetland and stream created from an old sand and gravel mining site. There's a good chance of seeing wetland birds, frogs, insects, and lots of plants. No need to wear waterproof boots.

Plant identification – Gavin will lead a short hike and help you boost your plant identification skills. If it's hot out, we'll do this in the shade and bring plants to you.

Prairie art with pressed plants – Rohit will provide pressed flowers and plant parts and other supplies to make your own prairie art project. Bring your creativity. This will be an indoor session.

LOCATION/DIRECTIONS

This event is located at The Nature Conservancy's Platte River Prairies, two miles south of Interstate 80 exit 300 (Wood River). On Google Maps, it is named 'Nature Conservancy Derr House Prairie'. From the exit, go two miles south on the highway and then as the highway curves sharply to the east, take a right onto South Platte River Drive (gravel) and you'll immediately see a wooden sign for The Nature Conservancy and a driveway that leads up the hill to the big brick Derr House. We will have designated parking areas mowed. Address is **13650 South Platte River Drive, Wood River, Nebraska 68883**.