

Westbrook Artists' Site Field Day Oct. 11

In 1932, Henry Gleason wrote an article on the role of fire in the ecology of the Midwest: —“barrens (savannas) were converted into forests as if by magic when fires that maintained them had stopped.” The essential role of fire in creating and maintaining prairies, savannas, and woodlands of the Midwest is not a new discovery. However, interest in has been growing in using fire (prescribed burns) to support native ecology and habitats that can support diverse communities of flora and fauna. A stunning array, including 988 different species of vascular plants, have been identified as native to the tallgrass prairies of the Midwest. While fire is a primeval force, it is also part of a complex set of relationships in the release of nutrients and the quality of the soil microbiome that shapes ecological health and sustainability.

A field day that is open to the public with a demonstration prescribed (also referred to as controlled) burn

is scheduled for Oct. 11 and is sponsored by an IFBF SHARE grant. The event is co-sponsored by the Southern Iowa Oak Alliance (SIOSA) and will be held at the Westbrook Artists' Site (WAS) located next to the Holliwell Covered Bridge starting at 8:30 a.m. until approximately noon. There will be a community conversation with ecologists, farmers, artists, and other invited special guests, and there will be an exhibition related to the history and ecology of the site. The burn requires a limited range of weather conditions to be executed so updates will be posted via facebook <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Westbrook-Artists-Site/446809552028025> and Twitter @WestbrookArtist. Our field day demonstration intended to help show the potential value, application and effectiveness of using prescribed burns

Our common heritage and commitments in which we are “together-as-one” with each other and with

the land is important in helping us provide for future generations. It is critical to understand not only the environment as it is today, but its history as it provides a wealth of information and increases our deeper appreciation as its stewards. Agriculture communities and the cultures that support diversity, creativity and innovation are consequently more sustainable and resilient. Recently local landowners and individuals have formed a vibrant new collaborative group invested in supporting native ecologies. This is part of a larger network of regional organizations which includes our field day and is co-sponsored by SIOSA who have been established to provide knowledge, resources and community support. The Farm Bureau is not only providing key resources for conservation but also is allowing for vibrant community development. We encourage members interested in learning more to contact us and join us at the field day.



The Westbrook Artists' Site (WAS) is on property owned by the Lair family at 2325 Holliwell Bridge Road. The burn field has been in CRP for the past 14 years and has not been part of a burn program. There is currently a mix of native and exotic plants in the field.



Eastern Gamagrass at WAS. This native to the tallgrass prairies is a relative of field corn. It was considered a valuable forage grass but is now rarely found in natural stands.