

Living Prairie Museum (Kyle Lucyk)

Partnership with St. James school division

Living Prairie Museum is a 13 hectare tall grass prairie preserve and interpretive centre in Winnipeg. The tall grass prairie is one of Canada's most endangered ecosystems, with less than 1% remaining. The preserve is one of the best examples of this ecosystem remaining in southern Manitoba, with over 150 plants species documented.

In the spring of 2009, Living Prairie Museum partnered with the St. James school division to increase the biodiversity at some their elementary schools. Together, we undertook a project which saw four butterfly gardens planted in school yards nearby to the museum. The gardens were planted with plants indigenous to the tall grass prairie of southern Manitoba. Each garden contains ten species of native plants and 200 plants total. Each species planted is either a nectaring plant for adult butterflies or the preferred food of caterpillars. The average size of the gardens was 175 sq. feet. Previously, the gardens were planted with annual flowers or non-native perennials. Museum staff partnered with grade three classes to educate them on the benefits of using native tall grass prairie plants to create habitat for butterflies. Children (and teachers) learned of the plight of the tall grass prairie, how these gardens are an important way to conserve one of Canada's most endangered ecosystems and the importance of biodiversity in our urban community.

To ensure the success of this program, staff agreed to water and weed the gardens during the first summer. This added maintenance has ensured that this project is a positive experience for the schools and the neighbourhood. In the fall of 2009, interpretive panels will be installed which thank the participants and explaining the importance of these gardens to area wildlife.

Based on the success of this partnership in 2009, we hope to renew this relationship with the school division again in 2010.

