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New wildlife study launches with volunteers

On American Prairie Reserve

A new long-term wildlife study in Phillips, Blaine and Valley counties is underway on American Prairie Reserve.

Titled Landmark, the effort involves teams of volunteer citizen-scientists crossing sections of the Reserve's deeded and leased lands with the purpose of gathering a wide variety of information about prairie wildlife.

The project is a partnership between Montana-based Adventurers and Scientists for Conservation (ASC) and American Prairie Reserve (APR), according to Sean Garrity, APR president.

Landmark is unusual in a number of ways, according to Gerrity.

First, wildlife studies sometimes involve gathering data during one month or a particular season. Landmark volunteers will gather information daily,

all year round for at least the next three years.

Second, data from such studies is often restricted and not always shared by those collecting it.

Landmark information will be "open access" and made easily available online for land managers like private landowners and wildlife agencies as well as scientists, schools, and the public.

In the project's first year (2014) the Landmark participants will be gathering population and movement information on mule deer, pronghorn, white-tailed deer, elk, bobcats, cougars and sage grouse in a forty-five square mile area around Telegraph and Box Elder Creeks.

In subsequent years, the study will expand geographically on other APR properties and will include additional species.

Each crew of six Landmark volunteers will stay from four to twelve weeks.

The volunteers, some coming from as far away as Europe and Australia, will have never met each other before and will be visiting Montana's Glaciated Plains for the first time.

"You can get to know the first group of hardy volunteers, who are already traversing the Reserve, on ASC's website," Gerrity said.

The teams will gather information on species by walking from five to ten

miles a day, 4-5 days a week, and noting what they find on electronic tablets.

They will also be regularly collecting video and still photographs from camera traps set to monitor wildlife, day and night, as they navigate fences, stream beds and other landscape features on the Reserve.

Each Landmark participant will have logged roughly 60-100 miles on foot by the end of his or her time on APR.

In three years, the accumulated miles walked by all volunteers could approach 21,000 miles, or nearly the same distance as a circumnavigation of the earth, Gerrity said.

In complement to the Landmark project, APR employees hope to make periodic use of small (three to four-foot

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(wingspan) remote-controlled aircraft outfitted with wildlife monitoring equipment to gather data from rugged or difficult to traverse areas of the Reserve.

At regular intervals, this information will be made available online as another way to share what's happening on Reserve lands.

American Prairie Reserve plans to host informal dinners throughout the year so that interested community members can meet volunteers, learn about what crews experienced during their time here, and view recent data.

ASC and APR also intend to host presentations in Lewistown, Glasgow, Zortman and Malta.

For more information on the Landmark project or to attend a dinner, please contact local APR Reserve Supervisor Damien Austin (damien@americanprairie.org) or Reserve Assistant Lars Anderson (lars@americanprairie.org).

To apply to be a Landmark volunteer, please visit www.adventureandscience.org/landmark.

The Reserve currently spans more than 274,000 acres of pri-

vate and leased public land in the region.

Along with volunteer projects like Landmark, American Prairie Reserve promotes access through recreation, hunting, and education programs.

Buffalo Camp, a public campground, is open year-round in the Sun Prairie region.

Trip planning details and a request form for free visitor maps are available on the APR website: www.americanprairie.org.

Adventurers and Scientists for Conservation was founded in January of 2011 with the understanding that many people traveling in the outdoors genuinely want to do more for the places they visit but often struggle with how to help.

ASC exists to bridge this gap by pairing adventure athletes already traveling to some of the earth's most difficult-to-reach places with the scientists who need information from these areas.

ASC also has the goal of creating unique and innovative learning experiences about science while also saving the scientific and conservation communities millions of dollars in data collection costs.

