

Naturalist Knapsacks: Enjoyment & Learning

Living Prairie Museum's Endangered Tall Grass Prairie

By **Jonina Ewart and Lori Nichols**

In 1968, the City Council of St. James agreed that 32 acres of tall grass prairie should be set aside in the community for protection and recreation. Today, this unique natural area serves as a popular destination for young and old alike. Visitors are welcome to walk the self-guided paths and explore the Interpretive Centre free of charge throughout the spring and summer months. The demographics of this audience range from formal school visits and informal daycare groups wandering in, or grandparents or parents coming with children to see what this place is all about.

Many of the visiting families view the Interpretive Centre as the “Living Prairie Museum”, spending the majority of their time exploring indoors. To encourage children take the opportunity to explore the *true* Living Prairie Museum – the tall grass prairie preserve to the north of the Interpretive Centre – Living Prairie Museum developed a program called ‘Knapsacks for Young Naturalists’. Each family will be offered a ‘knapsack’ for use during their visit to the tall grass prairie preserve. The bags are filled with items to help encourage the use of all senses during their explorations. In this way, people will be able to get ‘up close and personal’ with the grasses, wildflowers and wildlife; and encourage families to share together their stories and experiences that make up this endangered space.



The high tech youth bags were donated through fundraising efforts and help ensure families have a unique and engaging experience every visit. The ‘discovery items’ help children uncover the mysteries of the natural world through bug collection, bird sightings, wildflower identification, phenology records and storytelling, to name a few! The study aids include magnifying glasses, binoculars, weather equipment, measuring tools, probes, nets and collection boxes. Activity workbooks that are designed and developed to compliment the new self-guided trails, track and engage the children and adults in unique methods of observation, recording and drawing.

The Naturalist Knapsack is available to all visitors to the Living Prairie Museum. It is our belief that these knapsacks will encourage children of all ages to take the time to explore this endangered area- whether it is to feel the cottony plume of the anemone, to listen for the sound of a grasshopper, to bend down to catch the spicy aroma of sage, or to share the story of [Bobby Bluestem](#). We hope that these knapsacks will encourage nature education, creativity and imagination and will promote family activities that teach one another how to truly experience the natural world around them.

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