



# AMERICAN PRAIRIE

## A new hut system will soon welcome visitors to American Prairie Reserve

Most new visitors to the prairie are struck by the exposure; to the sky, to the weather moving between distant horizons, to wind that rolls heavy and steady across the land like a train. The elements are extreme in all this open space. It is a place where shelter is especially welcome; a seat in the shade on an August afternoon, a warm kitchen at dusk in midwinter, or a bunkroom to read in while the wind gusts beyond the walls.

Beginning this summer, APR is breaking ground on a new hut system to provide shelter across the nearly 200-mile width of the Reserve area. In the tradition of other hut systems, from the European Alps, to New Zealand's Great Walks, to the 10th Mtn. Division Huts of Colorado, APR's huts will offer comfortable and affordable backcountry accommodations in

remarkable settings. The huts will consist of two 30-foot yurts connected with a hallway (Kayla's drawing?) and accommodate 9 people in 4 bunkrooms. One yurt will serve as sleeping space, the other will contain the kitchen, dining tables, a library, a seating area and interpretive displays. Solar power will supply lights, a refrigerator and outlets for charging small electronics. For those who'd like to travel even lighter, a custom service will also be available to provide meals, sleeping bags and other required equipment.

Humans have built huts around the world, from the mountains of Japan to the trails of the Andes. Many systems grew from ancient footpaths and utilitarian shelters used by pilgrims, shepherds and nomads. The first two huts to be built this summer will

fit this heritage too. Visitors to them will be continuing 13,000 years of human exploration and habitation on the grasslands. The landscape contains remnants of tipi rings, old cattle drive camps, bison bones and even dinosaur fossils. One of the huts will be located on a high bench above the Missouri River. From an overlook nearby six mountain ranges are visible on the horizon, while below the Missouri River flows past on its long run across the continent. The next hut will be near the banks of the Judith River beside a grove of towering cottonwood trees. The grove forms one of the last intact cottonwood gallery forests on the Northern Plains.

I began my own career in conservation by working in a hut system along the Appalachian Trail in

**MYSTERY WHISPERED IN THE GRASS, PLAYED IN THE BRANCHES OF TREES OVERHEAD, WAS CAUGHT UP AND BLOWN ACROSS THE AMERICAN LINE IN CLOUDS OF DUST AT EVENING ON THE PRAIRIES.**





# HOME

New Hampshire's White Mountains. I saw first-hand how these backcountry buildings allowed families, school groups, and scout troops to make trips without backpacking equipment and other expensive gear. The adventure of the journey to the hut, the stars and quiet of a night in the backcountry, and the camaraderie of exploring with friends turned many of these hut visitors into life-long advocates for public land, wildlife and outdoor recreation.

Over the next few years APR will build 10 huts across the Reserve. Some will be sited near the big prairie rivers, the Judith and the Missouri. Some will sit high in the steep ponderosa forests of the Missouri Breaks country, and others will look out over the swells of the sagebrush sea. Each hut will have an interpretive theme to guide its educational displays, library and interior, from cultural history, to wildlife, to geology. Beyond the hut doorways, visitors will have the freedom to create their own adventures, exploring by

foot, mountain bike, canoe or 4WD vehicle.

Our goal is to allow the public to explore the prairie and discover on their own why this place is worth protecting. Shelter won't remove any of the adventure, or diminish any of the expansiveness of the prairie, but it will make packing for a trip a little easier. In encouraging the human pattern of exposure and shelter, the hut system will allow visitors to awaken their own sense of bigness and wonder.

*Mike Quist Kautz grew up in the wooded hills of Western Maine. He first came to the prairie to work on the Landmark citizen science project. While training volunteers during the three-year project he visited the Reserve during every month of the year, and walked several hundred miles on wildlife survey tracks. On these hikes he fell in love with the prairie landscape and APR's mission. As Visitation Manager he will oversee construction of the hut system and management of the Reserve's campgrounds, visitor centers and other lodging.*

## Gifts and an Invitation

American Prairie Reserve's hut system was launched by a gift from long-time donors and National Board members Susan and Gib Myers. In recognition of their incredible lifetime support, American Prairie Reserve invited the Myers to name the western portion of the new hut system, now called The Myers Great Western Gateway, as well as the system's first hut. During the summer of 2017, construction will begin on two huts, funded by the generosity the Myers and Susan and Roy O'Connor, on American Prairie Reserve's newly acquired PN unit.

Liliane and Christian Haub have funded a third hut that will be constructed in 2018. Liliane, a member of the APR's National Board, says of the Reserve, "This landscape is hauntingly beautiful in its complexity, and the best way we've found to experience it is in the open, where a person can't see anything manmade for miles. The Hut-to-Hut System encourages that kind of connection with the vast and amazing prairie."

These exceptional gifts from supporters like the Myers, O'Connors and Haubs have established a lodging system that is an invitation to the public to explore the prairie. And APR members and the public will help sustain this system with their visits. APR members will receive preference in reservations and special pricing on stays. Revenue generated by the huts will support APR's larger mission to create the largest wildlife reserve in the continental United States. Stay tuned to APR's media channels for updates on the hut system construction and opening!