COVID-19 Guide for Event Leaders

(revision September 30, 2020)

Introduction
The COVID-19 pandemic has created new challenges for everyone, which we all will be facing for at least the near future. For TPE, a major challenge has been how to hold our important in-person events (field trips, work parties, prescribed burns, workshops, classes, lectures, meetings and conferences) while still enabling everyone who participates to both be and feel safe. This guide is intended to help event leaders in TPE to plan, publicize, and conduct your event safely during this challenging time.

TPE Policy & Current Guidelines
In May 2020, the TPE Board approved a new policy covering TPE events and COVID-19. The core of the policy is a Current Guidelines document, which is reviewed and updated if needed at least monthly to fit changing conditions and public health orders and recommendations. The up to date Current Guidelines document is always available on the COVID-19 page of the TPE website (https://www.theprairieenthusiasts.org/covid-19). Please download, read, and familiarize yourself with this document.

Planning & publicizing your event
Social distancing is the key to conducting events safely and affects how to plan and conduct your event. It is widely recognized that outdoor events are far safer than indoor events, so currently we are limiting events to outdoors. In addition, you will need to plan for people staying at least 6 feet apart. In practice, this means limiting the attendance at your event, especially if you are going to be meeting as a group or if the leader(s) will be speaking to the group (as on a field trip). We have found that having more than 25 people at an event is not very practical for maintaining a safe 6-foot distance.

For events where transportation might be needed, be aware that we do not allow people from different households to ride together in a closed vehicle, so plan accordingly. In open vehicles the number of passengers should be limited, and everyone needs to wear a mask. Also plan to bring a few supplies to the event, including some extra masks, hand sanitizer, and sanitizing wipes if you are going to be using or sharing any objects or equipment.

Because of the attendee limits, we strongly encourage pre-registration for your event. We offer an easy way to both publicize your event and enable online pre-registration using the Events and Calendar pages of TPE’s website. Contact Diane Hills for more information or assistance (see below). You can also pre-register by having attendees contact the event leader directly by email or phone.

When you publicize your event, also please remind people not to come if they are sick or have tested positive for COVID-19, that we will be practicing social distancing, and will be requiring wearing of masks during the event when gathered distancing is not practical. For field trips, it is also helpful to recommend bringing close focus binoculars so they can look at plants and insects from a distance.
Conducting your event
At the beginning of your event, you will need to do a few things:

1. Record an attendee list, making sure you have phone numbers and/or emails for each attendee. This will be invaluable for contact tracing if needed after the event.

2. Let everyone know that we will be practicing social distancing under TPE’s organization policy during the COVID-19 pandemic and thank them for their cooperation in helping everyone be and feel safe.

3. Remind people that those from different households always need to stay at least 6 feet apart. Demonstrate how far 6 feet actually is and ask everyone to please gently remind each other when they forget (as all of us tend to do at times).

4. Ask everyone to please wear masks when they are gathered together or will have difficulty staying at least 6 feet apart. Remind people that masks protect others and help everyone feel safe.

5. On work parties where tools, equipment, or other objects might be shared, ask people to wipe down with sanitizer when they are done with the objects.

Social distancing tips
Here are a few other tips for conducting events with social distancing:

- For field trips, it can be very helpful for the leader and a few others on the event to carry a 5-6-foot-long walking stick, lightweight plant stake or pole. This works for well pointing out interesting plants, insects, and other objects along the way from a safe distance. It also serves as a constant reminder of the proper distance people need to stay apart.

- It may help to designate a couple of people to keep an eye out and remind everyone to stay apart. It seems to be very difficult to do so when we all want to look at and talk about that rare plant or insect someone just spotted, and a gentle reminder can be helpful.

- No one likes wearing masks, and some people are actively opposed. On hot days, they can be extremely uncomfortable. Remember that they have been proven to be one of the most effective ways we can all help stop the spread of this disease. In the outdoors, they are not needed if everyone stays well apart (which is often the case on work parties), but are required people are gathered together, or space is tight.

- One useful approach is to wear the mask on your chin when not with others. It serves as a reminder to everyone (including yourself) and can be pulled up quickly when needed.

Contact Diane Hills (outreach@theprairieenthusiasts.org, (608) 239-4699) with any comments, suggestions or questions, or for help with publicizing your event.

We sincerely thank you for holding your event and helping us carry on our important conservation work even during these challenging times!