



Stewards of Saskatchewan staff present Friends of the St. Victor Petroglyphs their personalized gate sign. From left to right: Ashley Fortney, Kevin Schauenberg, Wes Bloom, David Munro, Ernest Bissonnette, and Kaytlyn Burrows. Photo credit: Rebecca Magnus

FRIENDS OF THE ST. VICTOR PETROGLYPHS HELP SAVE MONARCH BUTTERFLIES

Ashley Fortney Habitat Stewardship Coordinator, Nature Saskatchewan

This past Earth Day, Stewards of Saskatchewan staff were glad to have the opportunity to get out of the office for a short trip to St. Victor, Saskatchewan. We met with new Stewards of Saskatchewan participants — the Friends of the St. Victor Petroglyphs. In attendance were members Wes Bloom, Kevin Schauenberg, Earnest and Yolanda Bissonnette, as well as the president, David Munro. The Friends recently joined Nature Saskatchewan's Stewards of Saskatchewan banner program, which works with interested landowners and land managers to conserve and enhance

habitat for species at risk on the prairies — and the Friends fit right in!

The Friends of the St. Victor Petroglyphs is a non-profit cooperative group whose main goal is to preserve, protect and promote the St. Victor Petroglyphs. They are also working hard to raise awareness around the importance of the diversity of species in the area and the need to conserve the habitat within the valley. The area is quite unique with coulees up to 300 feet deep, large swaths of undisturbed native vegetation full of spring beds, and an elevation that rises from 2,200 feet to nearly 3,000 feet in approximately 2 miles. The area contains rare and beautiful

vegetation, including flowers such as White Paint Brush, Camus, Blazing Star, and even a tiny fern.

The Friends endorse St. Victor Petroglyph Provincial Park, and locally run Sylvan Valley Regional Park, as an ideal place for the introduction of nature hikes and tours within the deep coulees of the Wood Mountain Plateau. They also suggest this area could be used for people who want to study and record butterflies. They have a soft spot for one butterfly in particular — the Friends are participating in the protection and monitoring of monarchs. David told us, historically, the interpretative centre honours the Plains Grizzly as the "monarch of the prairies," and joked that the Friends have honoured such a large monarch for so long, they felt it was time to honour a small monarch as well! In case anyone is wondering, he immediately apologized for the pun.

Recent growing attention on monarch butterflies has shed light on the potentially grim future for the species, spurring many organizations to take action. The Friends believe





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Monarch butterfly. Photo credit: May Haga

that it is time to take action as well. They have observed monarchs on milkweed near the interpretive centre every year and want to help increase their population. They are starting a project to create a butterfly garden to help save the monarch and other insect species that aid in pollination of plants and crops in the surrounding area. By the time this article is published, the Friends will have already held a volunteer event to hand pull brome and weeds from an area adjacent to the interpretive centre. This is the first step toward their plans for a self-guided path where people can interact with the butterflies and flowers.

The area for the butterfly garden is approximately 1,200 square feet. The Friends have not only planned

to hand pull a clearing, but they also intend to re-use the pulled vegetation for compost, to culture existing native flowers in the seed bed, and to collect native seeds from the surrounding area to plant. They will also be using seeds provided by Nature Saskatchewan. Rebecca Magnus, acting Species At Risk manager, has been in conversation with Blazing Star Wildflower Seed Company to create a butterfly seed mix that caters to monarchs by including milkweed, the monarch's natural host.

We were glad to be there to see David and Kevin hang the personalized Stewards of Saskatchewan gate sign right next to the butterfly garden area. We were also excited to have the

opportunity to discuss the Stewards of Saskatchewan program in detail and provide the Friends with some educational materials for distribution to visitors of the site. And (of course!) we weren't going to miss an opportunity for a guided tour of the petroglyphs by members of the group dedicated to their protection.

For more information about the Friends of the St. Victor Petroglyphs, please visit: <http://stvictor.sasktelwebsite.net/>. For more information about Nature Saskatchewan and the Stewards of Saskatchewan Banner program, please visit: www.naturesask.ca/what-we-do/stewards-of-saskatchewan/stewards-of-saskatchewan-banner-program, or call 1-800-667-HOOT (4668). 🐦