

Kansas Honors Little Bluestem

Environmentalists from ranchers to ecologists always knew that little bluestem was important to Kansas. And now it's official. Little bluestem (*Schizachyrium scoparium*) was officially named as the State Grass of Kansas by the Kansas Legislature on July 1, 2010. It marked the end of a long but effective lobbying effort that began in 2005 when the Kansas Sampler Foundation, a rural culture advocacy group, asked the Kansas Native Plant Society to lead the campaign.

Little bluestem has a lot going for it as a state symbol. Growing in every county, it makes significant aesthetic, economic and ecological contributions.

The Society went to the schools to tell the story, creating educational materials about little bluestem for use by teachers and students. The reasoning was, when Kansas school children learn about their state grass it will help raise awareness to the importance of preserving native grasslands and increasing wildlife habitat.

The campaign for little bluestem was ultimately successful due to partnerships with teachers and school children who helped drive the movement to name it as state grass. For instance, science teacher Jan Alderson and her students at Shawnee Mission High School launched a little bluestem campaign in 2006.

Students and their teachers were out in force at the final hearings, offering compelling testimony. Joseph Stout, a fourth-grade Chase County elementary school student, explained that little bluestem is a drought tolerant native perennial and is very nutritious forage. Chase County middle school student Sammy Jo Peterson said, "When kids learn about little bluestem, they will learn about the prairie."

The legislators were sold. 🌿

For more information about little bluestem and other Kansas native plants, contact the Kansas Native Plant Society at R. L. McGregor Herbarium, Bridwell Botany Research Laboratory, 2045 Constant Avenue, University of Kansas, Lawrence, KS 66047, or visit www.ksnps.org.



Painting of little bluestem by Myrna Campbell

Information provided by Shirley Braunlich