



Tales from a
Sisters Naturalist
by Jim Anderson

Think Twice

You'd think, with all the hoopla we hear about caring for our forests and being careful with fire, people either living in and/or visiting Sisters Country would be more in line with the Conservation Ethic.

Not so! Last Memorial Day weekend some idiotic ATV-user tore down the rail fence set up to protect Prairie Farm meadow from mud-boggers and ran an ATV all over the meadow — that was healing from past mud-bogger damage — leaving more ruts and torn-up toad, frog, salamander, butterfly, elk and deer habitat in ruins.

I couldn't believe my eyes when I first saw the blatant evidence of ATV destruction. At that moment *all* ATV riders roared through my memory regarding other

places I've seen where they intentionally devastated the land.

The operators of those ATVs that trash ponds and streams, and run wildlife habitat literally into the ground, don't think twice; they just open the throttle and shout with glee at the destruction and havoc they create.

It wasn't until I forced myself to think about the many other *responsible* ATV operators I know who would have been just as devastated by the gut-wrenching damage at Prairie Farm — and who wouldn't stand for such behavior — that I calmed down.

It was bad enough to find the campfire from the previous occupants still smoldering in their beer-can-filled fire pit when we pulled in under the trees, and find trash strewn about. Had the huge chunks of firewood left in the campfire ring caught fire with no one there to control it, the lovely camp spot at Prairie Farm would have been no more — along with the forest surrounding it. One of my grandchildren, teenager Joseph, discovered two cans of unopened beer among the litter, popped them open and poured them on the smoking embers of

the fire.

I happened to be at Prairie Farm with my family, made up of two older sons and daughter with their children. We'd made the choice to go there and enjoy the area because it's a much-loved site my wife, Sue, visits on her annual butterfly counts, and one of the few places in the immediate area where western toad populations are making a comeback.

This is the time of year when juvenile toads and tree frogs that hatched up there in the old sawmill pond are changing from pond-dwellers to citizens of the dry lands. We found several tree frogs wandering around in the meadow, leaving their world of water for that of the meadow and forest.

They still had vestiges of their tadpole life behind them, carrying what was left of their swimming tail, and clambering around the meadow grasses on infirm, newly formed legs. At that moment in their lives they are unable to eat and breathe through their mouth — absorbing oxygen through their skin and literally living off the fat of their tails. Their digestive system and



DRONE PHOTO BY SAM ANDERSON

ATV damage to Prairie Farm meadow.

breathing mechanism is going from a vegetarian to an animal diet, and from gills to lungs.

Who knows how many were murdered, squashed to death by the, "I wanna do my thing!" operator of that run-amok ATV?

It rattled my chain to think — and caused me to think twice — that here, in this magnificent Land of Freedom, we may have to install spy-cameras in places like Prairie Farm to catch those nutsos who conduct themselves illegally, doing that kind of damage. Those people who appear to have

no idea what citizen responsibilities are required to keep this country's land natural and beautiful.

Wildlife biologists use cameras placed in secret locations to watch the behavior of a wide variety of wildlife to better understand their lifestyle. Unfortunately, it seems to be time to use the same kind of devices to watch for those people's behavior who just don't care what their destructive action does to the land; take away their machines and license, and thereby put them away in jail to give them time to think twice.

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