

## **2026 Photo Contest Rules**

**Contest Deadlines:** September 13, 2025- September 13, 2026

**Contest Email:** [friendspwlc@gmail.com](mailto:friendspwlc@gmail.com)

**Website:** <https://www.prairiewetlands.org/>

**Facebook:** @FriendsPWLC **Instagram:** @friendsoftheprairiewetlands

### **Categories:**

**Prairie Wildlife:** Live birds, mammals, reptiles, amphibians, in their natural prairie habitat.

**Prairie Plant Life:** Trees, shrubs, grasses, flowers, mushrooms, and other flora in their natural prairie habitat.

**Prairie Scenic and Recreation:** Landscapes and scenic vistas, or people enjoying the recreational opportunities on prairies located on public lands. Examples include hunting, fishing, hiking, wildlife observation, and photography.

**Prairie Invertebrates:** Butterflies, moths, other insects, and aquatic invertebrates in natural habitats.

### **Primary Contest Rules:**

1. Only photos taken on prairies located on public land since September 13, 2025 may be entered.
2. The contest is open to amateurs; those who derive less than 5% of their income taking photographs.
3. Up to 5 photos per person may be entered: no more than 2 photos per category.
4. Photos may be digitally corrected and cropped from originals but must not have any digitally added elements or effects not existing in the original scene, including text or imprinted dates. (See later information on digital editing).
5. Entries (digital jpeg photo files and completed entry form) must be received no later than 4 pm on September 13, 2026.
6. Enter 5x7 inch color or B&W digital jpegs with no white border. Judging is based on digital jpeg photo files.
7. A completed signed entry form must be included with your entries. The entry form will contain space to record the subject category entered, the name of the photo, location, and date taken.
8. Submitted photos become property of the USFWS Fergus Falls Wetland Management District. The photographer grants unlimited use of submitted photos by Management District and Friends of the Prairie Wetlands Learning Center publications (including USFWS publications), web pages, presentations, and other promotional products. Credit will be given to the photographer. The photographer retains copyright to their photos.

### **Youth Division: Age 16 and Under**

Youth photos are separately judged and awarded first place, second place, third place, and honorable mentions, and then compete with all photos in the Grand Prize, PWLC Manager's Choice and PWLC Friend's Choice awards. Judges will consist of a panel of TBD photographers.

### **Additional Contest Policies**

1. Photos entered by USFWS staff taken during work hours are not eligible for contest prizes by USFWS policy.
2. The primary USFWS staff and Friends co-coordinators are not eligible to enter photos.
3. Any questions regarding interpretation of rules will be decided by the Friends' Photo Contest Coordinator.

### **Requirements of Submitted Photo Files**

The digital camera jpeg files for entered photos must be received by September 13, 2026. Photo files are required because photos may be used by USFWS or The Friends according to the uses described in these rules. If one's digital camera records in a format other than jpeg or if software is used to crop or correct photo, save the file as a jpeg with as little compression as possible. File names for submitted prints must be written in the appropriate space on the entry form. Renaming file names in the format of last name first name and title will make the file handling easier. Do not attach more than 25 megabytes of files in one e-mail and make sure you clearly indicate in the e-mail title that it is a photo contest submission. If submitted photos were taken with emulsion film, create a digital file by scanning your print at a resolution of at least 300 dpi. If assistance is needed in providing jpeg files, please send us a message on Facebook or Gmail.

**Digital Editing:** With increasing capability of photography software, the following describes what is acceptable for photos entered in this photo contest: All photographs should accurately reflect the subject matter and the scene as it appeared. Photos that have been digitally altered beyond standard optimization will be disqualified. Acceptable are adjustments to color, contrast, brightness, and sharpness; removal of dust and scratches; cropping; black and white conversions; and use of HDR (high dynamic range imaging). Not acceptable are photo composites (combination of two or more photos, not of the same scene); the addition, duplication, deletion or moving of objects in the photos; or the use of artistic digital filters and effects. Examples of not accepted artistic filters and effects are watercolor, neon glow, posterizing, stained glass, and others which do not show the scene in its natural way.

**Contest Signature Page:** The contest signature page is USFWS FWS Form 3-2259 Copyright Release Agreement where the contest's restricted photo uses have been entered into the form. On this form, photographers may instead choose "Grant Full Copyright Release" that allows the FWS and the Friends any use of photos, but choosing full release also releases photos into the public domain. The contest signature page can also be digitally signed by entered name, date and email address.



**Privacy Statement:**

Addresses, phone numbers, and email addresses collected on the contest entry form will be used only for purposes related to the photo contest and for contacting photographers about use of photos.

**Awards and Prizes:**

Photos will be judged by a panel of local photographers. First Place, Second Place, Third Place, and Honorable Mentions will be awarded in each photo category and youth division. Grand Prize, first place overall, second place overall, and third place overall will also be selected, as well as Manager's Choice and Friend's Choice awards. All winners will receive an award certificate. Overall winners will also receive a gift certificate to the Friends of the Prairie Wetlands Gift Shop, the Blue Stem Store. Gift Certificates will amount to \$60, \$30, and \$20 for the overall winners in the open competition, \$25, \$15, and \$10 for the youth division, \$20 for the People's Choice Award, \$20 for the Friend's Choice Award, \$20 for the Manager's Choice Award, and \$10 for the first-place award in each of the four categories, Prairie Plants, Prairie Wildlife, Prairie Invertebrates and Prairie Scenic/Recreation. The Grand Prize Winner will receive a large metal print of their photo after it is displayed in the Prairie Wetlands Learning Center Visitor Center for a year.

**Photo Contest Exhibit: 2026**

The Grand Prize winner and Youth Division Winner will be displayed at the Prairie Wetlands Learning Center for one year. All entered photos will be displayed on the Friends of the Prairie Wetlands Facebook Page.

**People's Choice Award:**

Facebook users can cast their vote for their favorite contest photo, which will be displayed on the Friend's Facebook Page or website. The photograph with the most likes will be awarded the People's Choice Award.

**Awards:**

Contest winners will be announced on the Friends of the Prairie Wetlands Learning Center Facebook page and website at a time and date To Be Determined. Prizes and certificates will be available.