

A wide-angle landscape photograph showing a dirt road winding through a vast, grassy valley. The terrain is a mix of green and brown, suggesting a semi-arid or high-altitude environment. The sky is filled with soft, white and grey clouds, with patches of blue visible. The overall scene is expansive and scenic.

51 Flowers of Alibates
Lessons Learned in Writing a Field Guide

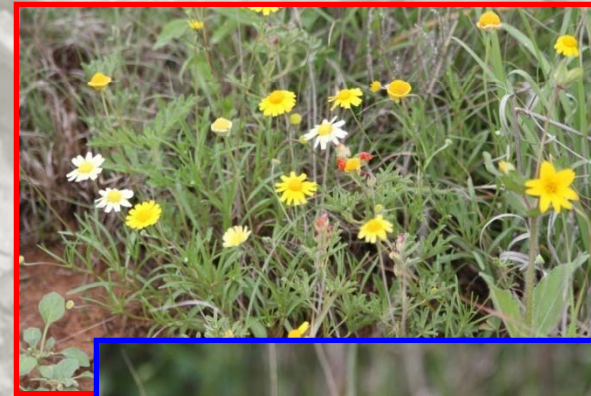
Origin of Project

- During a field session of TMN training in Alibates National Monument, we were asked to develop a field guide to the wildflowers we observed along the trail.
- The original purpose of the volunteer project was to produce a wildflower identification tool for Park Rangers who lead public hikes in the park.



Scope of Project

- The original concept was a series of index-sized cards identifying wildflower species common in the park
- What ultimately resulted was our small field guide, *51 Flowers of Alibates*



Project Steps

- **Locating excellent examples of specimens**
- **Photography**
- **Accurate identification, research, and collaboration**
- **Publication**



Lessons Learned

Lesson #1: Never underestimate the pace of change in science

- *Research for the Latin plant names revealed inconsistencies - some of the species names were changing due to new DNA evidence*
- *Experts can, may, and will disagree -- most of the USDA name changes were very new and many of our resource experts were uncomfortable with newer nomenclature*

Solution: Use the latest information available and have it reviewed by several experts.



Lessons Learned

Lesson #2: Field guides can be filled with different types of information...what do you want in yours?

- *It can be easy to increase the scope and content of the field guide since it can be hard to say no to “good ideas” –a small project can ultimately take much longer than anticipated*
- *Field guides need to be easy to use, simple to understand, and convenient in the “field”*
- *A simple identification tool is quickest; plan for the additional time it will take to develop and include other information such as:*
 - *Range*
 - *Life-cycle photos*
 - *Ethno-botanical uses*
 - *Interesting facts, legends, and lore, etc.*

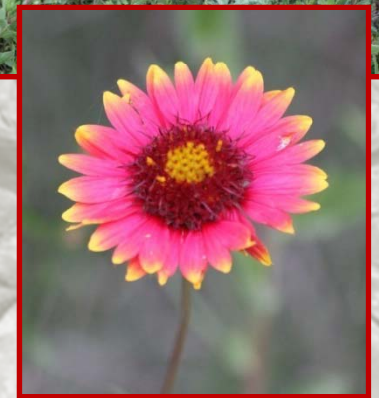


Solution: Identify your intended audience and develop a plan for the content scope—then stick to the plan.

Lessons Learned

Lesson #3: Genus is easy, species is harder

- *Positive identification in the field is easier because you have the plant in hand—requires accurate knowledge of the plant*
- *Relying on photographs is difficult unless you have numerous photos from a variety of angles and of different parts of the flower-- its leaf, stalk, flowers, sepal, etc.*

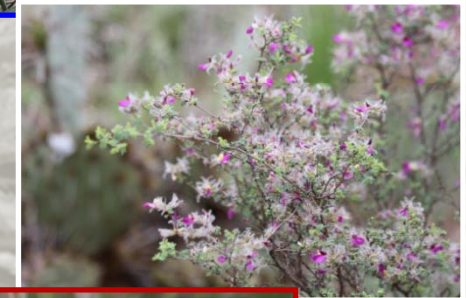


Solution: Take an expert in the field or take lots and lots of photos from different angles and different views.

Lessons Learned

Lesson #4: Subject matter can vary from year to year—be prepared

- *Environmental conditions, weather, land-use changes, etc. can impact the population and/or accessibility of subject matter from year-to-year*



Solution: Be prepared to utilize a variety of habitats, locales to ensure availability of subject matter for photos, study, etc.

Lessons Learned

Lesson #5: Most good authors need a good editor

- *The group works together, but someone ultimately should be in charge to ensure achievement of the goal*
- *A small project planned for completion in months can take much longer without someone making sure the plan is being followed*



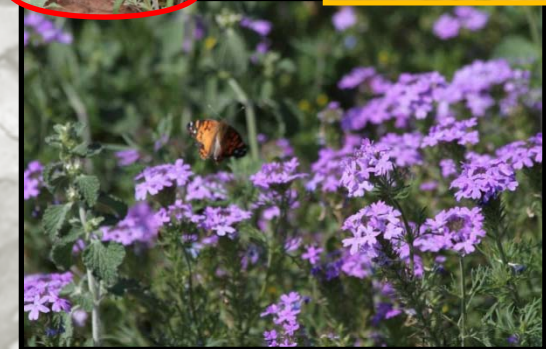
Solution: Ensure someone is responsible for being the editor and let them do so.

Summary

Nothing teaches you as well as preparing to teach someone else

- *Writing a field guide means you have to learn enough about the subject matter to be informational and accurate*
- *Research brings you closer to the subject matter and to the experts on the subject matter*

Enjoy the learning experience but be prepared for the challenge.



Credits

**Presentation Concept and
Development:** Carl Poldrack

Photographs:

*Troney Toler: Slides 1, 2, 9 and
background*

*Carl Poldrack: Slides 3, 4, 5, 6, 7,
8, 10, 11*

