

What can you expect to see after a prescribed burn?

- The prairie ground will briefly look black and barren.
- Prairie plants will grow stronger with reduced competition from invasive species and increased nutrient levels. Invading brush will disappear.
- Once prairie plants are established, a variety of grassland birds will return to inhabit the area.

What role do fires play in maintaining prairie ecosystems?

- Before European settlement, regular fires set by lightning or Native Americans burned through oak woodlands at least every three to five years.
- Fire incinerates dead vegetation, which promotes plant growth by returning nutrients to the soil and giving sunlight an opportunity to warm the ground earlier in spring.
- Fire removes invading woody plants that store most of their energy above ground. Deep-rooted prairie plants can regenerate and thrive using their belowground energy reserves.

Prairie Plants and Animals:

Grasses:

- Big bluestem
- Little bluestem
- Indiangrass

Flowers:

- Blazing star
- Sunflowers
- Shooting star
- Eastern prairie white-fringed orchid (WI endangered, US threatened)

Animals:

- Northern harrier
- Ornate box turtle (WI endangered)
- Monarch butterfly
- Regal fritillary butterfly
- American badger

Wisconsin's Tall Grass Prairie

Much of Wisconsin's pasture and farmland was once a sea of grassland. But the original 2.1 million acres of tall grass prairie have declined to less than 10,000 acres today, most of it degraded and fragmented. In order to protect this vital ecosystem, a number of local organizations and state and federal agencies are working together to restore degraded prairies and to preserve and manage our remaining prairies.

For more information:

The Endangered Resources Program of the Wisconsin DNR. <http://www.dnr.state.wi.us/org/land/er/>

WI DNR booklet

"Home on the Range," on restoring and maintaining grasslands.

<http://www.dnr.state.wi.us/org/land/wildlife/publ/wildland.htm>.

WI DNR publication

"Getting the Help You Need," on funding and advice sources for restoration and habitat management.

<http://www.dnr.state.wi.us/org/land/wildlife/publ/gettinghelp.pdf>.

C.F. Mutel and S. Packard's

"The Tallgrass Restoration Handbook: For Prairies, Savannas, and Woodlands." Published in 1997 by the Island Press.

Conservation Programs for Wisconsin Landowners.

<ftp://ftpfc.sc.egov.usda.gov/WI/>

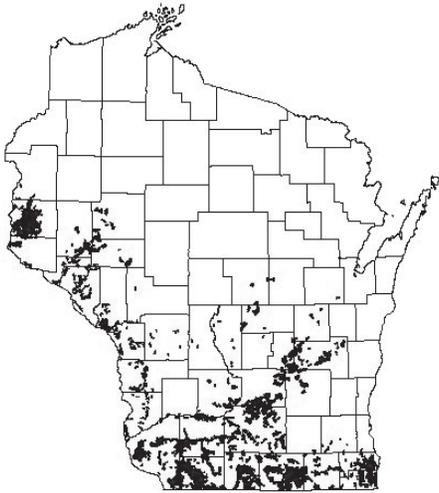
<Pubs/Progs2003.htm>

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Where were prairies historically found in Wisconsin?

- Wisconsin is the northern edge of the historic range of tall grass prairie.
- Prairies could be found in flat areas or, in more hilly regions, often on south and west facing slopes.



Wisconsin prairie distribution, pre-European settlement. Data created by Robert Finley, 1976.

What role can prescribed burning play in prairie management?

- Together with controlled grazing and mowing, prescribed burns mimic the original environment of prairies.
- Regular burning has been shown to control invasive species.

What are the characteristics of the tall grass prairie ecosystem?

- Mostly composed of perennial flowers and grasses, some as tall as six feet high.
- Grows in wetter climates than that of the short grass prairies along the eastern edge of the Rocky Mountains, with temperatures that range seasonally from below freezing to above 100 degrees.
- Remaining parcels of prairie are being identified in areas never altered from their original prairie composition - railroad right of ways, borders between crop fields, etc. - leading to preservation and restoration opportunities.
- Many public and private organizations at local, state, and federal levels have programs to help private landowners pay for and execute prairie restoration on their property. (Please see the back of this flier for contact information).

How is this situation improving?

- Citizens are beginning to value the importance of native prairies for local scenic beauty, preservation of rare plants and wildlife, and maintenance of diverse genetic resources.

What happened to Wisconsin prairie ecosystems?

- Settlers plowed up millions of acres of fertile, organic rich prairie soil for agriculture.
- Fire suppression led to an invasion of brush in remaining prairies.
- Today, only 0.5 percent of Wisconsin's original tall grass prairie ecosystem remains, most of it degraded or fragmented into small one to five acre plots.
- Grassland birds were particularly dependent on prairies and have declined to a greater extent than any other bird community.



Western Meadowlark

Drawing by Jim McEvoy,
courtesy of the Wisconsin DNR