

The Driftless Area, comprised of the unglaciated portions of Wisconsin, Minnesota, Iowa, and Illinois, sits between the Eastern Forests and Western Prairies. The region's rugged topography supports a wide range of habitats today, although much more of the area historically was prairie and savanna.



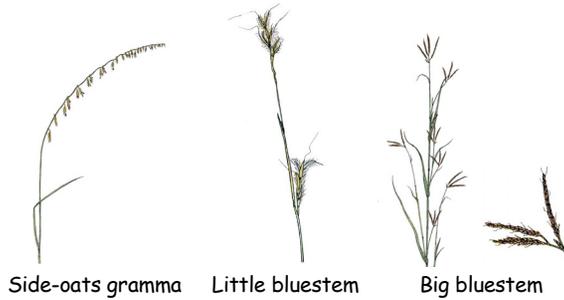
Less than 1/10 of 1% of our original prairies remain today. In the Driftless Area, much of the remaining prairies are hill prairies. These prairies are now considered "Globally Rare" and contain many unique and declining species of plants and animals.

Most prairie types were lost primarily to plowing. The hill prairies, however, disappeared due to a loss of fire on the landscape. The upside is that the loss has been relatively slow and a portion of the original hill prairies remain. These small patches (remnants) will not persist into the future without some management action.



Hill prairies (sometimes called goat or bluff prairies) are typically found on south and southwest facing slopes. The dry conditions on these sites favor the plants and wildlife that are common to the hill prairie.

Common Grasses



Side-oats gramma Little bluestem Big bluestem

Common Forbs (flowers)



Leadplant Silky aster Purple prairie clover



Coreopsis Pasque flower Grey goldenrod



False boneset Stiff goldenrod Rough blazingstar

Benefits to Wildlife

Many unique animals utilize hill prairies. Several reptiles, including lizards, find the dry conditions of these prairies attractive. Butterflies and birds frequent prairie openings to take advantage of the diverse plant life. Some invertebrates (snails, insects, and spiders) spend their entire lives on a hill prairie.



A hill prairie lizard

Current Threats to Hill Prairies

The lack of fire has allowed woody species to invade the prairie. Some are native species that are intolerant of fire, others are exotic (non-native) species. There are also non-woody invasives. Here are some things to look for:

Red cedar - In some areas, this is the primary threat. Though these are native, they were not common when fires were frequent.

Aspen and Sumac - These native species are well equipped to invade prairies. These trees form clones by suckering (sending up new shoots that become trees), thus spreading out into open areas.

Brush - Many shrubs (buckthorn, honeysuckle, prickly ash) will invade the open spaces of the prairie. Many are native and can be expected to be present in low density. Historically, fires kept the shrubs at a low density.

Non-woody plants - Sweet clover, spotted knapweed, and leafy spurge are some of the problem species that compete with native prairie plants.

Management Methods

There is no standard method for restoring a hill prairie. One or more of the following methods can be used to maintain or expand a hill prairie. Method selection depends on the remnant condition and the management objective.

Prescribed burning

Benefits:

- * reduces thatch layer
- * promotes soil warming
- * kills or sets back trees and brush

Fire alone may not be the best method. Many trees and brush may resprout. Suckering species like aspen and sumac will increase in density after a fire. Some species, like clover, will germinate more rapidly with fire.

Girdling trees

Girdling is the removal of the outer bark, thus starving the tree over a period of a year or two. This technique is especially helpful with removing suckering species such as aspen. There are some species such as box elder that re-sprout despite girdling.

Cutting trees and brush

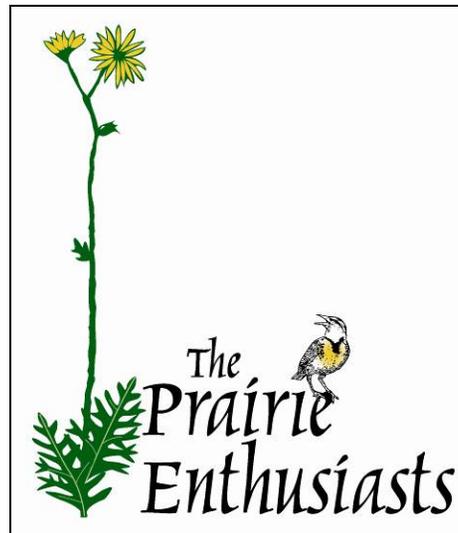
Cutting some trees such as cedars can be effective. However, simply cutting some species of trees and brush will not provide desired results over the long-term. Often cutting is combined with the use of herbicide to minimize resprouting.

Herbicides

In some cases, mechanical control methods are not successful. Many chemicals are available for specific uses. Great care should be taken to minimize adverse effects of herbicide use. Information on herbicide use as a control is available from a variety of resource agencies.

The heritage of this region is deeply rooted in prairies. The fertile soil we use as farmland is a product of the deep-rooted prairie plants from decades ago. Native Americans started fires to maintain the openness of the lands in this region, as did the early settlers. Rural landowners through time have enjoyed the beauty of the flowers such as "crocuses" (Pasque flower) on hikes to ridgetops. Many of the declining wildlife species are associated with prairies and savannas.

This brochure was produced by:



www.theprairieenthusiasts.org) - TPE is a non-profit organization committed to protection and management of native prairie and savanna of the Upper Midwest. Members work together on private lands, as well as protected lands that TPE owns or manages.

Artwork of plants donated by Mark Muller



Hill Prairies of the Driftless Area

Beautiful remnants of our
natural heritage