

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.
- 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.

Prairie Plants and Animals:

Grasses:

- Big bluestem
- Little bluestem
- Indiangrass

Flowers:

- Stiff goldenrod
- Sunflowers
- Shooting stars
- Purple coneflower

Animals:

- Goshawk
- Eastern and Western Meadowlark (declining)
- Ornate box turtle (WI endangered)
- Karner blue butterfly (US endangered)
- American badger

For more information:

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 activities.

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

W. Mirk's handbook

"An Introduction to the Tallgrass Prairie of the Upper Midwest: Its history, ecology, preservation and reconstruction." Published in 1997 by The Prairie Enthusiasts.

C.F. Mutel and S. Packard's

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

MN DNR booklet

"Going Native: A Prairie Restoration Handbook for Minnesota Landowners."

<http://files.dnr.state.mn.us/assistance/backyard/prairierestoration/goingnative.pdf>

Tall Grass Prairie Restoration

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, private citizens, local organizations, and state and federal agencies are working together to restore degraded prairies and grasslands. As part of this effort, your neighbor is currently undertaking a prairie restoration on his or her property.



What happened to Wisconsin prairies?

- Settlers plowed up millions of acres of fertile, organic rich prairie soil for agriculture.
- Fire suppression led to an encroachment of brush and trees in remaining prairies.
- Today, only 0.5% of original tall grass prairie remains in Wisconsin. Most of it is highly degraded or fragmented into small one to five acre parcels.

What are the characteristics of a tall grass prairie ecosystem?

- Mostly composed of perennial flowers and grasses, some as tall as six feet high.
- Grows in wetter climates than the short grass prairies along the eastern edge of the Rocky Mountains, with temperatures that range seasonally from below freezing to above 100 degrees.
- Before European settlement, fires set by lightning or Native Americans usually burned across prairies every three to five years. Fires removed invading brush and invigorated fire-dependent native prairie species.

Your neighbor's property is currently undergoing prairie restoration.

The following information describes the work you should expect to see over the course of this process.

Preparation for planting a prairie

- Prairie planting strategy depends on local site characteristics.
- In general, restoration begins with a prescribed burn to incinerate invasive grasses, which are not fire tolerant.
- Other control options include the use of herbicides to remove well-established invasive species.

Planting a prairie

- Plantings are most effective when a no-till drill specifically made for prairie seeds is used.
- Planting is done during dry periods between April and June, or after late October.



Cone Flowers

What to expect the first year

- Most native seedlings will remain less than a few inches tall. These plants are mostly perennial species, and initially concentrate the majority of their energy into root growth and development.
- The management focus is controlling the weeds so that light is permitted to reach the desirable seedlings.
- The new seeding must be mowed at least once the first year to keep weeds from producing seeds or shading out seedlings.

What to expect in following years

- Early successional flowers will bloom spring through fall. Grasses will go through beautiful color changes in the fall.
- Common prairie wildlife will settle in to the new habitat.
- Areas may need spot mowing to control weeds, but after the first few years it should be limited.
- As the prairie matures, new species will begin to bloom. Some flowers take five to seven years before they bloom.

What role does fire play in maintaining a restored prairie?

- Regular prescribed burns are a key component of a comprehensive prairie management plan.
- Conducting a prescribed burn on a site every three to five years maintains the vigor of the stand by reducing competition from weedy plants and unwanted brush or trees.