



The
Prairie Enthusiasts

Sparking Passion
for Prairie

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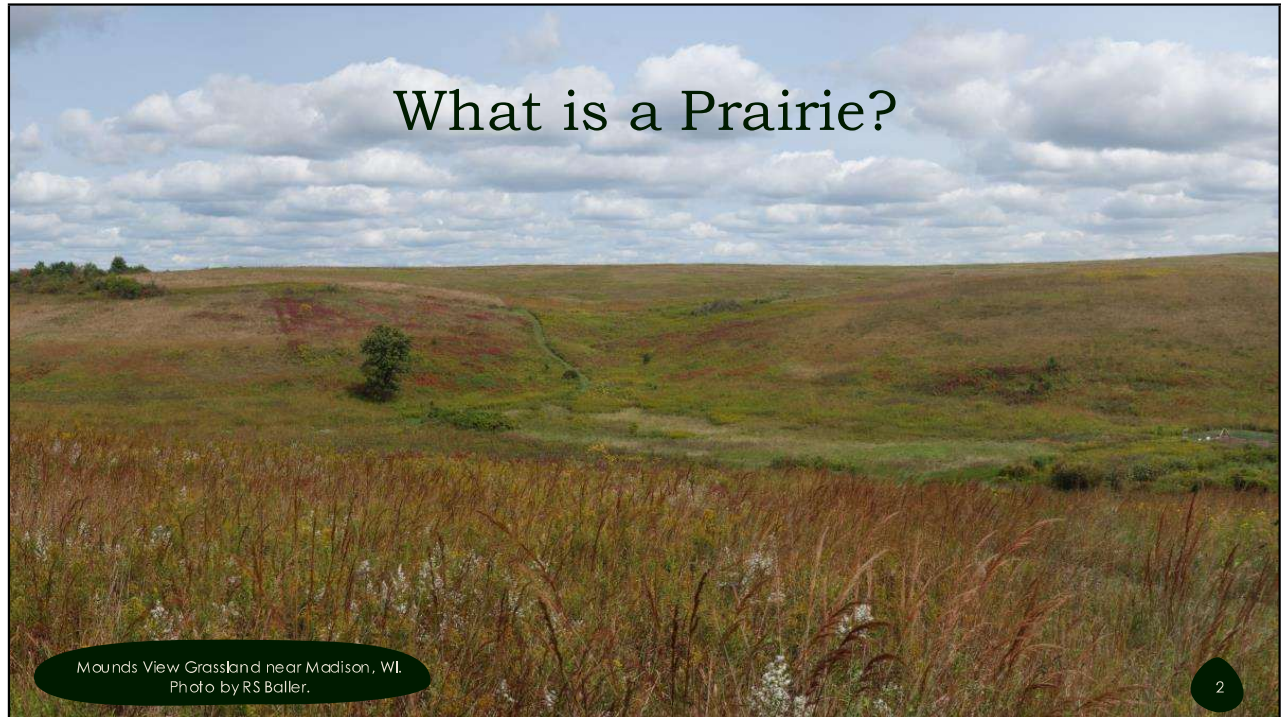
2026



Photo by Eric Preston

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What is a Prairie?



First, what do you think of when you hear the word “prairie.” Many think of sweeping grasslands when they hear the word “prairie.” But that’s just one type of prairie....



Thomas Wet Prairie near Muscoda, WI.
Photo by Kristin Westad.



Gasser Sand Barrens near Baraboo, WI.
Photo by Scott Weber.



Marowski Bluff near Ferryville, WI.
Photo by Jim Rogala.

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Prairies come in many forms. There are wet prairies, dry sand prairies, bluff prairies and more.

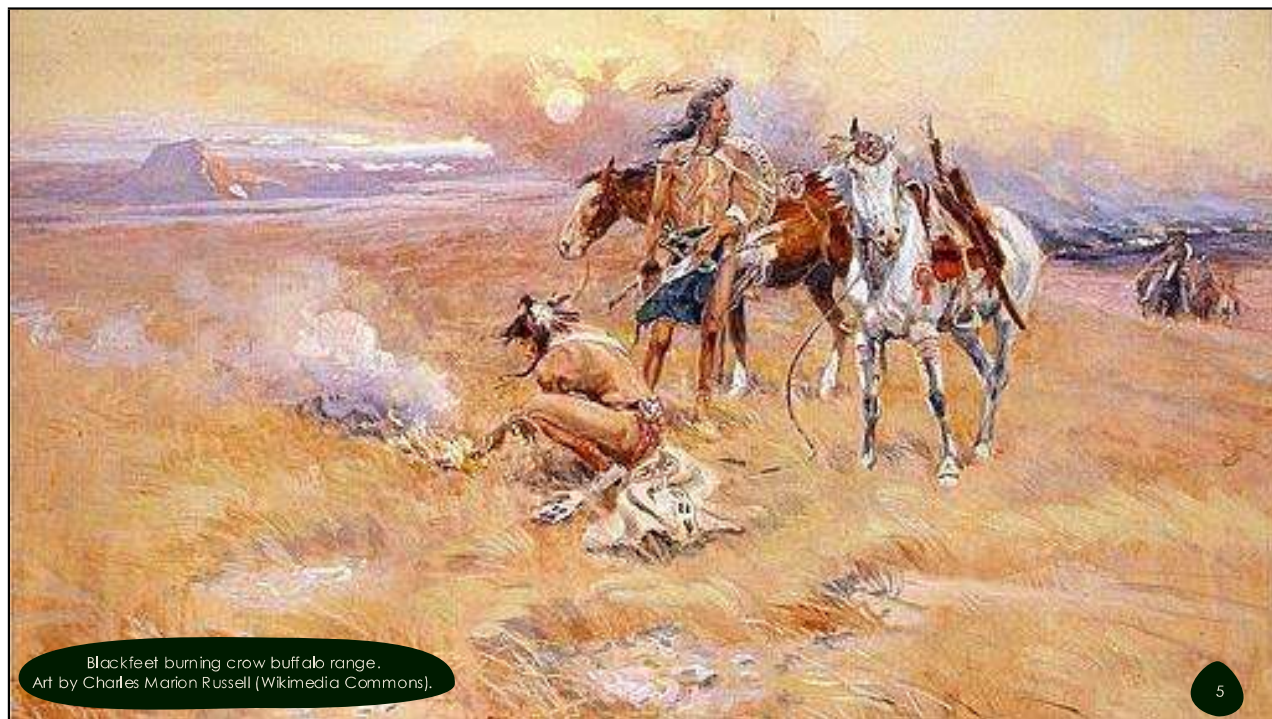
All of these places are fire-dependent



Spring prescribed burn at Pleasant Valley.
Photo by RS Baller.

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All of these places are fire-dependent, but what does that mean? Prairies, savannas, oak woodlands and many other habitats of the Upper Midwest are highly diverse ecosystems that evolved over thousands of years due to a persistent presence of fire.



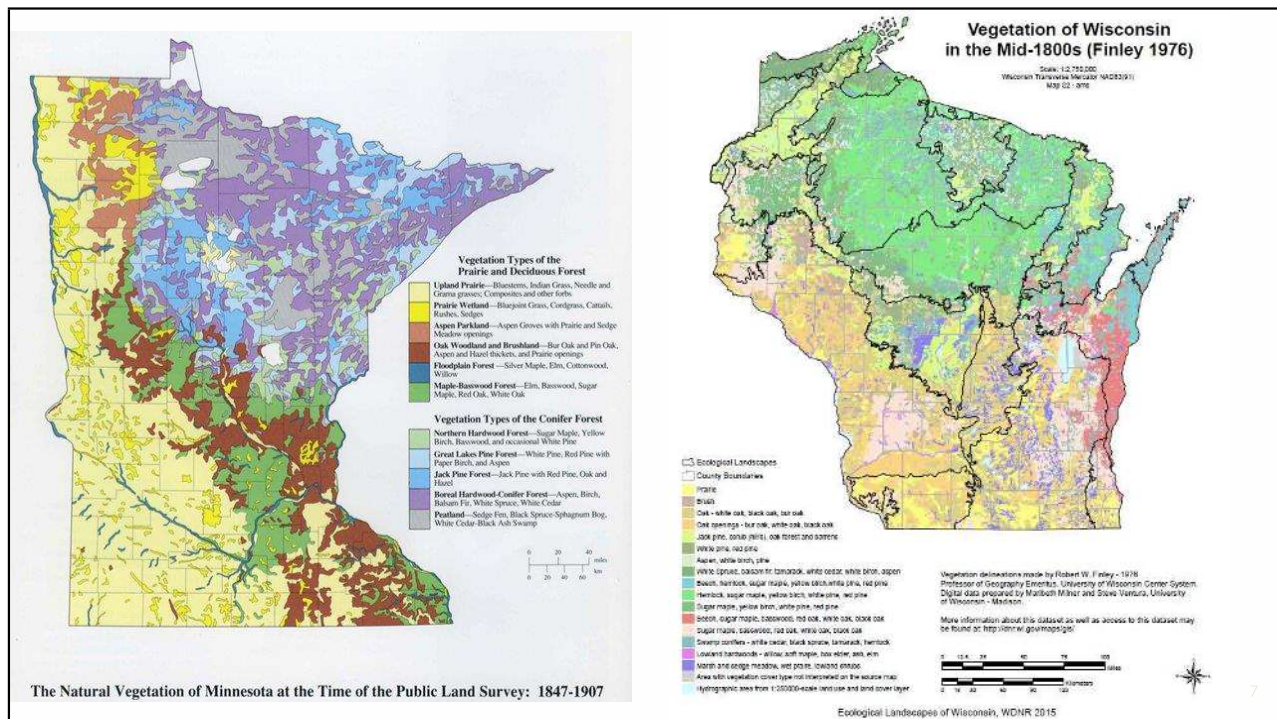
Those fires were primarily ignited by Indigenous Peoples as well as lightning strikes in the spring and fall.



Glacial Prairie Chapter prescribed burn volunteer.
Photo by Brad Wilkins.

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Because these habitats evolved with a persistent presence of fire, they continue to require fire to limit the invasion of woody brush and trees and remove the buildup of thatch and leaves, which can hinder the growth of native plants. That means, in order for these habitats to survive and thrive, they require stewardship from all of us. Simply put, prairies need people.



Unfortunately, of the millions of acres that once existed, less than 1% of the original prairies remain today due to a lack of fire on the land as well as habitat loss from agriculture and urbanization. This graphic from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign documents what’s believed to be original prairie and notes large-scale fires that were documented in writing in the last 200 years. However, to this day, we’re still discovering old-growth prairies, making it challenging to show what we’ve truly lost.

And these original prairies, called remnants, are incredibly important to protect and steward. They’ve maintained all of the parts of what make a prairie a prairie—the plants, animals, insects and fungi. Once that’s lost, it may take thousands of years (if ever) to restore that habitat to its original state.

That's where we come in!

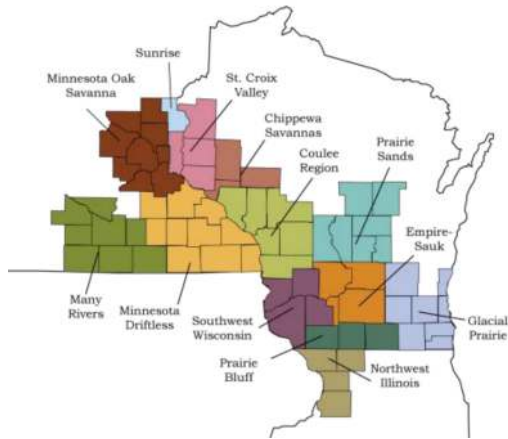


St. Croix Valley Chapter Prescribed Burn Volunteers.
Photo by Ginny Gaynor.

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The Prairie Enthusiasts is an accredited land trust comprised of 13 Chapters through Wisconsin, Minnesota and Northwest Illinois. We are hyper-focused on protecting and stewarding fire-dependent habitats of the Upper Midwest.

The Prairie Enthusiasts



Volunteers conducting the first burn at Murali Bluff in 1975. Photo by John Oschner.



We started as a small group in Southwest Wisconsin in the 70's with just a handful of people who were passionate about prairies. They began working on the land—learning about native wildlife and prescribed burning. With their enthusiasm, they started educating others about the importance of protecting these places—meeting with local landowners, getting newspapers involved and more. Eventually, that small group of people sought to protect land and decided to officially establish The Prairie Enthusiasts in 1987.



These species and more are all listed as endangered in at least one of the states in our region.

Top left: Ornate box turtle. Photo by Greg Wahl.
 Top right: Pale false foxglove. Photo by Eric Preston.
 Bottom left: Regal fritillary butterfly. Photo by Eric Preston.
 Bottom right: Henslow's sparrow. Photo by Eric Preston.



Today, we've protected over 4,000 acres of high-quality fire-dependent habitats. We conduct land stewardship on those sites as well as other important habitats that we don't own. And these are just some of the thousands of plants and animals that we're saving through this work, all of which listed as state endangered species.



Beyond land protection and stewardship, we also provide education through webinars, workshops, field trips, an annual conference and our publication *The Prairie Promoter*. We've grown from a few informal groups of local enthusiasts to over 1,700 members and over 700 volunteers.



These are incredibly diverse places that have evolved over thousands of years, and to recreate them may take thousands more (if we can at all). That's why we at The Prairie Enthusiasts are so focused on protecting the habitats that haven't yet been destroyed.

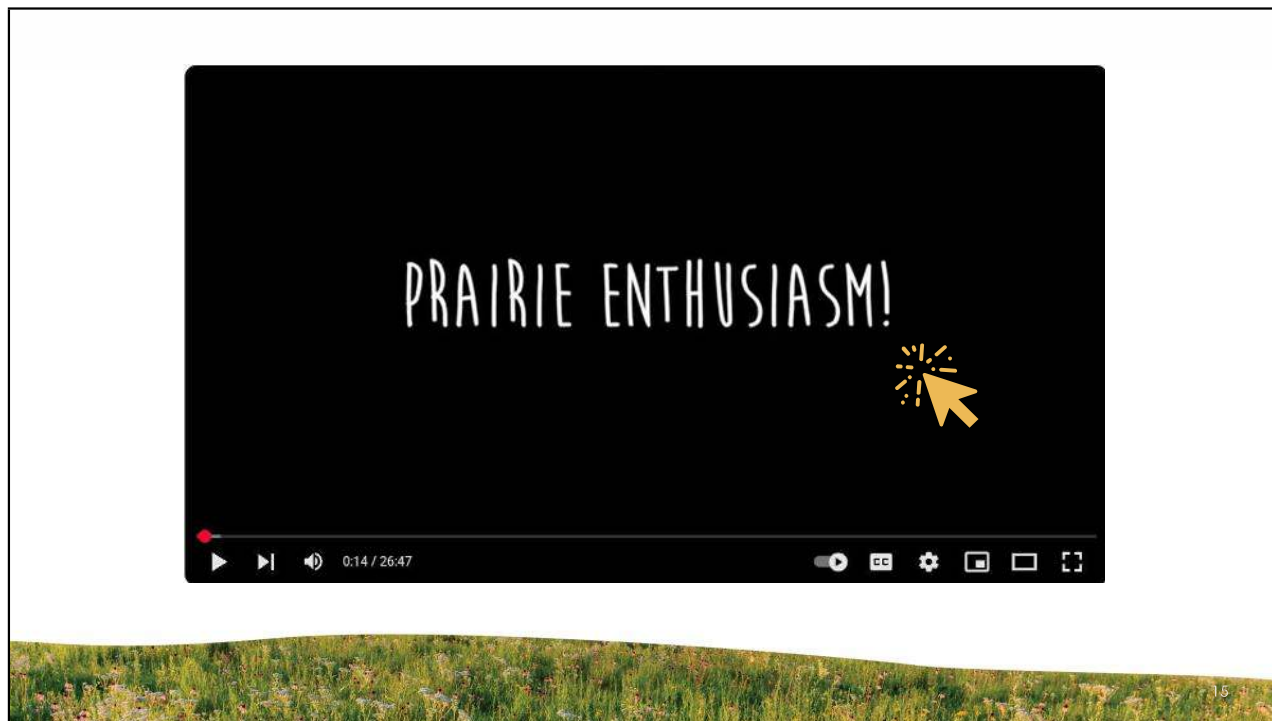


When we talk about the loss of prairies, we're talking about habitat loss for hundreds and hundreds of plants, animals and insects that call these places home. Recently a report from 3 Billion Birds showed that grassland birds as a group have suffered a 53% population loss since 1970. The Eastern Meadowlark alone, which is the emblem of our logo, has declined by 75% nationwide.

The Good News



The Upper Midwest has some of the best conservation opportunities—there are quite a few hidden pockets of habitat that haven't been destroyed. But, with the growing presence of nonnative species, it's absolutely imperative that we protect and steward these places now.





How You Can Help

- Visit a prairie
- Attend a workshop or field trip
- Join our email lists to stay up-to-date
- Volunteer
 - Seed Collecting & Cleaning
 - Biological Surveys & Citizen Science
 - Making Parsnip Predators or Makutus
 - Office Tasks
 - Outreach & Events
 - Photography
 - Seed Orchard
 - Writing
 - Brush & Tree Cutting
 - Prescribed Burning
 - Site Monitoring
 - Leadership Positions

Volunteers cutting invasive brush at Moely Prairie near Madison, WI. Photo by Amy Chamberlin.

Here's how you can help. First, we welcome you to visit a prairie. Get to know the places near your home. Enjoy a hike, birdwatching, hunting or fishing. You can see a list of our protected sites on our website. Second, we invite you to get involved with your local Chapter. No matter your knowledge of nature, we have a community of learners who are eager to share what they know. You can join a training, field trip or volunteer work party. Volunteers often tell us how fulfilling this work is, and they feel they are making a tangible impact, building resistance against climate change and enriching their local community. Finally, if you feel called to do so, you

can make a donation to fuel our mission. Every dollar is greatly appreciated and helps us continue to protect rare habitats, steward those rare places and provide educational materials.

Chapter Opportunities



Photo by Gary Shackelford

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Get Involved with Your Local Chapter

[Name] Chapter

- Chapter Contact:
 - [name]
 - [Email]



List upcoming opportunities to get involved.



Photo by Gary Shackelford

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ThePrairieEnthusiasts.org

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Thank you!

