

Grand River Grasslands

Conservation Opportunity Area



Central Dissected
Till Plains



Pawnee Prairie Conservation Area provides a landscape view of the once-vast sea of grass mantling the northern Missouri glaciated plains.

Tom Nagel, Missouri Department of Conservation

Grand River Grasslands is a native grassland and prairie restoration area in the Central Tallgrass Prairie Ecoregion. The diversity of grassland wildlife, including a small population of greater prairie-chickens, confirms that this is one of the best places in Missouri to restore a functioning tallgrass prairie ecosystem.

Land survey maps from the 1840s indicate that approximately 95% of this landscape existed historically as open, rolling prairie. The rest consisted of “timber” or “scattering timber” – savannas largely confined to area drainages.

Today, the land cover is roughly 84% grassland (mostly non-native brome and fescue pastures), 10% cropland and 4% forest and tree lines. Approximately half of the grasslands contain significant prairie vegetation that is restorable.

The West Fork of Big Creek flows through this landscape and is considered a high priority for prairie stream wildlife. Characteristic prairie fish include trout perch, black bullhead, orange-spotted sunfish and red shiner. The federally listed Topeka shiner occurred here historically; this fish is being considered for reintroduction into the watershed.

The Grand River Grasslands Conservation Opportunity Area (COA) supports several species of conservation concern, including northern prairie skinks, regal fritillary butterflies and prairie mound ants. Many important grassland birds (Henslow’s sparrows, dickcissels, boblinks, northern harriers) breed within this landscape, benefiting from prairie restoration projects at Dunn Ranch and Pawnee Prairie.

Grand River Grasslands Conservation Strategies:

- Restore prairies and improve grasslands on private lands.
- Reduce woody plant invasion.
- Increase structural habitat diversity by promoting grazing management and increasing prescribed burns.
- Control populations of problem exotic plants (e.g., Canada thistle, sericea lespedeza).
- Continue to expand and improve native seed nurseries.
- Establish a self-sustaining population of Topeka shiners in ponds.



Jim Rader, Missouri Department of Conservation

The Nature Conservancy and the Missouri Department of Conservation are partnering along with private landowners to build a 25,000-acre Grassland Coalition Focus Area in Harrison County.

Priority Research and Inventory Needs

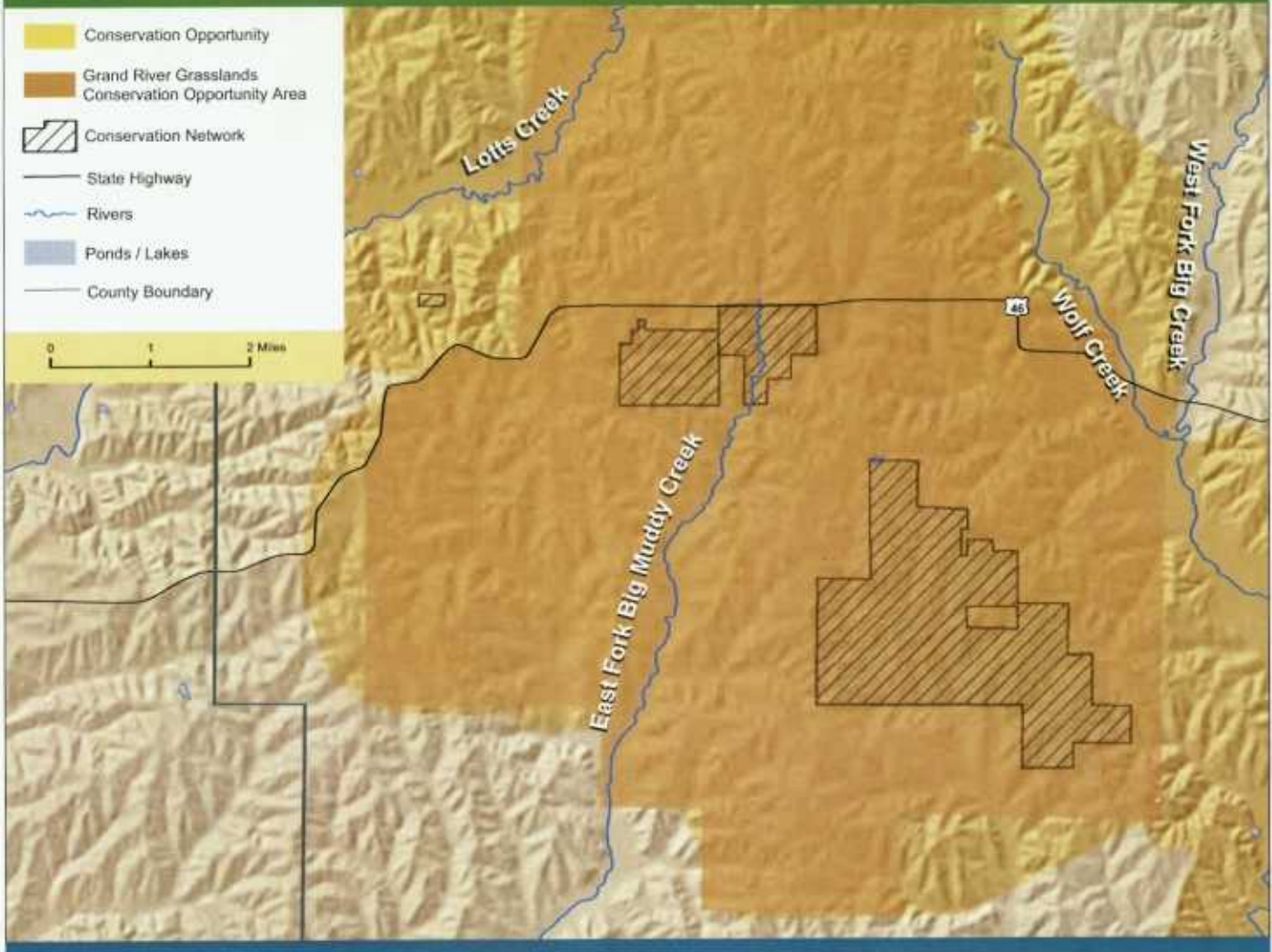
- Inventory remnant prairies and prairie indicator species.
- Determine the effectiveness of patch-burn grazing systems.
- Evaluate Topeka shiner introductions, if approved.
- Inventory amphibians, reptiles and insects.

Conservation Partners

Existing: The Nature Conservancy – Missouri Chapter (TNC); Grasslands Coalition; Missouri Conservation Heritage Foundation (MCHF); U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS); Natural Resources Conservation Service; Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC)

Potential: Audubon Missouri; National Wild Turkey Federation; Missouri Prairie Foundation; Quail Unlimited

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Jim Radert, Missouri Department of Conservation

Funding Sources

Existing: MDC annual budget; TNC annual budget; National Fish and Wildlife Foundation Grant; USFWS Partners for Fish and Wildlife; MCHF Grant

Promising Future Sources: MDC State Wildlife Grants; MDC Wildlife Diversity Fund; MDC Landowner Incentive Program

Existing Conservation Network

Audubon Missouri; National Wild Turkey Federation; Missouri Prairie Foundation; Quail Unlimited

The northern harrier is one of the few hawks that nest on the ground. With the destruction of native prairies, these birds nest only infrequently in Missouri.

Native Seed Nursery



In June 1999, volunteers from The Nature Conservancy and Missouri Department of Conservation planted thousands of native prairie plant seedlings at Pawnee Prairie to have a reliable source of seeds for future restoration projects. Since then, the native seed nursery has been expanded to include 35 species of native prairie plants.

Missouri Department of Conservation

Conservation Challenges

The Grand River Grasslands Conservation Opportunity Area represents a bi-state effort to conserve native tallgrass prairie at a landscape scale. Conservation partners on both sides of the Missouri-Iowa border are working to restore a functional tallgrass prairie landscape. Potential challenges to conservation success include lack of

baseline information on prairie remnants, lack of reliable land cover data, changing ownership patterns, limited staff time and the challenge of finding willing and interested private landowners to conduct fire management, convert fescue to native grasses and control exotic species.

To learn more about the Grand River Grasslands Conservation Opportunity Area, please contact:



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