

Manitoba Species at Risk

Mixed-grass Prairie



The Mixed-grass Prairie occupies the dry interior plains of Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba. It is the transitional belt separating the Shortgrass and the Tall-grass prairies. This “ecoregion” is highly adapted to, and even relies on, systematic disturbances from grazing, flooding and fires. Over thousands of years these variable conditions have led to the high levels of biodiversity and ecosystem resilience we see today.

Due to its relative suitability for crop and forage production, it is estimated that more than 75% of the Mixed-grass Prairie landscape has been lost. What remains is often degraded and fragmented but compatible activities such as grazing can retain and improve these habitats, while providing an economic benefit to producers. Once lost, this ecosystem is extremely challenging to restore and efforts should focus on the conservation of remaining areas.

Mixed-grass Prairie Range Map



* Range map based on potential range.

Beneficial Management Practices (BMPs)

- Retain large, un-fragmented patches of Mixed-grass Prairie
- Occasional controlled burning is highly recommended
- Haying or mowing can decrease woody growth
- Do not hay or mow before mid-July, to avoid disrupting ground nesting birds
- Utilize appropriate grazing to protect from woody growth encroachment
- Control invasive species through herbicide use, hand-clearing or other techniques like bio-control

Co-benefiting Species: Mixed-grass Prairie provides habitat to multiple SARs including Baird's Sparrows, Burrowing Owls, Loggerhead Shrikes, Ferruginous Hawks, and numerous other species.

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More about the Mixed-grass Prairie

Description

The Mixed-grass Prairie is characterized as a transitional grassland between the dry Shortgrass and mesic Tallgrass Prairies, with intermediate length of growing season, vegetative structure, and precipitation.

This area has an incredible diversity of species, with over 150 different plants, each adapted in its own way to the extreme temperatures, precipitation, and the effects of fire and grazing. Dominant grasses found here include blue grama, little bluestem, needle-and-thread grass, wheatgrass, and June grass.

Threats

Conversion of native grasslands for agricultural uses is a major threat facing Mixed-grass Prairie. Localized threats include habitat fragmentation, fire and flood control, encroachment of woody growth, over-grazing, and invasive species.

Outlook

As restoring native prairie is extremely challenging, there is a strong need to identify and conserve remaining native patches. Where this cannot be done, planting native species can help maintain biodiversity, prevent introduction of invasive plants, provide corridors for wildlife migration and maintain our natural heritage for future generations.

Producer Benefits

The Environmental Farm Plan (EFP) is a voluntary, confidential, self-assessment process, enabling farm managers to develop an action plan to address agri-environmental assets and risks in their operation. Completion of an EFP may qualify you for funding to implement BMPs on your land. For more information or to register, contact your local Manitoba Agriculture office.

Beyond the species benefits, BMPs can help your operation through:

- Access to on-farm programs and incentives
- Meet emerging market demands for sustainable sourcing
- Increased agricultural sustainability
- Greater resilience to events such as insect outbreaks, floods and droughts
- Better pest control and management
- Improved water quality, quantity and erosion control
- Improved pasture and forage

For more information regarding beneficial management practices on your land, please contact Manitoba Habitat Heritage Corporation or the organizations listed below.

FUN FACT

The extensive root reserve of native prairie plants allow them to regrow quickly after grazing or burning occurs.

Manitoba Habitat Heritage Corporation

www.mhhc.mb.ca

Conservation Data Centre

www.manitoba.ca/sd/cdc

Manitoba Agriculture

www.manitoba.ca/agriculture

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