



Grassland: Prairie

Source - IFMAP Michigan Land Cover dataset. Herbaceous openlands include warm season grass, poverty grass, cladonia, bracken fern, raspberry, and mixed upland herbaceous land cover types.

Grassland: Prairie

Description

Prairies are a type of natural grassland that is dominated by herbaceous plants. Trees are either absent or only widely scattered on the landscape (<5% canopy cover). There are many prairie communities that differ in plant composition due primarily to differences in soil moisture, hydrology, geology, landscape context, and frequency of disturbance. Prairies range from dry sandy prairies associated with savannas to wet prairies that are also ephemeral wetlands. Prairies are disturbance-dependent and must be maintained either by fire, seasonal inundation, or droughty soil conditions that are not amenable to tree growth. Without these frequent disturbances, prairies are invaded by trees or shrubs.

General Condition of Feature

Nearly half of the prairie in the Eastern Upper Peninsula is considered to be in fair condition and much of the remainder is considered good condition. About 20% of the prairie areas in the region are considered degraded.

Associated Natural Communities

N/A – no native natural communities

Associated Species of Greatest Conservation Need

AMPHIBIANS

- eastern tiger salamander (*Ambystoma tigrinum tigrinum*)
- pickerel frog (*Rana palustris*)
- northern leopard frog (*Rana pipiens*)

REPTILES

- western fox snake (*Elaphe vulpina*)
- smooth green snake (*Liochlorophis vernalis*)
- eastern massasauga (*Sistrurus catenatus catenatus*)
- Blanding's turtle (*Emydoidea blandingii*)

BIRDS

- Blue-winged Teal (*Anas discors*)
- Sharp-tailed Grouse (*Tympanuchus phasianellus*)
- Northern Bobwhite (*Colinus virginianus*)
- American Bittern (*Botaurus lentiginosus*)
- Northern Harrier (*Circus cyaneus*)

BIRDS cont.

- Upland Sandpiper (*Bartramia longicauda*)
- Short-eared Owl (*Asio flammeus*)
- Red-headed Woodpecker (*Melanerpes erythrocephalus*)
- Eastern Kingbird (*Tyrannus tyrannus*)
- Purple Martin (*Progne subis*)
- Sedge Wren (*Cistothorus platensis*)
- Prairie Warbler (*Dendroica discolor*)
- Field Sparrow (*Spizella pusilla*)
- Vesper Sparrow (*Pooecetes gramineus*)
- Savannah Sparrow (*Passerculus sandwichensis*)
- Henslow's Sparrow (*Ammodramus henslowii*)
- Dickcissel (*Spiza americana*)
- Bobolink (*Dolichonyx oryzivorus*)
- Eastern Meadowlark (*Sturnella magna*)

Associated Threats

OTHER

- Historic status/current abundance: This is not a prominent feature in the Eastern Upper Peninsula and was not historically.

Conservation Actions Needed [Threats addressed]

- No data available

Research and Survey Needs

- An inventory needs to be conducted to determine the location, condition, and classification of prairie remnants and of the opportunities for restoration.
- Test the assumption that remnants are widely dispersed and becoming more fragmented resulting in a loss of species diversity.
- Study the groundwater recharge capacity of prairie systems. High infiltration converts sheet flow to groundwater rather than increasing discharge into riparian systems. Determine the impacts on this dynamic and groundwater quality of the addition of pollution to prairies.
- Do structures like freeway corridors act as a substitute for prairie on the landscape?
- A better understanding is needed of the historical temporal distribution of fire and its influence.
- A better understanding is needed of the history of prairie sites. Many sites have been retained through cultural activities that foster maintenance of prairie features.
- Techniques need to be developed using remote sensing and physical inventorying to create digital data sources for use in research and planning.

Monitoring

- Track the total acreage of prairie in the ecoregion as well as its distribution across the landscape.
- Track changes in the floristic composition of prairies.