



Learn about Missouri's native grasslands at MDC's free Prairie Day event May 14 near El Dorado Springs

Wah'Kon-Tah Prairie will be in early summer bloom for wagon tours, prairie walks, and exhibits

El Dorado Springs, Mo. – Visitors can enjoy native grassland vistas and early-season wildflowers blooming when the Missouri Department of Conservation (MDC) hosts a free Prairie Day event from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Saturday, May 14, at the Wah'Kon-Tah Prairie Conservation Area near El Dorado Springs. MDC staff and partners will showcase the prairie's natural life and the role grasslands play in agriculture communities today.

Prairie Day will offer wagon tours, grazing demonstrations, a guided walk for bee surveys, conservation exhibits, presentations on grassland birds, and facts about grassland fire ecology. Activities will include target archery and atlatl. The St. Clair County Cattlemen's Association will provide concessions.

"People will enjoy speaking to experts about prairie ecology and management," said Krista Noel, MDC natural history biologist. "We can assist them with managing their own prairies and grassland watershed resources. Target archery and atlatl will provide a fun experience with the hunting tools used by Native Americans on prairies."

Co-hosts with MDC are The Nature Conservancy (TNC) and the Missouri River Bird Observatory. Much of the Wah'Kon-Tah Prairie is owned by TNC but managed by MDC. The partners will also host pre-arranged school groups on Friday, May 13, for Prairie Day educational activities.

"We will introduce visitors to the wonders of prairies, a now-rare natural resource," Noel said. "Prairies are unique with diverse grasses, wildflowers, and sedges. Those provide food and shelter for a wide variety of insects, mammals, birds, reptiles, and amphibians. The dense roots of prairie plants hold soil in place. When plants die the roots return organic matter to the soil. Organic matter helps soil absorb surface water and refurbish ground water. Prairie plants and roots also filter water and prevent runoff erosion that can harm streams."

Native grasslands once dominated northern and western Missouri. Today, less than half of one percent of the state's original unplowed tallgrass prairie remains. Those remnants are scattered. TNC and MDC properties at Wah'Kon-Tah preserve one of the state's largest contiguous native grasslands. Wah'Kon-Tah and MDC's Taberville Prairie Conservation Area are cornerstones for the Upper Osage Grasslands, a special native grassland focus area in partnership with private landowners. The goal is managing for healthy grasslands and prairie streams alongside profitable cattle grazing and crops.

Prairie Day is for all ages and requires no registration. Although organized activities end at 4 p.m., visitors are welcome to stay and enjoy the prairie.

For information about Prairie Day, call 417-876-5226. More information and a map for Wah'Kon-Tah Prairie Conservation Area are available at <https://short.mdc.mo.gov/Z94>. To learn about prairie in Missouri, visit <https://short.mdc.mo.gov/ZxM>.