



Supporting Biodiversity

Wetland and Prairie Habitat

Biodiversity refers to all of the animals, plants, fungi and microorganisms in an area. Diverse ecosystems are better able to withstand and recover from climate extremes, pests and disease.

Wetlands

occur in places with special water drainage and soil properties. They support groups of plants specially suited to saturated soil or standing water.



Biodiversity



Prairies

are characterized by a variety of grasses, wildflowers and some trees. Most of the prairie exists underground in the root systems of prairie plants.

Wetlands play a pivotal role in the lives of many birds, fish, amphibians and insects. Areas around wetlands provide breeding grounds, food and places to rest. Some animals spend their entire lives in wetlands.



Organisms



Prairie ecosystems are home to a wide array of organisms that are all connected. Insects are pollinators of prairie plants. In turn, they provide food for a prairie animals including birds, mammals and amphibians.

Wetlands collect and filter rain water, allowing pollutants to settle out before the water reaches lakes and streams. Pollutants are absorbed by wetland plants, such as cattails and water hyacinths.



Water and Fire



Prairies rely on fire to maintain species diversity. Prairie plants have extensive root systems that are unharmed and even invigorated by fire. If fires are suppressed, woods shade the sun-loving prairie plants.

Wetlands support plants and animals not found in other ecosystems. Wetlands accommodate and clean rainwater before it enters the water system. Without proper filtration, storm water can collect pollutants and run off into lakes and rivers.



Why is this important?



Prairies once covered about 40% of the US. Today less than 1% of the original prairie lands remain. Over 100 plant species can occur in a prairie of less than 5 acres. Some prairie plant roots extend 12 feet down, helping to purify rain water.

Photo: Indiangrass root and mural in Cerro Gordo County, courtesy of the Tallgrass Prairie Center