



IOWA CHAPTER

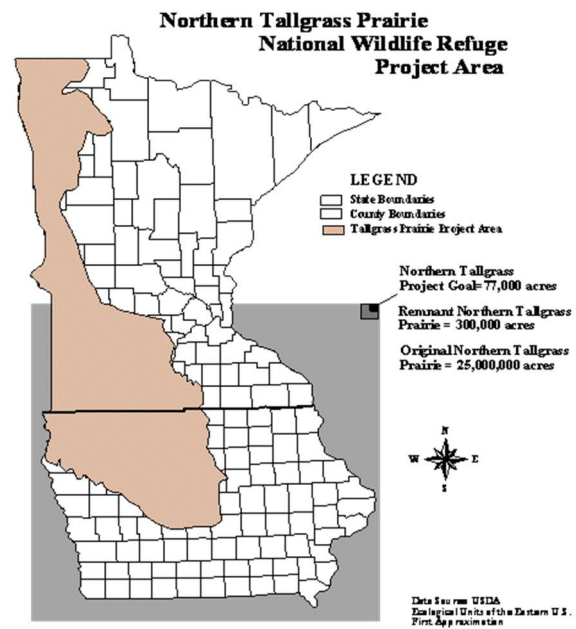
Northern Tallgrass Prairie National Wildlife Refuge . . . ground nesting birds, butterflies, grasses waving in the wind

Established in 2000, “the Northern Tallgrass Prairie National Wildlife Refuge was established to permanently protect and preserve existing remnants of the northern tallgrass prairie and to address the loss of America’s grasslands and the wildlife inhabiting the grasslands.”¹

“Scientists estimate the original tallgrass prairie in Minnesota and Iowa covered about 25 million acres. Now, there are only about 300,000 acres left in the two states.”²

“The tallgrass prairie ecosystem is dominated by native grasses that are often 3 - 6 feet tall. The prairie contains an immense variety of grasses and wildflowers, but the most dominant species defining the prairie are big bluestem, Indian grass and switch grass. The prairie landscape is mostly treeless. Due to the deep, rich, fertile soil that supports this expanse of grass, the prairie was easily transformed into crop land as it was settled.”³

The refuge is made up of parcels of land owned by the Fish and Wildlife Service and state and local government-owned land, as well as easements on private property. “These habitat easements protect existing grasslands and wetland complexes by restricting the landowners from draining wetlands or tilling or disturbing prairie. An easement functions as a privately



Map of the Northern Tallgrass Prairie National Wildlife Refuge Project Area; the project area is colored brown. Properties in the project area can be added to the wildlife refuge. Map is from the US Fish and Wildlife Service.

¹ Douglas Harr, Direct Testimony, In RE Dakota Access LLC, Docket HLP-2014-0001, Iowa Department of Commerce, Iowa Utilities Board, October 12, 2015, Exhibit Sierra Club-DH-1

² “Northern Tallgrass Prairie”, US Fish and Wildlife Service, https://www.fws.gov/refuge/northern_tallgrass_prairie/about_NWRS.html

³ “Northern Tallgrass Prairie”, US Fish and Wildlife Service, https://www.fws.gov/refuge/northern_tallgrass_prairie/wildlife_and_habitat/index.html

held wildlife refuge, where the landowner controls all other aspects of land use.”⁴ FWS will also work on restoration projects.

“Today, the refuge includes 49 parcels of land totaling over 5,000 acres. Forty-one units are protected through conservation easements, totaling nearly 2,500 acres. The eight units owned by the refuge system total nearly 3,000 acres; these parcels include two units in Iowa (352 acres) and seven units in Minnesota (2,451 acres).”⁵ “The Northern Tallgrass Prairie National Wildlife Refuge encompasses all or part of 85 counties in western Minnesota and northwestern Iowa. The refuge’s long-term goal is to protect 77,000 acres through conservation easements and government ownership.”⁶

Northern Harrier

The Northern Tallgrass prairie region is home to the northern harrier, a hawk that is on Iowa’s endangered species list. The male is gray while the female has brown and cream streaks. The face of the northern harrier resembles an owl. The northern harriers spend summers in the northern half of Iowa and also can be found in southern Iowa. The bird also migrates through Iowa. It particularly likes prairie marshes and wet prairies. It nests on the ground. When hunting for small mammals, insects, birds, amphibians and reptiles, it flies close to the ground.⁷ With increased interest in protecting the tallgrass prairies in Iowa, hopefully the northern harrier will have a chance to expand its population.



Illustration of northern harriers by Louis Agassiz Fuertes (1874-1927), artist, explorer, and natural scientist. Fuertes is considered by many to be America's greatest bird painter. Courtesy US Fish and Wildlife Service.

Regal Fritillary

The tallgrass prairie is also home to the regal fritillary butterfly. It is one of the largest butterflies found in Iowa, having a wingspan of four inches. As the prairies have disappeared across Iowa, so too has the regal fritillary. Efforts have been made to name this beautiful orange butterfly as the state

⁴ “Northern Tallgrass Prairie”, US Fish and Wildlife Service, www.fws.gov/refuge/northern_tallgrass_prairie/what_we_do/resource_management.html

⁵ “Northern Tallgrass Prairie”, US Fish and Wildlife Service, www.fws.gov/refuge/northern_tallgrass_prairie/about_NWRS.html

⁶ “Northern Tallgrass Prairie”, US Fish and Wildlife Service, www.fws.gov/refuge/northern_tallgrass_prairie/about_NWRS.html

⁷ “Northern harrier”, Iowa Department of Natural Resources.

Also see

“Northern Harrier”, Iowa IBA Education Initiative, Iowa Audubon

“Northern Harrier Identification”, Cornell Lab of Ornithology,

www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Northern_Harrier/id

“Northern Harrier”, Cornell Lab of Ornithology,

www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Northern_Harrier/overview

“Northern Harrier”, www.audubon.org/field-guide/bird/northern-harrier

butterfly.⁸ The regal fritillary is listed as a species of concern due to its dwindling population.⁹ Preservation, protection, and restoration of the native prairies will afford the regal fritillary the opportunity to continue living in Iowa.

Conclusion

Since the Europeans settled in Iowa, a significant amount of the state's natural area has vanished. The Resource Enhancement and Protection (REAP) law, adopted in 1989, summarizes the loss:

“The general assembly finds that:

1. The citizens of Iowa have built and sustained their society on Iowa's air, soils, waters, and rich diversity of life. The well-being and future of Iowa depend on these natural resources.

2. Many human activities have endangered Iowa's natural resources. The state of Iowa has lost ninety-nine and nine-tenths percent of its prairies, ninety-eight percent of its wetlands, eighty percent of its woodlands, fifty percent of its topsoils, and more than one hundred species of wildlife since settlement in the early 1800's. There has been a significant deterioration in the quality of Iowa's surface waters and groundwaters.

3. The long-term effects of Iowa's natural resource losses are not completely known or understood, but detrimental effects are already apparent. Prevention of further loss is therefore imperative.

4. The air, waters, soils, and biota of Iowa are interdependent and form a complex ecosystem. Iowans have the right to inherit this ecosystem in a sustainable condition, without severe or irreparable damage caused by human activities.”¹⁰

With the great loss of the prairies, it is important to protect, preserve, and restore the remaining prairies, wetlands, and wildlife in the Northern Tallgrass Prairie National Wildlife Refuge.

Sources

Douglas Harr, Direct Testimony, In RE Dakota Access LLC, Docket HLP-2014-0001, Iowa Department of Commerce, Iowa Utilities Board, October 12, 2015, Exhibit Sierra Club-DH-1

“Northern Tallgrass Prairie”, US Fish and Wildlife Service, www.fws.gov/refuge/northern_tallgrass_prairie/about_NWRS.html

Resource Enhancement and Protection (REAP) law, Iowa Code, Section 455A.15 Legislative findings



Blue vervain on Kalsow Prairie, Pocahontas County, Iowa



Grasses wave in the wind at Kalsow Prairie in Pocahontas County.

⁸ “Regal fritillary”, www.reimangardens.com/collections/insects/regal-fritillary/

⁹ Iowa Administrative Code, Section 77.1, (481B), “Endangered, threatened, and special concern animals”, www.legis.iowa.gov/docs/ACO/rule/571.77.2.pdf

¹⁰ Iowa Code, Section 455A.15 Legislative findings