



Photo by Lynn Betts, USDA, Natural Resources Conservation Service

Introduction:

Tall grass prairie was a prominent landscape type in all but eight of the 102 counties in Illinois. Prairies consisted of a diverse collection of native grasses and wildflowers and is the plant community responsible for the highly productive soils within Illinois. This job sheet will provide the information necessary to restore the plant species appropriate for your site and the management necessary for the prairies' health.

Species selection and sources:

Attached is a specification sheet with the grasses, forbs (wildflowers) and shrubs to be planted and the seeding rates for each species. These species have been selected for the specific type of prairie that is being restored and for the moisture and other characteristics of the site. Do not substitute species without making sure that it is an appropriate substitute. There are at least 5 grasses and 10 forbs to provide at least some of the diversity of the prairie type that is being restored. More species make it an even more diversified community closer to that of a native prairie.

Forb seed should originate from within a 100-mile radius of the site where possible. Commercial sources specializing in locally collected and propagated seed are listed in the publication *Prairie Establishment and*

Landscaping by William E. McClain, 1997. Technical Publication #2. Illinois Department of Natural Resources. An updated version of this list can be accessed at: <http://dnr.state.il.us/conservation/naturalheritage/prairie/append2.htm>.

Seedbed preparation and seeding:

Soil tests and supplemental fertility such as lime and fertilizer are not required for this practice. Seeding will be performed within the seeding dates listed on the attached specification sheet. It is recommended that the forbs be planted first during late fall and early winter when soil and air temperatures will remain cold enough to prevent germination. It is recommended that the grass component be seeded one year after the forb seeding using the no-till method. This allows the forbs to establish without competition from aggressive tall grass species.

Conventional seedings

Prepare a smooth, firm seedbed at a minimum depth of three inches using tillage methods most suited to the soils of the site. Place seed at a depth not to exceed two times the seed diameter, with a grassland drill equipped with a double disc opener, depth control mechanism, and seed covering device(s). Grain drills and cultipacker-type seeders are acceptable if the seed delivery mechanism is designed to handle the type of seed being planted.

No-till seedings for spring, and dormant seeding periods

Approved burndown herbicides shall be used to kill or suppress existing vegetation where necessary. A seed drill designed for no-till seedings will be used. No-till grain drills are acceptable if the seed delivery mechanism is designed to handle the type of seed being used.

Management recommendations:

The first growing season mow when necessary to control weeds. Keep mowing height above seedlings. After the first year, prairie communities are best managed by the use of prescribed fire. Prescribed burning may be conducted the first few years, if there is enough fuel to carry a fire, to stimulate the prairie plants and control weeds. After this period, prescribed burning can be conducted every three to four years. For wildlife considerations, divide the area into smaller management units and burn only 20 -30 percent of the area each year. Prescribed burning shall take place during the dormant season (late fall to early spring). Burn only with an approved burn plan. Use spot mowing or spraying to control noxious weed problems. Woody vegetation should be controlled and not allowed to shade out the prairie plants.