



Photos: Kansas Biological Survey

KU's Rockefeller Native Prairie supports more than 200 plant species and is the site for many research studies, including study of populations of the federally threatened Mead's milkweed (inset).

**A long-term prairie restoration study** began here in 1957 when former pastures and crop fields were sown to four prairie grasses. Seeded areas were assigned to one of four treatments:

- burning;
- mowing;
- grazing by cattle;
- no management (untreated).

Portions of these treatments are maintained, making this one of the longest-running experimental studies of prairie restoration in the region. The study has provided a unique opportunity to examine vegetation recovery, as well as the interaction of historic land use and management practices on prairie restoration and ecosystems.

**A major finding of this study** was that mowing or burning prevents trees from overtaking the prairie. While this information is well-known now, it was not known at the time the study was undertaken. The difference in the effects of the treatment is striking: Compare the prairie vegetation in the annually mown area (directly in front of you) with the thick red cedar and brush in the formerly grazed area to your right.

**Remember: Mowing or burning is needed to maintain the prairie ecosystem in this region.**

### Rockefeller Prairie Trail stations

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- 6 Soil erosion
- 7 The changing landscape



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Annual mowing maintains the prairie. Some of the best native prairies remaining in the region historically have been treated as hay meadows but with no fertilizer or herbicide application.



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This view of the southern part of the experimental area in 2004, just prior to removal of trees from the untreated tract (B), illustrates the effect of the various treatments over time. Note the lack of trees in the mowed (C) and burned (F) tracts compared to tracts that were grazed only (D), or that were untreated (B and E). The unplowed Rockefeller Native Prairie (A) was managed by springtime burns every one to three years from 1957 onward.