



Kansas Biological Survey

New shoots begin to emerge about a week after a prescribed burn.

Historically, fire was a major force shaping this landscape. Fire, interacting with climate, grazing and other factors, favored prairie in this region. Fire frequency during the past 500 years is estimated at once every three to five years, and fires could occur at any season. They resulted from lightning strikes and from the activities of Native Americans, who were known to have used fires for many reasons, including attracting animals to the tender vegetation that grew following a fire and thereby improving hunting success.

Prairie plants evolved with fire and adapted to it. Evidence of this is that these plants' growing points—their buds—are below the surface and protected from fire. Even if their above-ground parts are burned, they will grow again. Trees, on the other hand, have above-ground buds that are killed by fire.

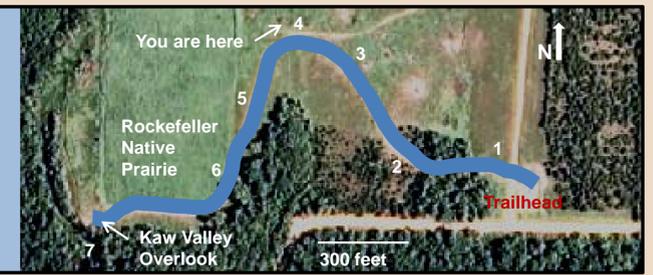
Animals of the prairie also evolved with fire. Their survival hinges on finding shelter below ground or fleeing. Depending on the time of year, mortality by fire can be high for certain species—yet burning is required to produce the habitat they need.

Euro-American settlers felt threatened by prairie fires. Fearing for their property, livestock and lives, they suppressed fires—and this led to major changes in the landscape.

Remember: The prairie ecosystem evolved with fire, and regular burning helps maintain a native prairie.

Rockefeller Prairie Trail stations

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- 3 Conservation and prairie restoration
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- 5 The Rockefeller Native Prairie
- 6 Soil erosion
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Fire shapes the landscape

From this vantage point (x), you can see different habitats resulting from fire management.

Fire managed:

- A. Unplowed (native) prairie
- B. Restoration prairie seeded in 1956
- C. Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) prairie seeded in 1988. (This government program was originally developed to protect topsoil from erosion, but it also provides benefits to wildlife.)

No recent fire:

- D. Oak/hickory forest (native)
- E. Successional woodland (developed on former prairie after burning and mowing ceased in 1948)



NAP



KU Field Station staff conduct a prescribed burn in a long-term prairie restoration project.



Research plots are visible just after the prescribed burn.

Photos: Kansas Biological Survey