

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

Great Plains Research: A Journal of Natural and
Social Sciences

Great Plains Studies, Center for

Spring 1998

Review of *Prairie Conservation: Preserving North America's Most Endangered Ecosystem* Edited by Fred B. Samson and Fritz L. Knopf

Walter H. Fick
Kansas State University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsresearch>



Part of the [Other International and Area Studies Commons](#)

Fick, Walter H., "Review of *Prairie Conservation: Preserving North America's Most Endangered Ecosystem* Edited by Fred B. Samson and Fritz L. Knopf" (1998). *Great Plains Research: A Journal of Natural and Social Sciences*. 374.

<https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsresearch/374>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Great Plains Studies, Center for at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Great Plains Research: A Journal of Natural and Social Sciences by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

Prairie Conservation: Preserving North America's Most Endangered Ecosystem. Edited by Fred B. Samson and Fritz L. Knopf. Washington, DC: Island Press, 1996. vii+339 pp. Tables, references, index. \$28.00 paper (ISBN 1-55963-428-6).

Prairie Conservation will interest anyone concerned about the current condition and preservation of grasslands, wetlands, and associated wildlife species in the Great Plains of North America. The book contains twenty chapters plus a summary by Paul G. Risser. Forty-four authors contributed to the book with over 700 literature citations. The well-written text is accompanied by forty-six figures and tables. A foreword by Nebraska Governor E. Benjamin Nelson discusses a program called the Great Plains Partnership (GPP), an experiment in environmental problem solving that will strive to bring all stakeholders together by working with and through private landowners.

The book is organized into four parts. Part 1, "Value in Prairie," consists of two chapters. The first provides a historical account of the Great Plains emphasizing how current agricultural production practices are less sustainable than practices of earlier cultures that used fire and adapted to the ecosystem around them. Periodic drought, depletion of the Ogallala aquifer, and the uncertain effects of global warming make the future of cultivated agriculture dim in many parts of the Great Plains. The author also emphasizes the declining population throughout much of the region and the removal of most of the tallgrass prairies and significant portions of the mixed

and shortgrass systems. The second chapter in this section discusses the economic value of the prairie, including how to assign non-use values to such considerations as aesthetics or cultural and sociological significance.

Part 2, "Prairie Ecology," consists of four chapters describing the tallgrass, mixed, and shortgrass prairies, as well as wetlands in the prairie region. The authors suggest that attempts to recreate pre-settlement conditions within single preserves are unlikely to be successful. Disturbances such as grazing, burning, and mowing are important tools in maintaining species diversity. The invasion of exotic species threatens the integrity of many habitats. Part 3, "Prairie Legacies," reviews the role of invertebrates, fish, amphibians and reptiles, birds, and mammals on the Great Plains. Although no North American prairie species have become extinct, several are threatened, endangered, or greatly reduced in number. The final section, "Prairie Conservation," discusses conservation planning programs in the US and Canada. These include the GPP already mentioned, Canada's Prairie Conservation Action Plan, the US Prairie Pothole Joint Venture, management of the national grasslands by the US Forest Service, and the Sandhill Management Plan. Chapter 20 focuses on the many challenges associated with conserving prairie grasslands, including governmental policies. The North American Waterfowl Management Plan, signed by the US, Canada, and Mexico, is a significant piece of legislation intended to improve wetland habitats and increase migratory waterfowl populations.

Individuals concerned about endangered and threatened species will undoubtedly enjoy reading *Prairie Conservation*, but much could be gained in understanding and insight by a broader readership. The authors all understand that developing partnerships with a number of participants is vital to conserving our prairie ecosystems. I found it refreshing to see so many recognize that any conservation effort in the Great Plains will depend on the support of private landowners. **Walter H. Fick**, *Crop, Soil, and Range Sciences, Kansas State University*.