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**Review of *The Elemental Prairie: Sixty Tallgrass Plants
(Watercolors and introduction)* by George Olson**

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The Elemental Prairie: Sixty Tallgrass Plants. Watercolors and introduction by George Olson. Essay by John Madson. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2005. 92 pp. Color plates. \$34.95 cloth.

The Elemental Prairie provides a general discussion of the Great Plains and the tallgrass prairie for the general reader. Its botanically accurate plant drawings render a beautiful and artistic view into prairie plants.

George Olson writes a compelling introduction about “Prairie Elements,” painting a graphic verbal description about his trip into the prairie with noted prairie author John Madson. The introduction draws readers into the book and prepares them for John Madson’s essay “The Running Country,” an eloquent portrayal of the history of the tallgrass prairie. We are led into the hearts and minds of the pioneers who crossed the immense expanse of the Great Plains. Madson’s descriptions of prairie plants help us visualize how the Great Plains looked prior to settlement, stirring us to see not only the allure of the prairies, but also the solitude and sometimes the loneliness. Madson mixes his personal experiences with current scientific theory of the formation of the prairies across the region, offering a way of seeing how the present fits into the past.

Both the introduction and Madson’s essay illuminate George Olson’s color plant drawings, which include such common tallgrass prairie plants as the Maximilian sunflower, purple coneflower, Ohio spiderwort, compass plant, common milkweed, stiff and tall goldenrods, Canada wildrye, prairie cordgrass, Indian grass, big bluestem, switchgrass, and pasture rose. It is not often that botanists or artists portray the beauty of prairie plants while still showing the individual characteristics accurately. Winter foliage drawings help readers connect with the plants year round.

A tantalizing view into the tallgrass prairie, this book would be a useful addition to any collection of prairie books dealing with early and current life in the Great Plains. **Misty Hays**, *USDA Forest Service, Douglas Ranger District, Wyoming.*