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**Review of *Valley of Grass: Tallgrass Prairie and Parkland of the Red River Valley Region* by Kim Alan Chapman, Adelheid Fischer, and Mary Kinsella Ziegenhagen**

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**Valley of Grass: Tallgrass Prairie and Parkland of the Red River Valley Region.** Kim Alan Chapman, Adelheid Fischer, and Mary Kinsella Ziegenhagen. St. Cloud, MN: North Star Press of St. Cloud, Inc., 1998. xi+122 pp. Illustrations, maps, photos, and references. \$14.95 paper (ISBN 0-87839-127-4).

A great deal has been made of the dire circumstances facing imperiled tallgrass ecosystems in the future—and with good reason. With more than 98 percent of all tallgrass and tallgrass savanna already converted to cultivated farmland and other nearly irreversible land uses, tallgrass ecosystems now teeter on the brink of total collapse. Into this bleak condition leap the authors of *Valley of Grass: Tallgrass Prairie and Parkland of the Red River Valley Region*. Remarkably, they strike a refreshingly non-confrontational, almost optimistic posture. Their thesis? That the restoration and rehabilitation of the tallgrass prairie and the continued use of its natural resources need not be in conflict but, instead, may be complementary. While this premise perhaps

seems overly idealistic, such a view of contemporary and future land use may be essential, if only because of the complicated political, economic, and social realities at play regarding the tallgrass of the Northern Plains.

The authors focus their attention on three clusters of tallgrass complexes in the Red River Valley of North Dakota, Minnesota, and southern Manitoba: the Sheyenne Delta, Agassiz Beach Ridges, and Tallgrass Aspen Parkland. These areas represent the best of what is left of the tallgrass of the Northern Plains and, to their credit, the authors provide a broad spectrum of information concerning these tallgrass ecosystems, including the inseparable social and economic implications of living with (or in opposition to) the natural challenges the tallgrass environment poses. The authors insinuate the social fabric of the Red River Valley region through a chorus of voices: biologists, botanists, ranchers, farmers, public land managers, resident Native Peoples, nature advocates, entrepreneurs. Through these voices the reader is introduced to a variety of perspectives concerning the tallgrass ecosystem and begins to recognize the complications of land use and preservation as overlaid by tradition, ethnic origin, and the expectations of a free-market system.

The authors represent this region as a “fertile crescent” of agriculture, which it is, but as a fragile biological system, too, one that may or may not hold a promise for the future, depending upon the land-use decisions made today. From gradual changes in farming practices to emerging economic diversification in the region (including ecotourism and native-seed production), from the need to conserve the soil and water to the impacts of metropolitan sprawl, the authors contend with a myriad of subjects for such a small volume.

Implied throughout the text is their advocacy of partnerships: between private landowners and governments, between businesses and environmental groups, between academia and municipalities, to list just a few combinations. The authors contend that the only real hope for the perpetuation of tallgrass communities is a continuous cooperative spirit in the search for tallgrass resurrection. Their implicit call for cooperation falls short only in their diplomatic tone. While their call to action in behalf of tallgrass is evident, its urgency is less than passionate.

*Valley of Grass* is a valuable resource for students of the tallgrass, regardless of their walk in life. It is, I believe, overall an accurate reflection of land use in the Red River Valley, which, I hope, leads to future conversation and partnership development in behalf of tallgrass prairies. Truly, the complexities of the tallgrass are as deep and rich as the dark black soils the

tallgrass produces. The authors introduce these complexities and indicate the significant challenges the people who live in the Red River Valley face in determining what the future of tallgrass really will be. **Tom Domek**, *Custer, South Dakota*.