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NORTH AMERICAN PRAIRIE CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS

17. Prairie Reverie: What Does the Word Prairie Mean in Postprairie Illinois?

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Abstract

The meaning of the word "prairie" seems to have changed in recent years, as the Silicon Prairie replaced the Silphium prairie. There are bewildering uses of prairie that have nothing to do with native grasslands. The word is often used in a generic way, such as calling farmland, a vacant lot, or other open space a prairie. It is frequently used evocatively, as in Lakewood Prairie, a subdivision without a lake, a wood, or a prairie; a shopping center with no prairie for miles around is called Prairie View. Oxymorons like prairie golf or prairie fishing are common. Prairie reverie is a thoughtful meditation on the disappearance of the tallgrass prairie.

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Meaning of PRAIRIE. What does PRAIRIE mean? Information and translations of PRAIRIE in the most comprehensive dictionary definitions resource on the web. Prairies are ecosystems considered part of the temperate grasslands, savannas, and shrublands biome by ecologists, based on similar temperate climates, moderate rainfall, and a composition of grasses, herbs, and shrubs, rather than trees, as the dominant vegetation type. Temperate grassland regions include the Pampas of Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay as well as the steppes of Eurasia. Lands typically referred to as "prairie" tend to be in North America. Within Illinois, several prairie restorations have been successful in establishing high biological, or at least botanical, diversity on formerly agricultural or degraded land. A good example is the Schulenberg Prairie at the Morton Arboretum in Lisle, which covers over 100 acres (40 hectares). Initially, volunteers were used extensively to grow plants from seed in a greenhouse, hand-plant the material on the site, and control non-native species. Even the best prairie restorations do not approach the species diversity of the original systems. Some new restorations are successful at recreating the prairie plant community but, most fall short of replicating the insect, small mammal and soil invertebrate communities. Some restorationists feel we will never reach that point.