

Natural Resources News - Prairie Restoration Projects

North Dakota State Parks have been doing prairie restoration for years, but it was only last year that restorations efforts were kicked into high gear. In 2009, North Dakota Parks and Recreation partnered up with ND Game and Fish Department to restore native prairies at 6 state parks including Fort Abraham Lincoln State Park, Cross Ranch, Fort Stevenson, Lake Sakakawea, Icelandic and Turtle River State Parks.

Many of the sites at the parks are small non-native or degraded grasslands which are dominated by crested wheatgrass, smooth brome grass and Kentucky bluegrass.



Fort Stevenson State Park



**Devils Lake State Park:
Grahams Island Prairie
Site - 2009**

Site preparation:

It usually takes over a year of rigorous weed control to get the sites ready for planting. Vegetation on the sites is usually removed through herbicide application – several applications of herbicide per year are often necessary to get the job done. Dead vegetation is often removed using prescribed fire.



Fort Lincoln State Park:

**Stables Prairie Site -
Pre-planting - 2010**



Lake Sakakawea State Park:

**JT North Prairie Site -
Pre-planting Prescribed
Burn - 2009**

Finally, when the sites are just about ready for planting they may be lightly disked and harrowed using a variety of different equipment.



Native seed mix:

High diversity native seed selection is based on individual site characteristics. The native seed mixture is obtained from local seed sources.

***Typical High
Diversity
Mixedgrass Prairie
Native Seed Mix***

Native Grasses

Big Bluestem
Little bluestem
Sideoats grama
Blue grama
Indiangrass
Green needle
grass
Western
wheatgrass
Needle-and-
thread grass

Native Flowers

Black-eyed Susan
Blanket flower
Blue flax
Yellow
coneflower
Rocky mountain
beeplant
Purple prairie
clover
Purple
coneflower
Wild bergamot
White prairie
clover
Heath aster
Ground plum
Dotted blazing
star
Large-flowered
beardtongue
Stiff goldenrod
Western
spiderwort
Heart-leaf golden
Alexander's
Lead plant



Western Spiderwort



Blue Flax



Western Spiderwort



Black-eyed Susan

Establishment and seeding:



**Fort Lincoln State
Park:
Stables Prairie Site -
First Year - August
2010 Blanket Flower**

Native seed is often hand broadcasted or seeded with a no-till drill. During the first two years, a planted prairie is usually flush with fast-growing, weeds and non-native species such as thistle, clover, wormwood and alfalfa. Hidden below the weed canopy, however, are seedlings of the slower-developing prairie plants.



**Fort Lincoln State Park:
Stables Prairie Site -
First Year - August 2010**



**Fort Stevenson State Park:
Nelson Prairie Site -
Second Year - August 2010**



**Fort Stevenson State
Park:
Nelson Prairie Site -
Second Year - June 2010**

By the third year after planting, prairie grasses and wildflowers begin to out-compete and replace the weedy species. Mowing once in the year of planting helps to reduce competition for sunlight and speed development of certain prairie plants. Once established park staff manages the prairie with a

combination of prescribed fire and mowing. Prairie restoration is quickly becoming an important conservation tool in North Dakota State Parks. The planted prairies are beautiful, and provide plant and animal habitat, soil protection and recreational opportunities. And those involved in planting new prairies - including park staff, visitors and volunteers - take great pleasure in knowing they help recreate natural landscapes that have almost disappeared.

