

TALLGRASS

O N T A R I O

Ontario Tallgrass Prairie and Savanna Association

PRINCIPLE #5

FOR THE MANAGEMENT OF TALLGRASS PRAIRIE AND SAVANNAH FRAGMENTS IN SOUTHERN ONTARIO

Tallgrass Ontario (TGO) has created a series of six principles to offer support to the landowner in southern Ontario who wishes to maintain and enhance their tallgrass habitat, and are derived from the experiences of tallgrass habitat managers from across the eastern portion of North America. These principles apply to all the various tallgrass habitats in southern Ontario including prairies, savannahs, woodlands, and most types of alvars. More information on what, exactly, constitutes tallgrass habitats is provided on the TGO website. In addition, please refer to the Further Readings section appended to these principles.

Landowners are excellent caretakers and stewards of our natural environments. The day-to-day observations of landowners are one of the most important ways that our knowledge of how to successfully manage habitats will increase.

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ON THE USE OF MUSCLES AND CHEMICALS



As mentioned in the previous section, one of the types of disturbance that kept healthy prairies on the landscape was low nutrient levels in the soil. It follows, then, that prairies should not receive any type of fertilizers, either purposefully, or inadvertently through run-off from adjacent fields or overspray. This is vital for your prairie, because the tallgrass species can only out-compete non-tallgrass species in the absence of nutrients, but will be out-competed themselves in the presence of extra nutrients. This situation has to do with the marvellous adaptations that tallgrass species have developed in order to succeed in this environment.

Caution is advisable with any type of chemical assistance in prairies. There are times, for instance, when a tool like Round-up™ is very useful for helping to eradicate shrubs and brush from a patch of prairie that simply cannot be burned, trampled, flooded, etc. But the herbicide should be carefully applied to individual woody plants after a little judicious

chainsaw use, as opposed to being widely broadcast. In the event that a portion of the prairie has been invaded by a weed, it may be the case that a herbicide could be broadcast; just remember that in many such situations in the United States and Australia where grassland management benefits from much more research support than what we have here in Canada, managers now resort to muscle power instead of chemicals, offering employment to local youth and environmental and agricultural groups, as opposed to taking a chance with unpredictable chemicals. When in doubt, use caution! You may also want to get in touch with TGO to see if we have any volunteers who could come out and give you a hand.

Similar caution needs to be exercised around the use of pesticides, as well. Prairie plants are heavily reliant upon prairie animals for such things as pollination, soil aeration, decomposition and the creation of organic soil matter, seed dispersal, etc., and pesticides can disrupt this complex system easily. Be judicious in your use. If you are truly concerned about keeping the impact of animals down, consider the fact that several studies have now documented that feral and domesticated cats and dogs have a dramatic, large, and negative impact on wild populations of birds, reptiles, small mammals, and amphibians. Keeping cats and dogs neutered, spayed, and contained within a yard goes a long way towards supporting the fauna of your prairie.

all line drawings by Judie Shore

FURTHER READING



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