

## Tallgrass Ontario's New Executive Director

June 15<sup>th</sup>, 2024

Dear Tallgrass Ontario Supporters,

I am very happy and grateful for the opportunity to introduce myself as the new Executive Director of Tallgrass Ontario.

When I think back on my most vivid memories of times where I felt grounded to the earth and felt connected with the present, most of those moments included being in nature. In fact, most of my memories associated with appreciating beauty, being astonished by the complexity of the world, and being connected with something mystical are all associated with times when I was imbedded in nature. These experiences strongly influenced my career.

Early on in my career, when I was the Superintendent of the Hullett Provincial Wildlife Area, I spent many spring mornings walking through 30 acres of tallgrass prairie that were planted by Ducks Unlimited. The adjacent (non-tallgrass) fallow fields were flattened by the winter snow, while the tallgrass prairie, containing big bluestem, Indiangrass, switchgrass, and other grasses maintained much of their vertical structure. The ducks would capitalize on these vertical grassy tufts for early nesting, and I would inevitably push up a bird or two during my explorations.

Tallgrass prairies, oak savannahs, and other tallgrass communities hold a special magical place in my heart. At one point in my career, part of my job was to assess habitats occurring in old abandoned aggregate properties, some of which had experienced ecological restoration and some which had naturalized on their own. Even before becoming adept at recognizing and identifying tallgrass species (which I am still working on), I would occasionally walk into tallgrass habitat, rather than a field filled mostly with non-native grasses, and I could intuitively feel the difference and knew that I was entering something truly special.

I have worked in the environmental field managing nonprofit organizations and programs since 2000. During that time, three of my jobs have included the management and/or restoration of tallgrass communities, in which I was very dependent on guidance, wisdom, and support from Tallgrass Ontario. This led me to becoming a lifelong member in 2011 (which I urge you to do as well). Since then, I have been reading the Bluestem Banner, attended some Annual General Meetings, and continued to benefit from the efforts of the volunteer Board Members and supporters (you know who you are).

In 2022, I was fortunate to be able to take on a larger volunteer role supporting the Board of Directors, which led to me being able to coordinate the updating of the TgO Strategic Plan. This led to additional conversations about whether there might be a larger role for me to assist in the implementation of that strategic plan, which was a challenge that I was very happy to accept.

I have had many wonderful experiences serving on various habitat-based Boards and Committees, including being a founding member of the Niagara Land Trust. My career took me on many interesting turns and twists, including a returning to school to acquire my Masters, where I studied organizational behaviour, human resources, and business strategy.

The strategic planning process revealed that the Tallgrass Ontario Board of Directors is very interested in expanding their logistical, financial, and organizational capacity to better support tallgrass communities in Ontario, which led to them hiring me for this position. I look forward to working with you all and supporting the Board of Directors in various capacities to help achieve that vision.

