

LESSONS LEARNED THROUGH THE GRASSLAND RESTORATION NETWORK; 2003-2010

***CHRIS HELZER, THE NATURE CONSERVANCY, EASTERN NEBRASKA PROJECT OFFICE, P.O. BOX 438, AURORA, NE 68818**

***BILL KLEIMAN, THE NATURE CONSERVANCY, NACHUSA GRASSLANDS, 2055 LOWDEN ROAD, FRANKLIN GROVE, IL, 61031**

CHIP O'LEARY, THE NATURE CONSERVANCY, KANKAKEE SANDS FIELD OFFICE, 3294 NORTH HIGHWAY 41, MOROCCO, IN 47963

BILL GLASS, MIDWIN NATIONAL TALLGRASS PRAIRIE, U.S. FOREST SERVICE, 30239 S. STATE ROUTE 53, WILMINGTON, IL, 60481

Abstract: The Grassland Restoration Network was formed in 2003 by The Nature Conservancy, along with many other partners. The original goals were to share expertise and experiences between prairie restoration sites across the country, and to work together on shared challenges. Staff from those project sites, along with many other participants, have worked toward those goals through annual workshops and targeted peer review sessions. Considerable time has been spent defining the role of prairie restoration as a tool for restoring ecological function, and exploring ways to evaluate success in that regard. In addition, many discussions have focused on the kinds of techniques used by the diverse group of participants to establish prairie communities. Those techniques include harvesting, cleaning, storing, and planting seeds, propagating plants in nurseries, and both short- and long-term management of restored prairies. In some cases, participants have found that methods such as dormant-season broadcast seeding are universally successful across all or most sites. In contrast, seeding rates that lead to successful prairie community establishment seem to be driven largely by unique local conditions. After eight years of existence, the Grassland Restoration Network has successfully built collaboration, shared experiences and expertise among project sites, and is investing in research projects to further build our shared knowledge about prairie restoration.