

SAND PRAIRIE ECOLOGY AND RESTORATION ON ARMY LANDS: A PRIMER FOR LAND MANAGERS

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Abstract: Sand or “dry” prairies in this region were once common on the broad sand terraces bordering the Mississippi, Wisconsin, Black, and Chippewa Rivers, as well as in areas of central Wisconsin known as the “Sand Counties.” Conversion of these areas by European settlement to farms and cities and the suppression of fire have reduced this community to a relic of its past extent.

Army lands in this region comprise more than 80,000 acres of sand prairies and the unique ecology of this ecosystem gives managers the opportunity to restore this vegetation community.

Sand prairie restorations have been used by the Army Corps of Engineers to create habitat on a water control embankment near Genoa, WI and adjacent to a water control embankment near Alma, WI; reclaim lands used for disposal of materials dredged from the Mississippi River navigation channel; and provide cover on a closed landfill at Fort McCoy, WI. The largest restoration (131 acres) is located near Kellogg, MN and is currently in its fourth growing season. Part of a sand prairie complex known as Weaver Dunes, this restoration was created on fallow farmland where more than 1 million cubic yards of dredged materials were hydraulically placed. A diverse blend of locally collected and purchased seed was planted into soil containing an already diverse seed bank of native sand prairie species.