

## **FROM INSPIRATION TO RESTORATION: REPORT ON THE FIRST SIX YEARS OF THE RICE LAKE PLAINS JOINT INITIATIVE**

\*TODD FARRELL, Nature Conservancy of Canada, 18 Second Avenue Uxbridge, ON

MARK STABB, Nature Conservancy of Canada, 18 Second Avenue Uxbridge, ON

*Abstract:* The dry rolling hills of the Rice Lake Plains, at the eastern end of the Oak Ridges Moraine in Central Ontario, were historically a 17,000 ha – 30,000 ha tallgrass prairie landscape. Fire suppression, conifer plantations and, increasingly, invasive species have changed and degraded the now globally rare black oak savanna and other significant tallgrass habitats of this region. The Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC) began investing in conservation of the Rice Lake Plains in 2001, with the goals of protecting and restoring multi-property tracts of tallgrass prairie. Inspired by the active tallgrass prairie management of the 45 ha Alderville First Nation Black Oak Savanna and the Red Cloud Cemetery Prairie, NCC forged the multi-partner Rice Lake Plains Joint Initiative in 2002 to raise awareness and to collaboratively work on a landscape-scale to restore tallgrass habitats. A Natural Area Conservation Plan was created, which helped prioritize and guide initial land securement, early inventory, restoration and communications actions. Due to the partnership, over 3,000 ha have been evaluated, 536 ha have been secured, and over 150 ha have had prescribed burns. Private landowners are getting involved and awareness has been raised about tallgrass prairie birds, plants and snakes and things they can do on their property. There have been bumps and challenges, as partners and the local community respond, adapt and rise to the possibilities and realities of tallgrass restoration. To date the partnership has grown to 7 groups and momentum continues to build to help revitalize this globally rare ecosystem.