

RIPARIAN FOREST ASSOCIATED WITH TALL-GRASS PRAIRIE: SPECIES COMPOSITION AND DISTRIBUTION ALONG THE MISSOURI RIVER OF CENTRAL NEBRASKA

*THOMAS L. FREEMAN, Department of Biology, Division of Arts and Sciences, College of St. Mary, Omaha, NE 68106, USA

Abstract: Forest is often found between natural prairie remnants, or prairie restorations, and the river. These riparian habitats likely play important roles for control of erosion, maximizing diversity through “edge effect”, providing nesting sites for birds and other cavity dwellers, and cover resources for animals. In addition, prairie-associated forests add to the recreational quality of many sites by providing shade, opportunities for game hunting and morel habitat for mushroom collectors. This study will present preliminary analysis of plant species and distribution in forest adjacent to the Missouri river in Nebraska. Both belt- and distance- type methodology were utilized to characterize the woody vegetation, while line intercept methods have been used for ground cover and other vegetation measurements. The size distribution of trees will be measured, and when possible the age estimated from regression analysis correlating diameter to the number of annual rings found in naturally felled trees. In addition, the selection of trees by beaver (*Castor canadensis*) will be evaluated with regard to species and age at time of felling in an effort to predict how tree diversity and distribution will change in these forests with a hypothesized, but largely anecdotal, increase in beaver activity at the study sites.