

## **PRAIRIE WINDOW PROJECT: PUBLIC EDUCATION THROUGH PRAIRIE RESTORATION AND CONSERVATION IN SC KANSAS**

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*Abstract:* An abundance of remnant prairie in the Flint Hills is a treasure for Kansas. Outside of the Flint Hills, however, the loss of prairie through conversion to cropland, native and exotic woody plant encroachment, and over-grazing is alarming. Perhaps due to the fact that Kansas still has vast prairie resources remaining, there are very few concerted efforts in the state being put towards prairie restoration and conservation. The Prairie Window Project is beginning to make a difference in SC Kansas where prairie restoration and conservation are badly needed, but where expertise and local ecotypes of seed have largely been unavailable. Since 2004, staff efforts have been put into restoring diverse, local ecotype prairie and seed nurseries at the Dyck Arboretum of the Plains, and networking with nearly 70 local prairie remnant landowners to study prairie, collect seed, and help conduct management. The Prairie Window Project has generated information and data sets through quantitative photo-monitoring, Floristic Quality Assessments on remnants, quantitative sampling of bird and butterfly populations on remnants, and quantitative sampling of vegetation on restoration plots. A number of prairie educational outlets have also been generated or sustained through the Project including prairie exploration field trips throughout the growing season, day-long conferences, a winter lecture series, a landowner dinner, Prairie Window newsletter, Jr. Prairie Explorers Series for 2-5 year olds, Samplemania! Prairie Exploration Series for 6-11 year olds, and establishment of a regional facilitating center for Earth Partnership for Schools.