

From Bison to Bread: The American Prairie

Study Units

[Iowa's Wildlife Resource Base](#); [Iowa's Wildlife Habitats](#); [Wildlife Management](#); [People and Wildlife](#)

Supplemental Information

See the information in [Iowa's Wildlife Resource Base](#) about early explorers' and settlers' views of Iowa. [Iowa's Wildlife Habitats](#) discusses changes in the landscape and impacts on Iowa's prairies and savannas. [Wildlife Management](#) discusses habitat restoration and management.

The supplemented activities, [Changing the Land](#), [Fire Ecologies](#), and [Prairie Memoirs](#), also have useful supplemental information for this activity.

Teaching Suggestions

Check the [Natural Resources Conservation Service \(NRCS\)](#) web page for a map depicting where prairie was the historic land cover.

Have students find one or more benefits (to people) provided by each plant or animal in their investigations of prairie plant and animal species—a present, known benefit or a possible future benefit. For example, many prairie plants are adapted to our climate and for surviving fire. Could their genes be valuable in future plant breeding or for medicines? Is it important to preserve a diversity of prairie plants for their potential future benefits to humans?

Webs of life become obvious when you study prairies. Eliminating even one element in a prairie system can have a “ripple effect.” Have students list at least one other plant or animal on which their research subject depends for survival and hypothesize what would happen if that plant or animal disappeared. For example, great fritillary butterflies depend on prairie violets for survival – adults lay eggs exclusively on that species and caterpillars feed on them.

Many native prairie remnants still exist in Iowa in pioneer cemeteries. Team with a history teacher and take a field trip to one of these pieces of Iowa's past. Contact your [county conservation board](#) or [Iowa Department of Natural Resources \(DNR\) wildlife management biologist](#) to locate possible prairie sites in your area.

Evaluation

See the activity.

Student Materials

None

Teacher Aids

None



Additional Materials

- See the references listed for [Iowa's Wildlife Resource Base](#) for information about various groups of animals.
- [Prairie Voices: An Iowa Heritage Curriculum](#) from The State Historical Society of Iowa
- [Natural Resources Conservation Service \(NRCS\)](#) for national resources inventory information and maps showing land use change

