

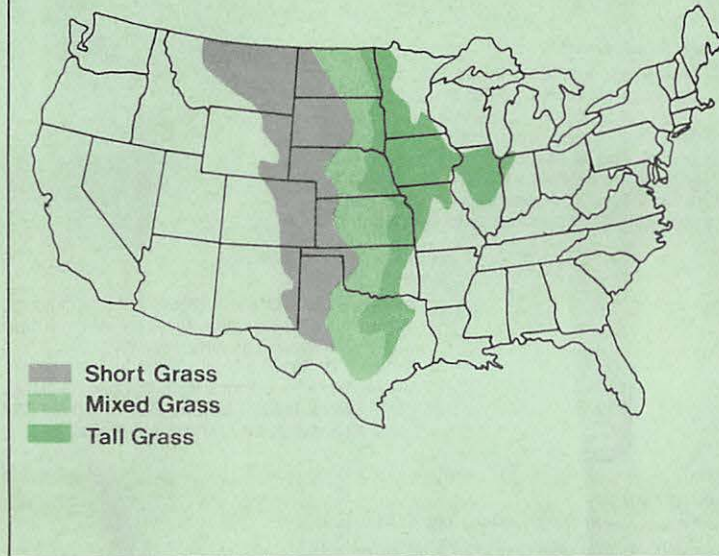
Some of the tallgrasses will grow to a height of 8 to 10 feet, and because of the abundant root system (often running as deep as the grass is tall), the plant can survive drought, fire and grazing.

Early explorers saw different visions when they looked at the prairie. In 1841, George Catlin saw "some of the most beautiful and sublime scenes to be witnessed in the country." Five years later, Susan Shellby McGoffin wrote "to the west is a wide expanse of prairie, as far as the eye can reach, nothing but a wavering sea of tallgrass is to be seen."

But Major Stephen Long had written in 1819, "In regard to this extensive section of country, I do not hesitate in giving the opinion that it is almost wholly unfit for civilization and of course uninhabitable by a people depending on agriculture for their subsistence."

Nevertheless, before settlement overran the prairie, it was a romantic land of tall grass and beautiful wildflowers that stretched from the deciduous forests of the East to the Rocky Mountains in the West.

## MID-CONTINENT PRAIRIES



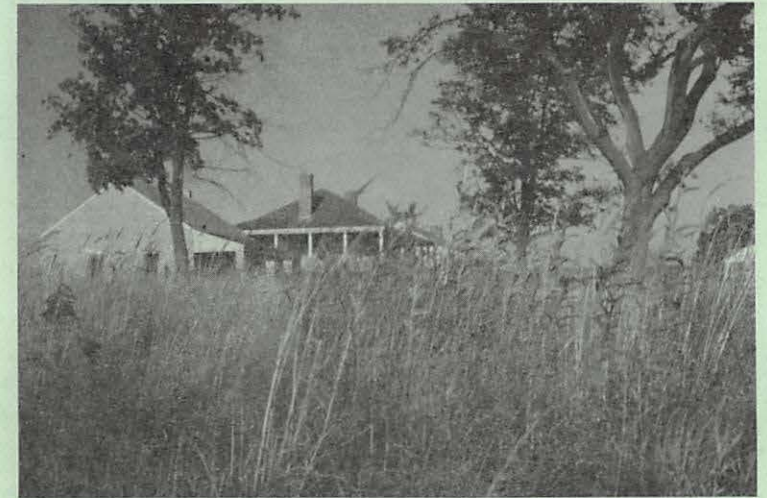
Corresponding with a decrease in rainfall from east to west, the grasslands of central North America divide into tallgrass, mixed-grass and short-grass prairies.

The tallgrass prairie extends from eastern Kansas well into Missouri, dominated by Big Blue Stem, Little Blue Stem and Indian Grass. The short grass prairie extends from the Rockies to the western edge of Kansas and is dominated by medium-sized grasses such as Side Oats Gramma, and short grasses, Buffalo Grass and Blue Gramma Grass.

Although only two percent of a once-vast sea of grass remains, one can still experience some of the awesomeness and grandeur of the prairie. The largest remnants of tallgrass prairie are found in the Kansas Flint Hills and in North Central Oklahoma, but native prairie areas survive in various state parks and private preserves, along roadsides and in pastures. Although there is growing interest in preserving one large area as a national prairie park or preserve, Congressional action is necessary to establish any new unit of the National Park System.

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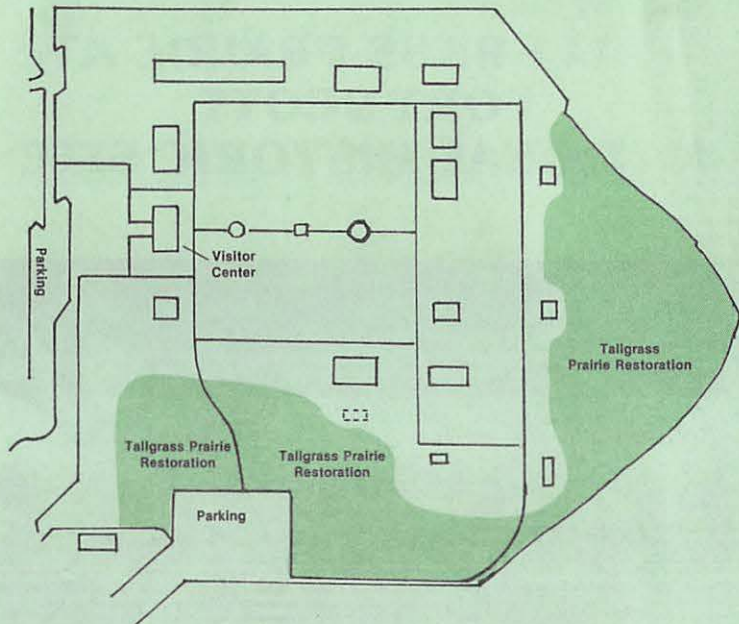
## Exploring the TALLGRASS PRAIRIE AT FORT SCOTT NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE



A scarcity of trees led early explorers like Zebulon Pike to assume that the tallgrass prairie land was barren and unsuitable for agriculture calling it the "Great American Desert." When Andrew Jackson decided for this and other reasons that the tallgrass prairie would be used to relocate Indians from the Eastern United States, Fort Scott was established as one of a chain of military forts along "The Permanent Indian Frontier."

In 1852, Assistant Surgeon Joseph K. Barnes, wrote concerning the medical topography of Fort Scott: "the immediate site of the post is a flat spur of high prairie, running from south to north, bounded on the northwest by the Marmion (sic.) River, and on the northeast by a small, clear-water creek, joining the Marmion within a short distance of the spur. This plateau opens out rapidly to the south in a beautifully undulating prairie; while to the west, north and east, it terminated abruptly in an almost precipitous descent of fifty feet to the river and creek bottoms."





You are invited to explore the prairie areas identified on the map above. Please do not pick flowers or other specimens so others may also enjoy them.

The unique ecosystem that is the tallgrass prairie once covered 250 million acres from Canada to Texas and from Indiana across Kansas. However, population and urban development, overgrazing and crop-farming have left only two percent of the original acreage, most of it bordering roadsides or thriving on land unsuitable for cultivation.

Because the tallgrass prairies were an integral part of the Indian Frontier and pioneer life during the 1800's, the National Park Service has restored five acres of prairie as part of Fort Scott National Historic Site. Containing both tall and short grasses and some of the prairie wildflowers, this acreage is another opportunity for visitors to the historic site to encounter the unique beauty that was Fort Scott in the 1840's. This brochure offers descriptions to help you identify some of the most prominent grasses and wildflowers in a mixed prairie area.

## GRASSES

### Big Blue Stem

The tallest of all the grasses, reaching 3 to 8 feet tall, Big Blue Stem is one of the most important. It is sometimes called "turkey foot" bluestem because the seed head branches into 3 parts resembling a turkey foot. Growth begins in early April and seed stalks appear from late August to October.



### Little Blue Stem

This grass, identified by its flat, bluish-colored basal shoots and leaf blades that tend to fold, has a very dense root system 5 to 8 feet in depth. It is the most widely distributed of the perennial grasses and at one time was the most abundant grass in the midlands of America. Growth begins in early April with seed stalks from 2 to 5 feet tall appearing from late August to October.



### Switch Grass

Switch Grass is a warm season, sod-forming tall grass with vigorous roots. It has rather large seed with a sprangled-type seed head on stalks 3 to 6 feet tall. Its green to bluish-green leaves are usually from 1/4 to 1/2 inch wide and 6 to 18 inches long. Switch Grass provides excellent protective cover and stands well throughout the winter.



### Indian Grass

A native warm season grass, Indian Grass is identifiable by its golden, plume-like seedhead 4 to 12 inches long on stems 4 to 8 feet tall. Like Big Blue Stem, it may form patches of sod and occur in bunches, but it is readily distinguished from Big Blue by its slightly more erect habit of growth.



### Side Oats Gramma

This grass gets its name from the small oat-like seeds that hang down uniformly on one side of the seed stem. It is a native, warm season perennial mid grass, beginning growth in early April with seed stalks 18 to 36 inches tall from July to September. It has excellent nesting value and is used by a variety of birds and small animals.



### Blue Gramma Grass

Blue Gramma is a native perennial warm season short grass with narrow leaves 3 to 6 inches long. The identifiable trait of this grass is the seed head which, when mature, will usually bend into a curve resembling a human eyebrow. Often referred to as the "Queen of the Prairie," it is found growing throughout the Great Plains.



### Buffalo Grass

This native short grass seldom grows more than 5 inches tall and is usually found growing with Blue Gramma Grass in the drier part of the Great Plains. It provides an excellent ground cover and produces seed throughout the year. At Fort Scott, the parade ground and areas around the post hospital are seeded with Buffalo Grass.



## WILDFLOWERS AND FORBS

### Western Yarrow

Common to the open plains and prairies throughout the Central United States, yarrows have erect stems covered with silky hairs branching 15 to 30 inches tall. Dull green leaves alternate and are fern-like in appearance. Flat-topped clusters of grayish-white small flowers appear May through July. Western Yarrow has a spicy aroma and has been used as medicine for curing minor disorders such as influenza, gout, indigestion, spider bites and wounds.



### Daisy Fleabane

Daisy Fleabane starts growth in early spring, reaching a height of 1 to 3 feet. With yarrow, it is one of the first forbs to bloom in the spring and is easily identified by its many small daisylike flowers. The yellow disk centers are fringed with numerous small white petals. Its common name derives from a European belief that the plant would keep fleas away.



### Pitcher's Sage

Pitcher's Sage is easily identified by its square stem and alternate opposite leaves with azure blue, two-lipped flowers that sometimes appear as early as May. While the plant has glands on its leaves, their secretions are not as fragrant as garden sage or other species. It is abundant in all three Fort Scott prairie units and in front of the officers' quarters.



### Maximilian Sunflower

This member of the sunflower family grows upright, singly or in a close cluster with stems 3 to 6 feet tall. It can be identified by 4 to 6 inch, narrow, trough-shaped leaves which taper at both ends, have a rough upper surface and curve downward. Indians ate the tuberous root cooked or raw. On the grounds of Fort Scott, look for this flower growing in clusters in all 3 prairie units, in front of and in the backyards of the officers' quarters.



### Western Salsify

This yellowish flower is abundant throughout the prairie blooming in June and July. The mature head of this plant resembles a giant dandelion. The roots of the salsify plant have the flavor of oysters while the juice has been used for chewing gum and for treating indigestion.



### Upright Prairie Coneflower

This forb grows from 1 to 2 feet high and its slender hairy stems branch from the base. It is identified by its drooping bright yellow flowers located at the base of a brown cone, or central disk. The disk is 1 inch or more in length and 1/3 to 1/4 inch thick. The leaves and flowers can be used to brew a pleasant tea. Prairie coneflowers can be found in prairie units A and B blooming May through July.

