

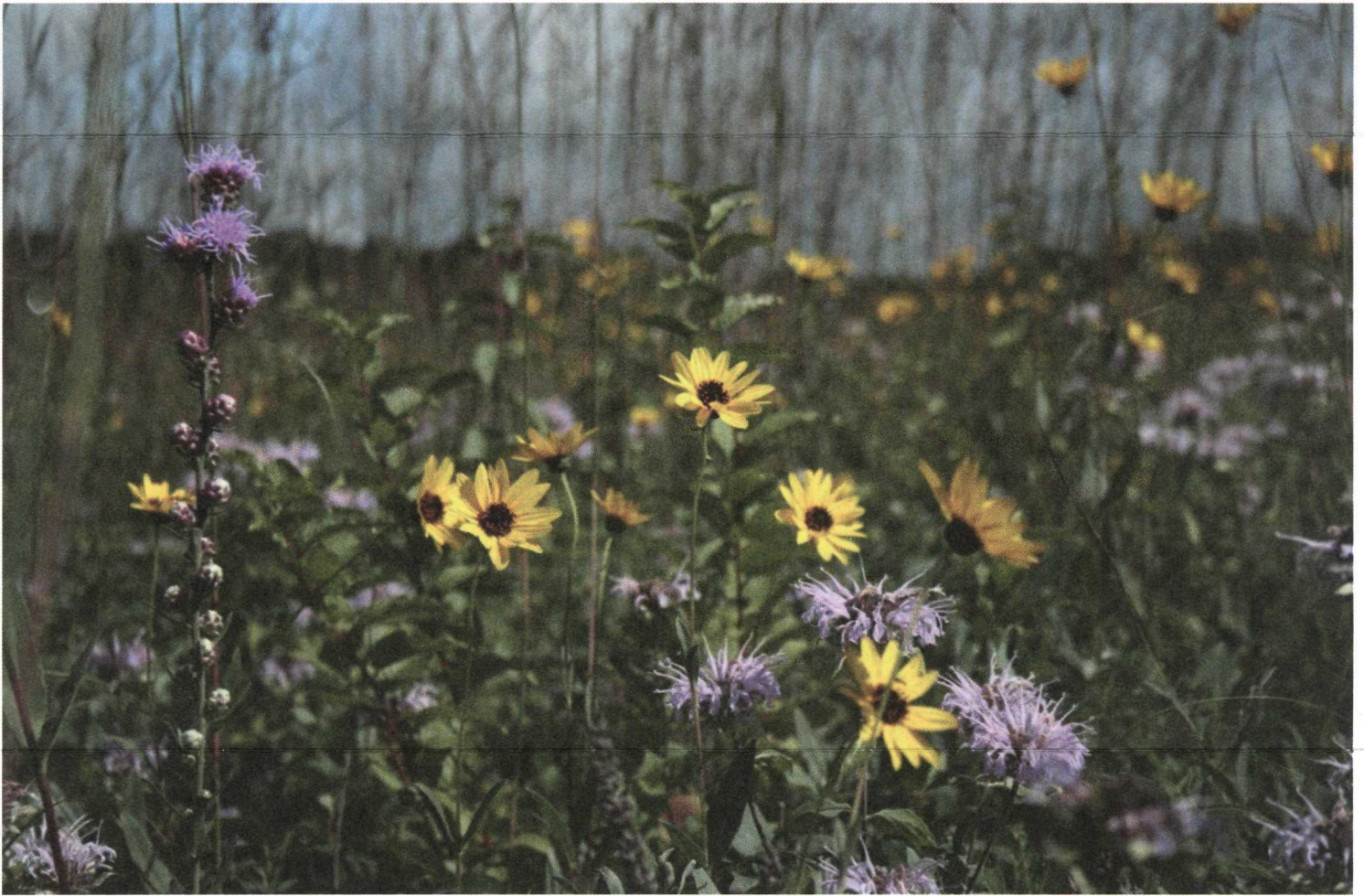
Pipestone

National Monument
Minnesota

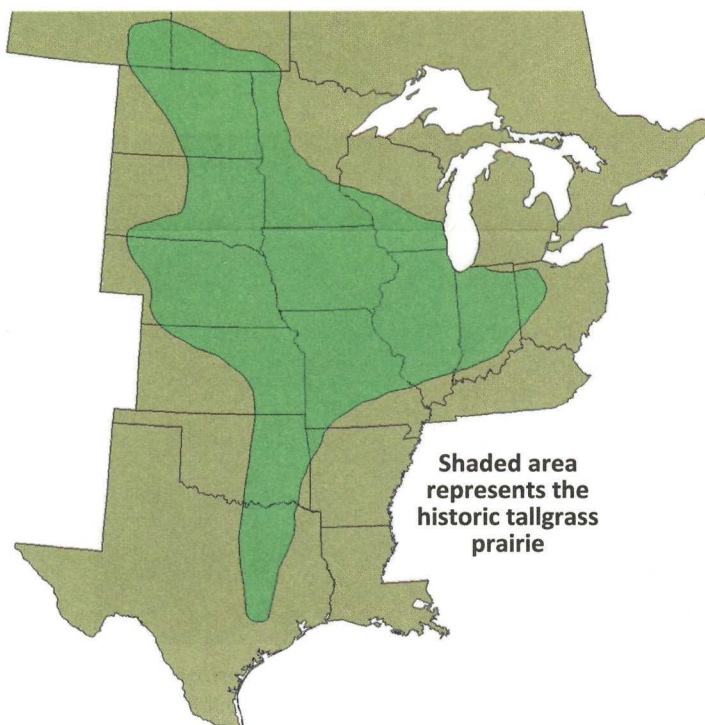
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



Tallgrass Prairie



The vivid colors of the tallgrass prairie present a constantly changing view to visitors of the area. The individual grasses transform into a unified wave of motion as the wind moves them, giving the impression of a “sea of grass” as described by early pioneers. Today, visitors to Pipestone National Monument can view a small remnant of this once vast prairie.



America’s tallgrass prairie once covered 170 million acres, but less than 4% of that remains today. Here at the monument, it is a mixture of both restored and remnant (never plowed) prairie. Most of the trees would not have been here prior to the establishment of the town, but they provide a welcome relief to quarriers in July and August.

Management of the prairie includes prescribed burning and the physical removal of non-native plant species. This enhances the growth of the native plants and preserves the prairie habitat for future generations.

Pipestone National Monument is culturally significant to many Indigenous people, not only for its source of pipestone, but also because of the tallgrass prairie which has provided medicines for centuries.



Smooth sumac is native to the prairie, but can take over other plants if not controlled. In early fall, its leaves turn a brilliant red.

- Prairies formed about 8,000 years ago, making them one of the most recently developed ecosystems in North America.
- Over 100 plant species can occur in a prairie of less than 5 acres.
- The major grasses of the tallgrass prairie are the big bluestem, the little bluestem, Indiangrass and switchgrass.
- These tall grasses are capable of growing as tall as ten feet and average a height of six to eight feet (but must have the soil depth for their roots in order to do so).
- Some prairie plants put out roots that extend 12 feet below the prairie surface.
- Up to 60 million bison grazed on the plains and prairies of North America when European explorers first arrived and fewer than 600 existed by 1885.
- A bison can consume 30-50 pounds of feed each day.
- Grazing was an integral part of the prairie ecosystem and increased the growth of prairie plants.
- Fires were important to the creation of the prairies as they kept the grasslands from becoming a forest. The monument conducts prescribed burns annually to maintain the health of the tallgrass prairie.
- Prairie fires can move as fast as 600 feet per minute and burn as hot as 700 degrees Fahrenheit.
- Fire does not destroy prairie grasses because they grow from the stem up rather than from the tips of the blade.



The prairie rose can often be seen along the trail in the summer.



The prickly pear cactus is a surprise for many visitors. Its bright yellow blooms are typically visible in July.