

CURING THE CALENDAR PRAIRIE SYNDROME: MANAGING PRAIRIES FOR DYNAMISM AND RESILIENCE

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Abstract: Prairie managers can sometimes fall into the trap of managing their prairies to look the same each year. This could be called the “Calendar Prairie” syndrome, in which managers develop a visual image of what they want their prairie to look like, based on flowery prairie photos they see in calendars or magazines. To make a prairie look the same each year requires repetitive management treatments that, over time, may limit both plant and animal diversity. More importantly, repetitive management can lead to a less resilient community that, when faced with changing conditions, may not be optimally suited to adapt them. There is no one prairie management regime that is optimal for prairies because each prairie has unique challenges and stresses. However, data from prairies in Nebraska and elsewhere show that diverse management treatments, including fire and grazing, that vary from year to year in intensity, timing, and duration, can promote more animal and plant diversity than can more static management regimes.