

## How This Site is Managed

The Nature Conservancy is using a combination of prescribed fire and grazing to maintain the plant diversity in these prairies. Both fire and grazing are major historic forces that shaped grasslands and they continue to be important tools for grassland management. In order for prairies to maintain their plant diversity, all plant species in the prairie have to be able to reproduce and maintain their populations. The primary job of prairie managers is to facilitate that process.

Without fire and grazing, a select few plant species would dominate the prairie community. Fire helps to suppress invading trees and shrubs, removes the buildup of thatch from previous year's plant growth. Grazing defoliates plants, primarily grasses, which opens up the aboveground canopy to let more light through to the ground and also reduces the size of the root mass those plants can maintain. The increased availability of light and root space allow other less dominant plants to reproduce and flourish. Both fire and grazing can also help suppress invasive grasses and other weeds, but herbicides and other techniques are also part of the solution.

The Conservancy is currently experimenting with patch-burn grazing, in which a portion of a prairie is burned each year. Cattle have access to the entire prairie but spend most of their time in the current year's burned area. This creates a matrix of intensely grazed vegetation in the burned area and taller vegetation where grazing is less intense. It also leads to plants being grazed hard in one year but rested for multiple years in between.

### PLEASE...

1. Stay on trail.
2. No littering.
3. No camping.
4. No smoking.
5. No dogs. (There are large numbers of cactus on the trail.)
6. Leave it as you found it.
7. ENJOY!

**Contact us!** If you have questions or want more information call 402.694.4191 or visit [nature.org](http://nature.org) or [prairienebraska.org](http://prairienebraska.org)

The Nature Conservancy   
Protecting nature. Preserving life.™



## What to Look For

These prairies have a great diversity of plants, particularly grasses, sedges, and wildflowers. That plant diversity provides resources and habitat for a host of animal species, from insects to birds. During the summer, common bird species can include grasshopper sparrows, bobolinks, dickcissels, upland sandpipers, bobwhite quail, sedge wrens, eastern and western meadowlarks, and many others.

The west trail passes through restored mesic and wet-mesic prairie. These lowland grasslands are on alluvial soils – soils formed by historic Platte River flows. The resulting mixture of sandy and sandy-loam soils distributed across the landscape results in a patchwork of plant communities tied to those soil types. Plant species such as big bluestem, indiangrass, Canada milkvetch, purple prairie clover, and wild bergamot are common in these prairies.

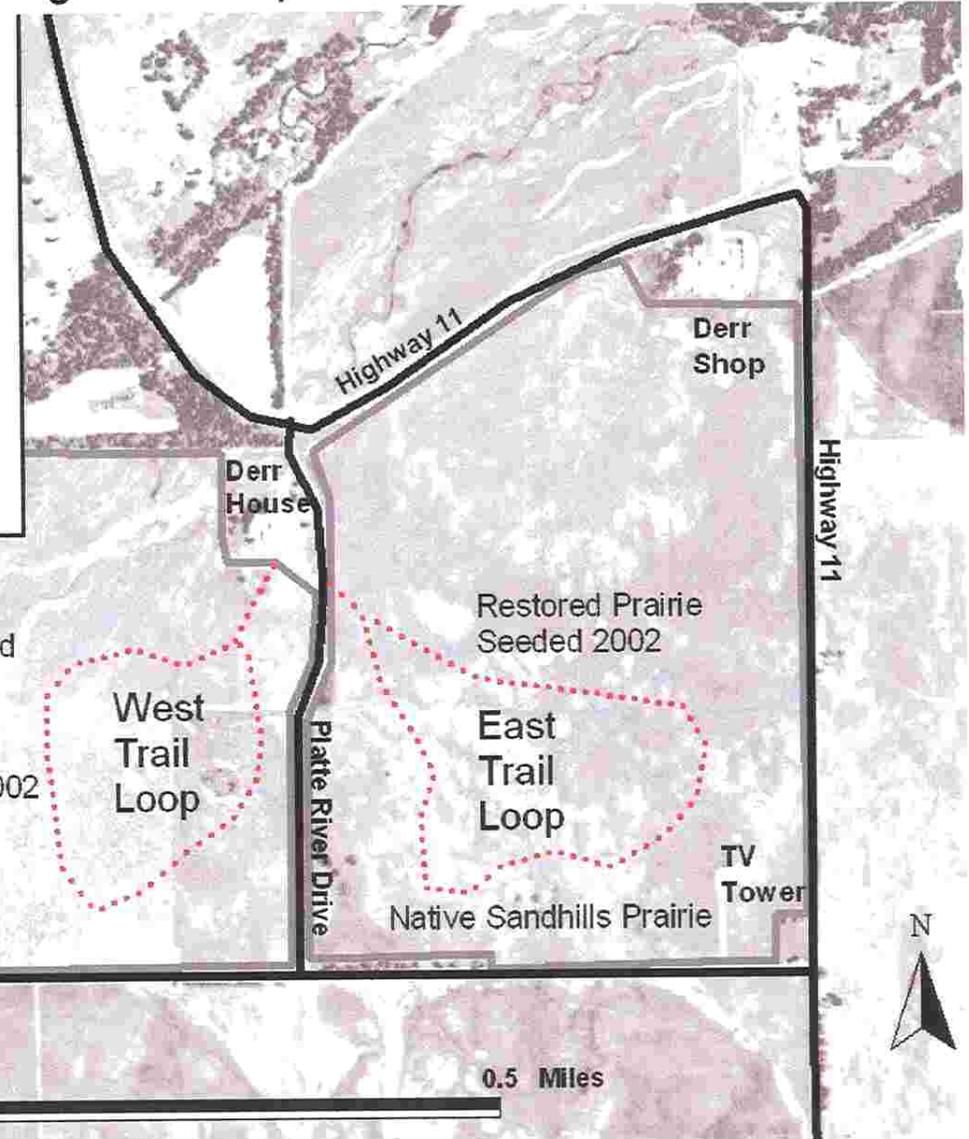
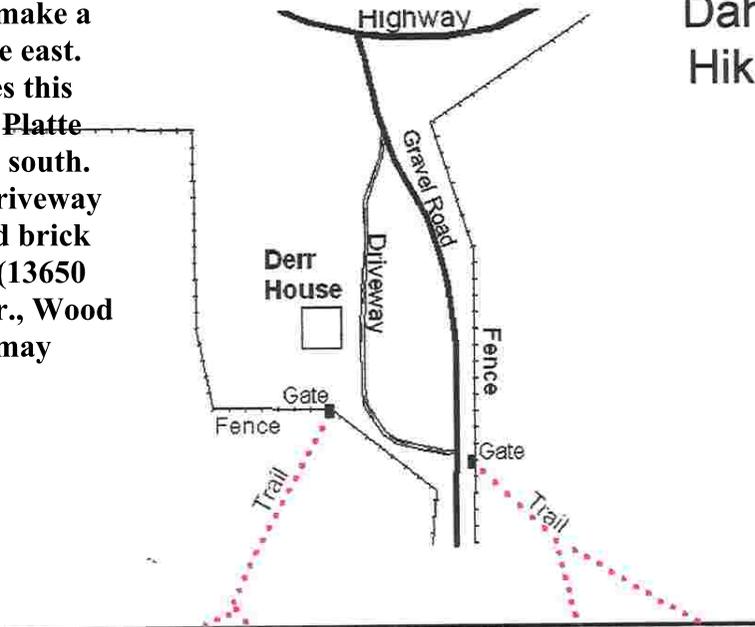
The east trail starts in mesic prairie but soon travels uphill into sandhill prairie. Both the restored and native portions of this prairie are underlaid by sand dunes constructed by historic winds blowing sand from the wide Platte River valley. The plant communities on these sandhills are dominated by plants such as sand lovegrass, sand dropseed, needle-and-thread, stiff sunflower, blazing star, spiderwort, and many others.

*Cattle may be present along the trails. Please be sure to close and latch the gate behind you.*

**DIRECTIONS:**

At Exit 300 on Interstate 80, take State Highway 11 south-southeast for approximately 2 miles. Highway 11 will make a sharp curve to the east. As Hwy. 11 makes this curve, turn on to Platte River Dr. headed south. There will be a driveway that leads to a red brick house on the hill (13650 S. Platte River Dr., Wood River, NE). You may park there.

### The Nature Conservancy Dahms/Derr Tract Hiking Trails Map



Two trails are available for public hiking. Park on the gravel driveway and enter through the gates as shown on the map above.

The west trail winds through restored lowland prairie – former cropland that was seeded with over 200 plant species between 1999 and 2002.

The east trail passes through both restored and native (unplowed) sandhills prairie. The restored portion was seeded in 2002 with over 160 plant species.