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James N. Becic

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GRASSLAND REESTABLISHMENT UNDER BURNING AND MOWING MANAGEMENT
IN EASTERN NEBRASKA

A Thesis
Presented to the
Department of Biology
and the
Faculty of the Graduate College
University of Nebraska

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
University of Nebraska at Omaha

by
James N. Becic
May, 1976

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THESIS ACCEPTANCE

Accepted for the faculty of the Graduate College, University of
Nebraska, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree
Master of Arts, University of Nebraska at Omaha.

Thesis Committee

Name

Department

<i>D. J. Sullivan</i>	<i>Chemistry</i>
<i>Thomas B. Bagg</i>	<i>Biology</i>

Chairman

David M. Sutherland

Date

April 20, 1976

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INTRODUCTION

Bluestem prairie (Andropogon-Panicum-Sorghastrum) (Küchler 1964) once covered much of eastern Nebraska (Weaver 1954, Weaver and Albertson 1956, Costello 1969) but extensive cultivation since the mid-1800's has eliminated most of these native prairie stands. Four types of management have been widely used in managing remaining native bluestem prairie ranges; these include burning, mowing for hay, grazing, and prevention of burning, mowing, or grazing. Historically, burning of bluestem prairie occurred frequently in both spring and fall and was initiated by lightning and native-American Indians (Catlin 1848, Komarek 1964, 1966, Anderson 1972); grazing by large herbivores was extensive but probably less intense than present cattle grazing. Recent studies on native bluestem prairie suggest that (1) burning decreases woody plant invasion, prevents litter accumulation, improves nutrient release, and increases soil temperature (Kucera and Koelling 1964, Kucera 1970, Richards 1972, Hulbert 1973, Bragg and Hulbert 1976), (2) mowing appears to decrease soil nutrients and grass productivity, and increase annual weeds and soil compaction (Johnson 1970, Cawley 1972, Christiansen 1972, Smeins 1973), and (3) cattle grazing, depending on intensity, increases soil compaction, changes vegetative species composition by selective grazing, decreases depth and quality of grass roots, and hinders anthesis and seed production (Weaver 1950, Voigt and Weaver 1951, Owensby et al. 1973). The combined results of these studies indicate that native bluestem prairies appear to be best managed by judicious burning (Ehrenreich and Aikman 1963, Owensby and Smith 1973,

Heitlinger 1975, Hill and Platt 1975).

Studies on seeded and managed grasslands suggest results similar to those obtained for native bluestem prairie (Bland 1970, Schulenberg 1970, Schumacher 1975, Bragg 1976), although extensive work has not been done in this area. This study was designed (1) to evaluate the effect of various management conditions on seeding success, and (2) to conduct a vegetative survey of Allwine Prairie Preserve for use in future studies.

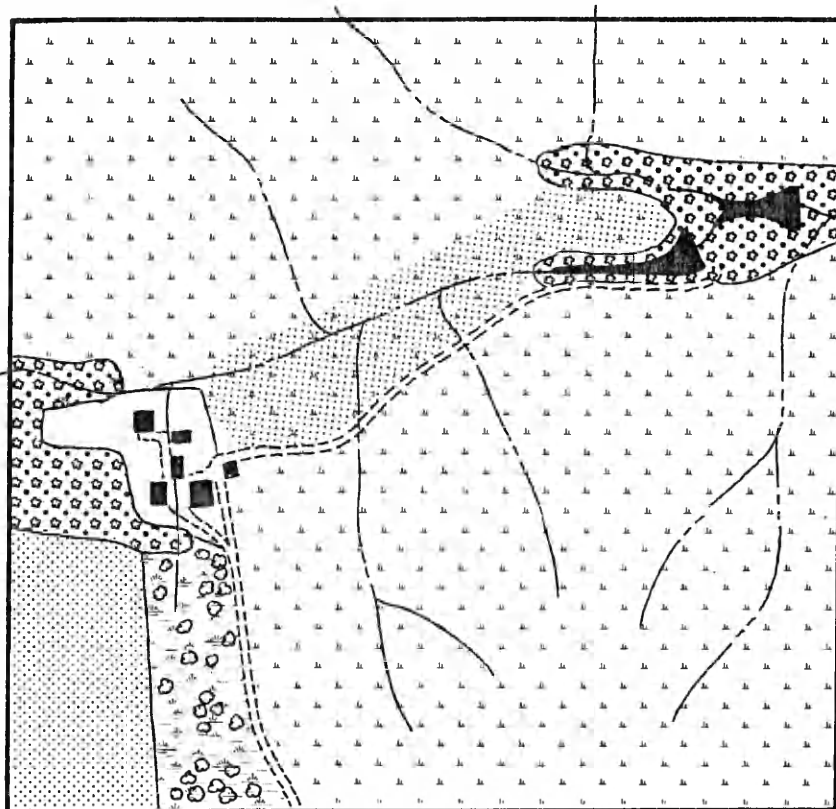
STUDY AREA

Allwine Prairie Preserve (Fig. 1) is a 65 hectare (160 acre) restored grassland research site situated within the portion of eastern Nebraska designated by Küchler (1964) as potential bluestem prairie. Past management conditions, and accessibility to the University of Nebraska at Omaha, made Allwine Prairie Preserve an ideal site for this type of study. Three areas; tall-grass, mid-grass, and lowland-double-seeded, totaling 55 ha, were seeded to native grass species in May 1970 (Fig. 2). All seeded areas were mowed twice in each of 1970 and 1971, and mowed once in 1972. Management from 1973 to 1975, incorporating burning and mowing, varied substantially (Bragg 1975); spring burning occurred in late April or early May; fall mowing occurred in late summer or early fall. Bare ground appears to be abundant in this newly established grassland (Bragg 1976).

The research site consists of gently rolling loess hills of both north and south aspect. Hills range from 3 to 15% slope and include four principal drainage areas; vertical interval of terraces vary from 3.5 to 4.0 meters. Deep and generally well drained soils are of the Mollisol and Entisol Soil Orders, Subgroups Cumulic Haplaquolls, Cumulic Hapludolls, Typic Hapludolls, and Typic Udorthents. Mollisols of the area are slightly acid in pH, and have an upper 41 to 74 cm of silty clay loam or silt loam. Entisols, formed from calcareous, loamy, glacial till are basic in pH, with clay loam in the upper 15 cm. The climate of the area is characterized by a mean annual precipitation of 71 cm, three-fourths of which falls from April through September. Local droughts occur when



Fig. 1. Allwine Prairie Preserve.




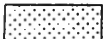


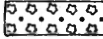

-  TALL-GRASS: tall and mid-grasses - big bluestem (*Andropogon gerardii*), little bluestem (*A. scoparius*), indiagrass (*Sorghastrum avenaceum*), switchgrass (*Panicum virgatum*), and sideoats grama (*Bouteloua curtipendula*).
-  MID-GRASS: mid and short-grasses - little bluestem, sideoats grama, blue grama (*Bouteloua gracilis*), and buffalo grass (*Buchloe dactyloides*).
-  LOWLAND-DOUBLE-SEEDED: seeded twice with tall grasses - big bluestem, indiagrass, and switchgrass.
-  BROME WATERWAY: smooth brome (*Bromus inermis*), with scattered trees.
-  TREED AREA.
-  PONDS & FARM STRUCTURES.

Fig. 2. Seeding plan for Allwine Prairie Preserve. Scale: 1 cm = 51 m. (Species nomenclature throughout, from McGregor 1973)

the time or distribution of precipitation is poor. Temperature ranges average from 1°C in January to 31°C in July with extremes of -23°C in January and 41°C in July not uncommon. The frost-free season averages about 167 days (climate and soils from Bartlett, 1975).

METHODS AND MATERIALS

The tall-grass portion of the prairie was divided into three management areas, (1) two-year-burn; that portion burned in the spring of 1974 and 1975, (2) two-year-mow; that portion mowed in the fall of 1973 and 1974, and (3) burn-and-mow; that portion burned in the spring of 1974 and mowed the following fall. The mid-grass, and lowland areas were not included in the management comparisons but were evaluated for the baseline study. Within each management area specific study areas were delineated based on topographic location. Study areas evaluated included upland, upper-slope, mid-slope, and lower-slope. Vegetative composition was evaluated by systematically locating 5, 2 X 10 meter plots on the slope areas and 10, 2 X 10 meter plots in both upland and lowland areas. In each plot, 10, 1 dm² microplots were randomly located and the canopy coverage of each species was estimated using the following categories: less than 5% coverage, 5 - 25%, 25 - 50%, 50 - 75%, 75 - 95%, and greater than 95% (Daubenmire 1959). Mid-point values of each coverage category were used for analysis. Canopy coverage of each species was separately evaluated; for convenience, weedy forbs and all species of incidental coverage, termed "combined forbs" and "other" respectively, were grouped using the maximum coverage in the plot for any species of the group. Vegetative sampling was conducted during June and July, 1975; identifications were verified at the University of Nebraska at Omaha Herbarium.

Biomass was measured in August by clipping, drying, and weighing the vegetation in 3, 0.5 m² plots, systematically located in a number of selected study areas. Species canopy coverage and basal area of surface

clumps and stems along 3, 1-meter transects were also recorded.

Soil data were obtained from 10, 23 cm deep, increment samples systematically collected within each selected study area. Soil texture was determined using a soil hydrometer and standard soil texture determining procedures. Organic matter, soil pH, and phosphorus, potassium, and residual nitrate content were determined by the University of Nebraska - Lincoln Soil Testing Laboratory.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Response to Management

Two consecutive years of burning management substantially increased native grasses and decreased weedy forbs when compared to either the two-year-mow or the burn-and-mow areas (Figs. 3 and 4); weedy forbs were primarily horseweed (Conyza canadensis), Canada lettuce (Lactuca canadensis), sheepsorrel (Oxalis dillenii), red clover (Trifolium pratense), and yellow sweetclover (Melilotus officinalis) (common names from Anderson and Owensby, 1969). These results suggest either that (1) consecutive spring burns have a more permanent effect on reducing weedy forbs than does a single spring burn, or (2) in the year burned, weedy forbs are substantially reduced but not necessarily in subsequent years. The latter hypothesis is partially supported by the vegetational composition of the burn-and-mow area in which forb cover in 1975 was high even though the area had been burned in 1974 (Table 1). Considering the abundant open soil present (Appendix Table 2), it appears that annual, weedy forbs will continue to present problems in all areas unless some burning management is used to control them, but with time, the natural increase in native grasses should ultimately outcompete and replace weedy species.

Response to Environmental Gradients

After five years of vegetative development, the most notable segregation along natural topographic gradients, was that of big bluestem which increased from upper-slope (33%) to lower-slope (54%) and little bluestem which decreased (13% upper-slope to 10% lower-slope) (Fig. 5). Higher

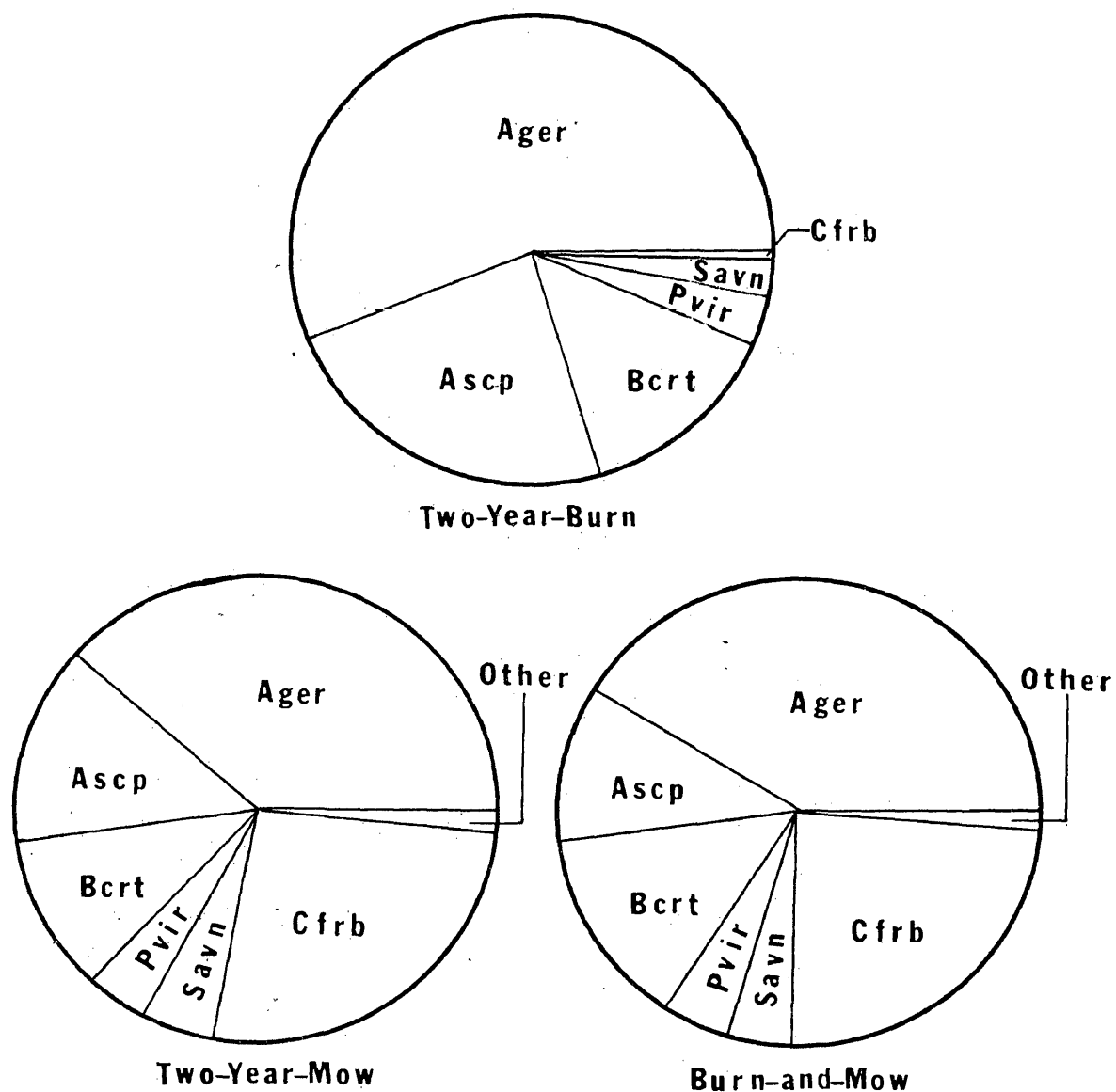


Fig. 3. Percent coverage of vegetation¹ on combined management areas.

¹Key To Species

Ager = Andropogon gerardii

Ascp = Andropogon scoparius

Bcrt = Bouteloua curtipendula

Pvir = Panicum virgatum

Savn = Sorghastrum avenaceum

Cfrb = Combined forbs

Other = Bouteloua gracilis, Bromus inermis, Annual Grasses

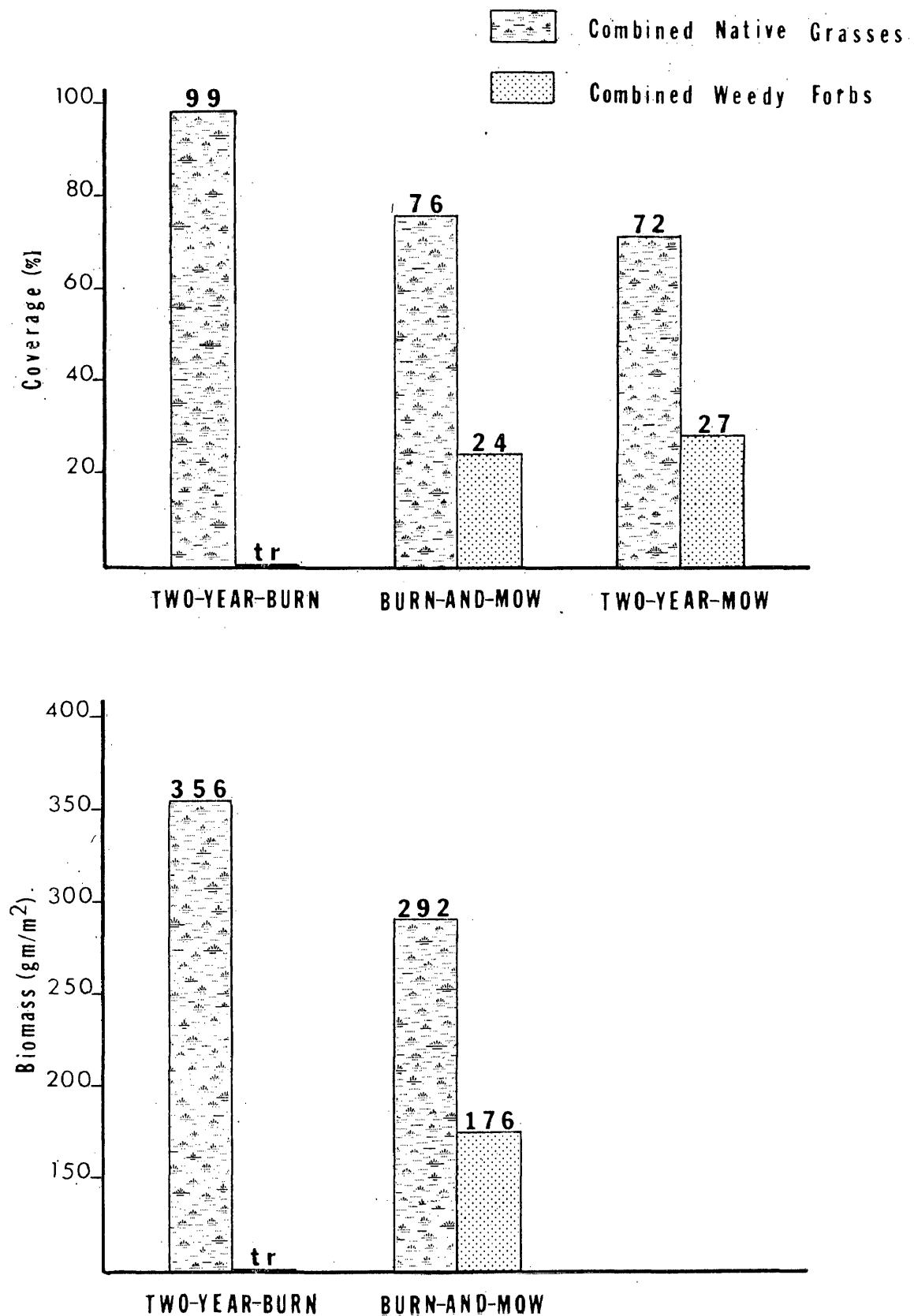


Fig. 4. Vegetative differences in three management areas.
tr = less than 0.5.

Table 1. Combined relative weedy forb coverage following various management. Trace = tr (less than 0.5).

Past Management			Combined Forb Coverage (%)
<u>1973</u>	<u>1974</u>	<u>1975</u> ¹	<u>1975</u>
unburned unmowed	<u>SPRING-BURN</u> unmowed	<u>SPRING-BURN</u>	tr
unburned unmowed	<u>SPRING-BURN</u> <u>FALL-MOW</u>	unburned	24
unburned <u>FALL-MOW</u>	unburned <u>FALL-MOW</u>	unburned	27

¹ Mowed in 1975 subsequent to study.

soil moisture generally found in the lower elevations may explain this segregation (Bragg 1976). Physical soil properties (Appendix Table 1) do not appear to influence bluestem development.

Baseline Vegetative Study

Sampling in each of 9 study areas (Fig. 6) provided the 1975 vegetative composition to which future comparisons may be made (Table 2). The major seeded grasses were found to be most abundant in all areas except in area 8, and the upper-slope of area 1, where weedy forbs were dominant.

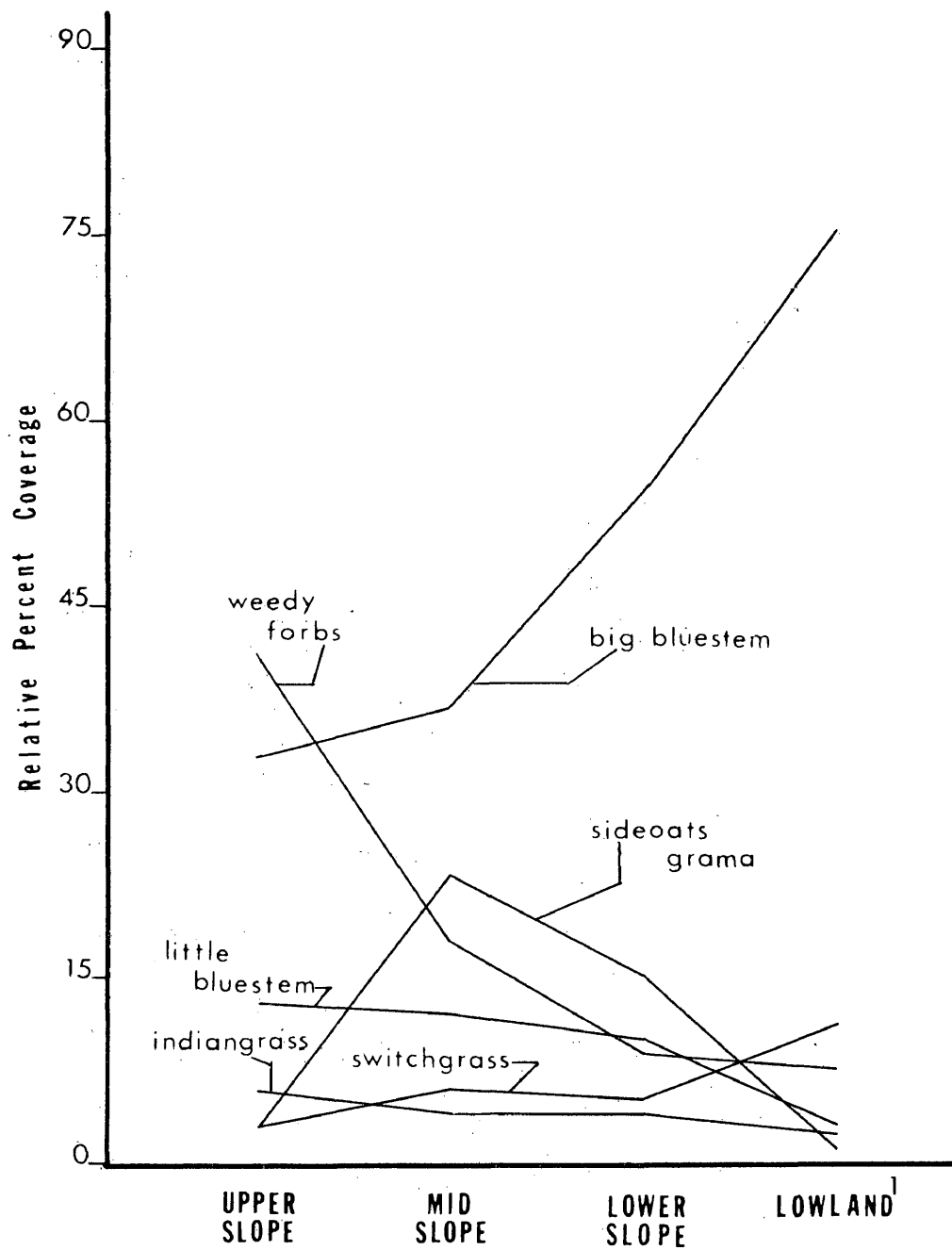


Fig. 5. Vegetative coverage in relation to topographic location on combined burn-and-mow and two-year-mow areas.

¹Burned only in 1975.

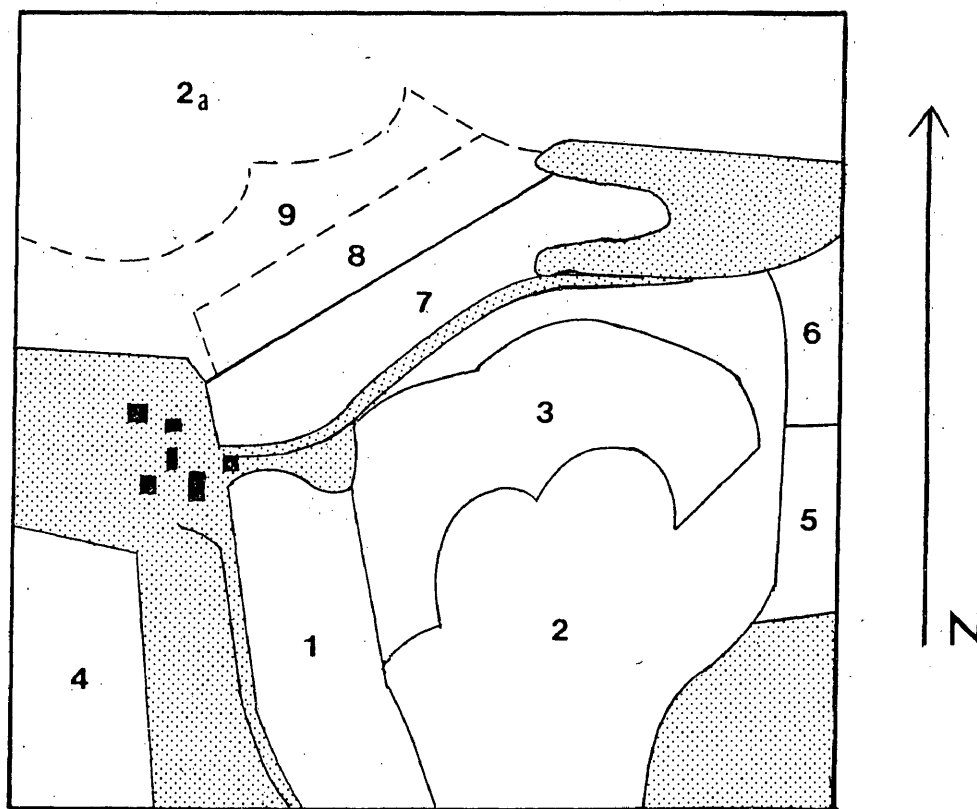


Fig. 6. Vegetative sampling areas. Broken line indicates a separate study area within the management area. (Area 2_a has the same management as area 2 but was rated separately).

Table 2. Average percent vegetational coverage of principal species in 9 study areas¹. Upland = up, Upper-slope = us, Mid-slope = ms, Lower-slope = ls, East-slope = es, East-lowland = el, Lowland-double-seeded = ld, North-lowland = nl, North-slope = ns, Trace = tr (less than 5%).

	Tall-Grass								Mid-Grass								Misc.-Areas											
	Area-1		Area-2		Area-2a		Area-3		Area-4		Area-5		Area-6		Area-7		Area-8		Area-9									
	up	ms	ls	up	us	ms	ls	up	us	ms	ls	up	us	ms	ls	up	us	ms	ls	up	us	ms	ls	es	el	ld	nl	ns
<u>Andropogon gerardii</u>	34	45	32	63	40	28	43	46	61	55	34	47	50	46	45	1	0	0	0	42	93	57	50	38				
<u>Andropogon scoparius</u>	14	26	14	10	9	18	18	12	12	9	3	9	6	22	31	65	58	51	50	13	4	3	3	14				
<u>Bouteloua curtipendula</u>	12	4	28	8	15	5	16	9	0	5	25	26	22	4	9	14	29	28	34	21	2	1	0	7				
<u>Panicum virgatum</u>	4	4	7	4	4	6	0	1	0	2	9	9	0	7	2	0	0	0	0	7	14	28	9	1				
<u>Bouteloua gracilis</u>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	4	3	1	0	0	0	0	0				
<u>Sorghastrum avenaceum</u>	2	3	8	7	15	15	tr	2	13	4	3	4	5	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	2	7	0	6				
<u>Bromus inermis</u>	2	0	0	4	0	0	0	0	tr	3	0	0	0	0	0	12	tr	0	0	1	0	0	0	0				
Annual grasses	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	tr	tr	0	0	tr	0	14	0	0				
Combined forbs	29	84	7	5	17	53	33	14	16	26	14	5	tr	tr	tr	3	20	6	tr	12	9	41	89	19				

¹ Coverage by individual species located in Appendix Table 2.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Reestablished native grasses under 3 years of burning and mowing management showed that (1) two-year-burns resulted in a greater native grass cover than two-year-mowing or burning-and-mowing (2) biomass was greater on two-year-burned areas than on burned-and-mowed areas (3) weedy forbs were substantially less on the two-year-burn, than on either the two-year-mow or the burn-and-mow areas, and (4) big bluestem increased while little bluestem decreased from upper to lower slopes. Soil differences did not appear to affect native grass establishment.

The combined results of this short term study suggest that (1) frequent burning is the best initial management for establishing native grass stands and for controlling weedy forbs and, (2) some native species begin to segregate along natural topographic gradients during the initial years of establishment.

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Appendix Table 1. Physical properties of soil within management areas.
 SCL = Silty Clay Loam.

	<u>Management Areas</u>					
	2-year burn	2-year mow	burn & mow	lowland area ¹	lowland dbl.-seed	mid- grass ¹
pH	6.3	6.6	6.4	6.6	6.9	6.3
Nitrate (ppm)	1.4	1.5	1.4	1.8	2.6	1.4
Phosphorus (ppm)	1.7	4.4	3.2	8.0	49.0	6.0
Potassium (ppm)	189	194	211	248	723	226
Organic Matter	2.47	1.84	2.42	2.37	3.42	1.97
Sand	12	13	15	12	17	11
Silt	56	56	54	59	56	56
Clay	32	31	31	29	27	33
Soil Type	SCL	SCL	SCL	SCL	SL	SCL

¹Burned in 1975 only.

Appendix Table 2. Average percent vegetational coverage by species in the 9 study areas. Upland = up, Upper-slope = us, Mid-slope = ms, Lower-slope = ls, East-slope = es, East-lowland = el, Lowland-double-seeded = ld, North-lowland = nl, North-slope = ns, Trace = tr (less than 5%).

Species	Tall-Grass												Mid-Grass				Misc.-Areas							
	Area-1			Area-2			Area-2a			Area-3			Area-4		5, 6, 7, 8, 9									
	up	us	ls	up	us	ms	ls	up	us	ms	ls	up	us	ms	ls	up	us	ms	ls					
<u>Andropogon gerardii</u>	34	45	32	63	40	28	43	46	61	55	34	47	50	46	45	1	0	0	0	42	93	57	50	38
<u>Andropogon scoparius</u>	14	26	14	10	9	18	18	12	12	9	3	9	6	22	31	65	58	51	50	13	4	3	3	14
<u>Bouteloua curtipendula</u>	12	4	28	8	15	5	16	9	0	5	25	26	22	4	9	14	29	28	34	21	2	1	0	7
<u>Panicum virgatum</u>	4	4	7	4	4	6	0	1	0	2	9	9	0	7	2	0	0	0	0	7	14	28	9	1
<u>Bouteloua gracilis</u>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	4	3	1	0	0	0	0	0
<u>Sorghastrum avenaceum</u>	2	3	8	7	15	15	tr	2	13	4	3	4	5	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	2	7	0	6
<u>Bromus inermis</u>	2	0	0	4	0	0	0	0	tr	3	0	0	0	0	0	12	tr	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
<u>Elymus canadensis</u>	0	0	0	0	tr	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<u>Buchloe dactyloides</u>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	tr	0	0	0	0	0	0

Appendix Table 2. (continued)

Species	Tall-Grass				Mid-Grass				Misc.-Areas								
	Area-1		Area-2		Area-2a		Area-3		Area-4		5, 6, 7, 8, 9						
	up	ms	ls	up	ms	ls	up	ms	ls	up	ms	ls	es	el	ld	nl	rs
<u>Poa</u>																	
<u>pratensis</u>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<u>Agropyron</u>																	
<u>repens</u>	tr	tr	3	tr	0	0	0	0	0	tr	0	0	0	0	tr	0	0
<u>Setaria</u>																	
<u>glauca</u>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0
<u>Setaria</u>																	
<u>viridis</u>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	10	0
<u>Bromus</u>																	
<u>japonicus</u>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	tr	0	0
<u>Trifolium</u>																	
<u>pratense</u>	25	82	tr	0	2	22	26	0	0	0	0	0	tr	0	0	2	5
<u>Melilotus</u>																	
<u>officinalis</u>	0	14	2	0	2	36	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	17
<u>Oxalis</u>																	
<u>dillenii</u>	1	tr	0	tr	3	2	0	3	tr	tr	tr	tr	tr	0	tr	tr	1
<u>Lactuca</u>																	
<u>canadensis</u>	2	tr	1	3	3	1	4	2	5	11	7	1	tr	0	tr	1	tr
<u>Conyza</u>																	
<u>canadensis</u>	3	tr	tr	4	11	8	8	tr	6	4	8	1	tr	tr	tr	tr	tr

Appendix Table 2. (continued)

Species	Tall-Grass						Mid-Grass			Misc.-Areas									
	Area-1		Area-2		Area-2a		Area-3		Area-4		Misc.-Areas								
	up	ms	ls	up	ms	ls	up	ms	ls	up	ms	ls	es	el	ld	nl	ns		
<u>Taraxacum</u>																			
<u>officinale</u>	tr	0	0	tr	1	0	0	1	1	tr	0	0	0	0	tr	0	1	0	1
<u>Convolvulus</u>																			
<u>arvensis</u>	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	tr	tr	11	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<u>Polygonum</u>																			
<u>pensylvanicum</u>	0	0	0	0	tr	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	tr	0	tr	22
<u>Lepidium</u>																			
<u>densiflorum</u>	tr	0	tr	0	0	0	0	tr	tr	0	0	0	0	tr	0	0	0	0	0
<u>Medicago</u>																			
<u>lupulina</u>	0	0	0	0	2	0	5	0	0	0	0	0	tr	0	0	0	0	0	2
<u>Medicago</u>																			
<u>sativa</u>	0	0	4	0	0	0	2	0	5	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	tr	0	2
<u>Asclepias</u>																			
<u>syriaca</u>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	3
<u>Thlaspi</u>																			
<u>arvense</u>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	tr	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	tr	2
<u>Chenopodium</u>																			
<u>album</u>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0
<u>Physalis</u>																			
<u>virginiana</u>	tr	0	0	tr	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	tr

Appendix Table 2. (continued)

Species	Tall-Grass						Mid-Grass		Misc.-Areas											
	Area-1		Area-2		Area-2a		Area-3		Area-4		5, 6, 7, 8, 9									
	up	ms	ls	up	ms	ls	up	ms	ls	up	ms	ls	up	ms	ls	es	el	ld	nl	ns
<u>Ambrosia</u> <u>trifida</u>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	0
<u>Abutilon</u> <u>theophrasti</u>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	tr	0
<u>Cannabis</u> <u>sativa</u>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	tr	0
<u>Tragopogon</u> <u>dubius</u>	0	tr	tr	0	0	0	0	2	0	1	1	0	0	0	tr	0	0	0	0	2 tr
<u>Carduus</u> <u>nutans</u>	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	tr	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<u>Erigeron</u> <u>strigosus</u>	0	tr	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<u>Acer</u> <u>negundo</u>	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	tr	0
<u>Rosa</u> <u>arkansana</u>	0	0	0	0	tr	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<u>Misc.</u> <u>forbs</u>	0	0	0	0	0	0	tr	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	tr	0
Open soil	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	17	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-