

AN ASSESSMENT OF THE REMNANT TALLGRASS PRAIRIES/NATIVE GRASSLANDS IN FOUR ECOREGIONS OF TEXAS

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More than 99 percent of the tallgrass prairie ecosystem has been destroyed or fundamentally altered, making the tallgrass prairie the most-endangered large ecosystem in North America. It is estimated that losses are even greater in Texas' tallgrass prairie regions: the Blackland Prairie, Gulf Coast Prairies and Marshes, and the Grand Prairie sub region of the Cross Timbers and Prairies, where most of the prairies were destroyed or altered by plowing for row crop agriculture, poor livestock grazing management, and urban sprawl. The destruction of most of Texas' tallgrass prairie, followed by changing agricultural practices (such as planting of non-native forage grasses), has led to a significant loss of habitat for native wildlife such as grassland birds and the native plant communities these species depend upon. High human population growth in cities around these regions is jeopardizing the remaining native prairies and the wildlife that resides within and depends upon them. The discovery and cataloging of all native grassland remnants in these ecoregions is a necessary step towards significant habitat conservation and restoration actions in these areas. Data collected will include location, ownership information, native plant communities present, vegetation quality (using a defined scale), and GIS information including GPS coordinates.