

Tallgrass Roots

An Interview with Janet Beimborn

By Kelsey Koppelberger

Department of Oceanography and Coastal Sciences
Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, LA 70803

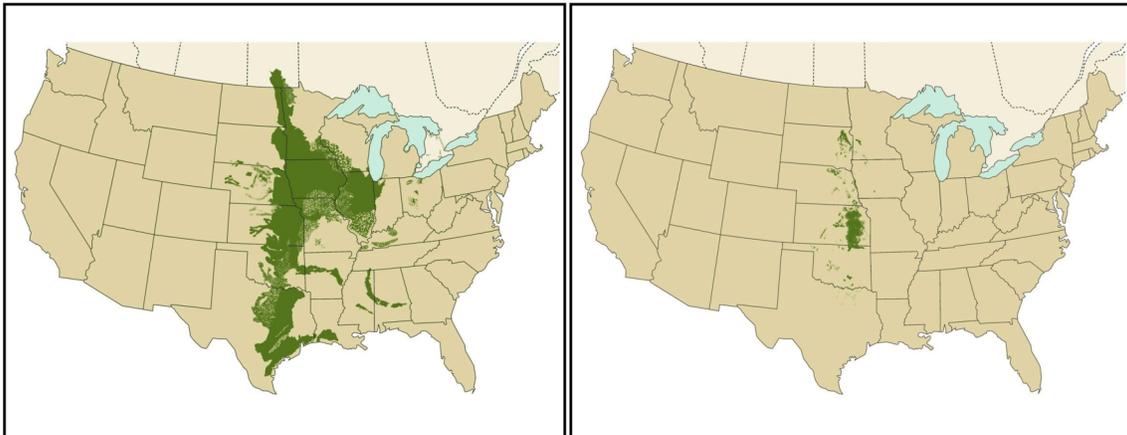


Fig. 1. North American Tallgrass prairie: THEN and NOW
(adapted from Landscape America and the Tallgrass Prairie Center).

Within the last 200 years, tallgrass prairies have been reduced to less than 5% of great prairies settlers would have originally encountered. The images above show the historical North American tallgrass prairies (left) and the current, remaining tallgrass prairies (right).

THE ROOTS

In 1989, inspired by her work with the local nature center, Janet Beimborn (Fig. 2), a retired audiologist, converted her family's farm-land into tallgrass prairie, an endangered habitat (Fig. 1). The hope was to create a wildlife refuge and preserve declining species. A nonprofessional project, it has been a true example of adaptive management: with each season with its own set of obstacles of learning curves.

“Our goal in planting wasn’t to make a big flower garden: it was to create habitat for grassland species – because grassland habitat, especially tallgrass prairie, is one of the most endangered habitats on the planet.”



Fig. 2. Janet Beimborn.

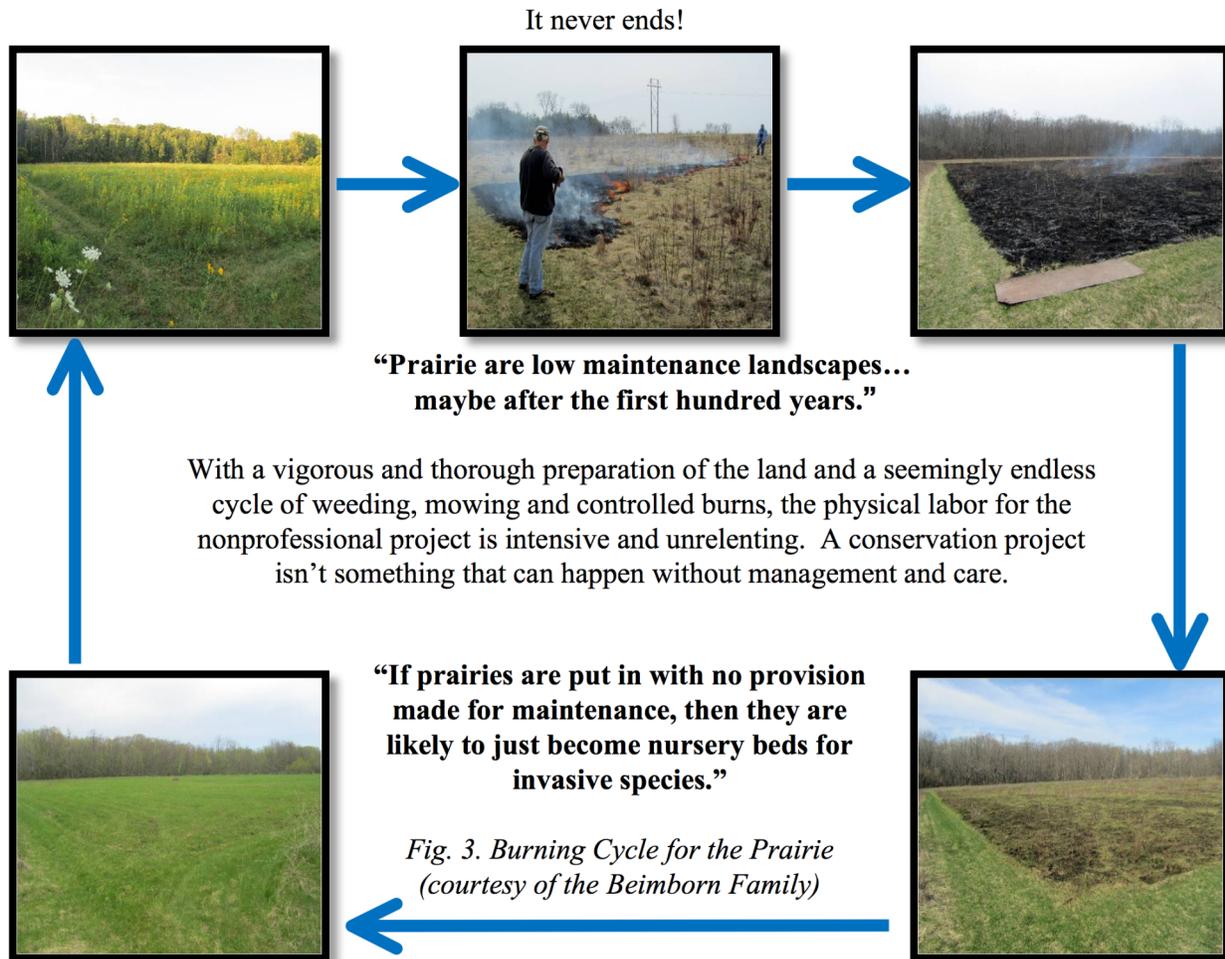


Fig. 3. Burning cycle for the prairie (courtesy of the Beimborn Family).



Fig. 4. The Beimborn Farmland converted to Tallgrass prairie (aerial image from Pictometry).

The site (Fig. 4) has been used by many researchers for various studies on the habitat and its (wild) tenants. It has been home to Bobolinks – a blackbird in a strong decline due to habitat loss. Wild Quinine, a native, state threatened flower, thrives on the prairie (Fig. 5). The vernal pond on site has been discovered to have many indicator species. The prairie has also attracted many student trips.

“It’s a seed bank and a gene bank for species that may be otherwise disappearing.”

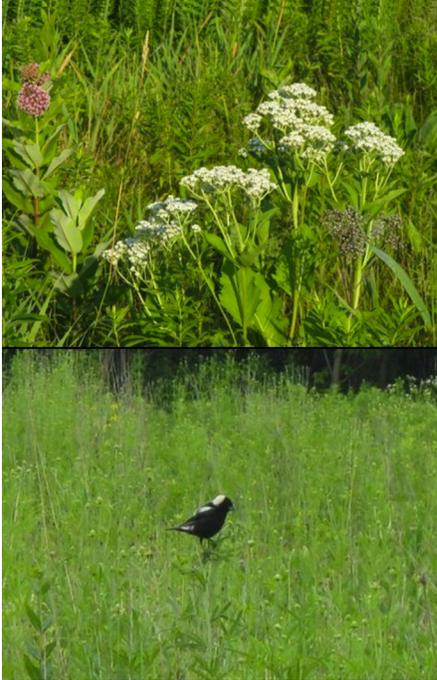


Fig. 5. Wild Quinine (above) and Bobolink (below) (courtesy of the Beimborn family).

“It surprised me how many people appreciated it...people that are not involved in natural history and things of that sort.”

Backyard ecological restoration isn’t yet a grassroots movement, but it has had an impact on the community. Further, Beimborn’s efforts have reached four generations within her family – including her great-niece, Kelsey Koppelberger (Fig. 6).



Fig. 6. Janet Beimborn and three generations of nieces (courtesy of the Beimborn family).

For further information:

<http://www.landscape.org/>

<http://www.tallgrassprairiecenter.org/>