

FOSTERING FUTURE RESEARCH ON NORTHWEST PRAIRIES:
Recommendations from the Northwest Prairies Conference
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The final session of the Conference summarized the common points identified by the afternoon breakout groups. Though not framed as formal recommendations, at least two points received wide recognition as essential next steps to foster future research on Northwest prairies.

GIS-based information sharing:

Each breakout group emphasized that a comprehensive data base is critical for developing integrative approaches for research and management of NW prairies. Geographic Information System (GIS) is capable of integrating different databases using spatial information, allowing for comprehensive analysis of data. Since prairies are spatially situated, GIS creates a framework that facilitates interdisciplinary research by combining data from different sources to fixed points. Analysis conducted through GIS can also give greater understanding of the interrelationships and variability of Northwest prairies. One recommendation at the conference was that a typology of prairies needs to be formulated, and GIS will provide a means to do this. GIS programs are also not limited to mapping modern or historic spatial data, but can also model landscapes based on paleoecological and archaeological data as well. GIS maps would also greatly aid in the selection of research sites, as well as help researchers find potential collaborators based on previous work or interests. Eventually, such maps would provide a platform for analysis (e.g., relationships of prairie size to species richness). GIS layers should include information such as soils, pre-settlement and current vegetation, archeological significance, tribal use and significance, plant and animal conservation issues, land ownership and management, references to literature and reports, etc. Several agencies have begun to collate information in GIS format (e.g., Forest Service (David Peter), Department of Natural Resources (Chris Chappell)), but the geographic area and number of map layers will undoubtedly need to be enlarged to serve the diverse interests represented by the Conference. The scope of this work will depend on the status and compatibility of existing data bases, as well as the availability of data for GIS layers.

“White paper” on NW prairies:

An effective, integrative statement about Northwest prairies is urgently needed. The statement must clearly articulate the intrinsic biotic and cultural value of understanding NW prairies, as well as the pressing need to preserve and restore these systems. The process of writing this statement will crystallize thoughts about research and management needs. The statement can be used for diverse

purposes: e.g., to inform potential granting agencies, academic and public organizations, and general public. We envision that a small group of the conference participants will compose such a statement for publication in *Northwest Science*. We have identified a list people who represent the range of interests and organizations at the Conference and will likely be key contributors to future studies of prairies. It is essential that this group meet face-to-face for 1 or 2 days to identify the major rationale and topics of the paper and to assign writing tasks. A 2-day meeting might provide sufficient time to produce a first draft of the paper.