



Driftless Prairies: Native Ecosystems

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"50 Ways" to Manage

"50 Ways" to Manage

"50 Ways to Right" is a common phrase I use when talking with folks about ecological restoration. I like this phrase because this kind of work isn't absolute. There are a myriad of techniques available and more on the way as we invent new ones to fulfill our need to humbly and conservatively manage our land and reduce collateral damage. The other factor is that we're working with nature which is ever changing and unpredictable. So what works on my land or even within pieces of my land may not work best for your land.

While field research on native ecosystems exists, it is young and it is impossible to precisely recreate. No two ecosystems are alike, nor do they experience the same nature patterns e.g. rainfall, insect herbivory, wildlife scritchings, etc. Even within several acres, the microclimate can differ such that a singular management technique isn't the best. Expect to use a combination of management techniques to do the least amount of damage and yet be the most effective.

Nonetheless, field experiments have provided us with general knowledge, such as: frequent fire decreases biodiversity.

As you traverse the myriad of management possibilities, you'll encounter each of these topics. My hope is this list from my experience and research will benefit you and make your restoration journey fun and less stressful!

- [Establish Goals & Writing a Management Plan](#)
- [Burning & Mowing](#)

- [Woody Control](#)
- [Managing Herbaceous Invasives](#)
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There is no singular right way to manage native ecosystems but there are:

- ways that are kinder and gentler to the inhabitants;
- ways that are less time-consuming;
- ways that cause less collateral damage; and
- ways that safeguard wildlife.

What was effective in one ecosystem may not be in another

Another caution when reading field research is to keep in mind the location where that research is being conducted and what comprises the existing vegetation. These are 2 key elements in understanding whether that research can translate to your project. Some great research is being done in Florida and Kansas yet we can't assume it will translate to Wisconsin ecosystems. Florida has frequent lightning fires and their vegetation is different; Kansas has more tallgrass-dominated research sites and differing climate. Even when keeping ecoregions and vegetation in mind, it's near impossible to replicate research in nature. Nature is ever changing and microenvironments aren't always included in the research.

This is also important when talking with folks about various techniques as they may not understand that what happens in another part of the US may not translate to Wisconsin.

Rely on the biological science

To avoid the pitfalls of the vast amount of dogma existing in

the ecological restoration realm, ask each person giving you the “advice” to explain how that “advice” works biologically. You’ll soon learn what info is trustworthy and sage.

Know your goals

Be sure the folks giving you advice understand your goals (or even ask what they are!) and that their advice matches your goals. There is a continuum of goals and your advisor needs to meet you on that continuum. This eliminates disappointment and costly errors.

Because each of us has different goals and different land in different regions, it’s imperative we make our own decisions based on what is right for our goals, our land, and our resources.

Specific management advice given without seeing the land and understanding the goals is chancy – it might be what you want and it might not.

A diversity of management techniques equals a diversity of biota.

Marci Hess

You have a toolbox of techniques.

Use them all. Who builds a house with only a hammer?

Check out the Tools & Techniques section, too. It offers detailed information.

The Research & Science section provides background and biology. With this knowledge, you’ll be able to refute the dogma that you’re bound to encounter.

[Tools & Techniques](#)
[Research & Science](#)

For a real-life example of the “ways” listed above, read about a burning of an oak savanna that didn’t go as the “experts” would have you believe it should. This isn’t an isolated incident. Yet, our fire-promoting organizations and people ignore this, even when they were provided this info.

[Burning of an Oak Savanna - Confessions of DIY Enthusiasts](#)

Click on the button for some of the lessons we’ve learned along the way. I’m sure there are many others and as these come to mind, I’ll add them here.

[Lessons Learned](#)

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