Committee: Natural History & Wildlands
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Remove Livestock from Missouri’s Last Remaining High Quality Prairies

1. WHEREAS, 232,000 square miles of tallgrass prairie once covered the Midwest. Few natural communities have fared worse over the last 200 years as only 4 percent of the Nation’s presettlement tallgrass prairie remains. Of this Missouri’s historic tallgrass prairie once covered 15 million acres of the state. Tragically, only some 8,000 acres of moderate to high quality fragments survive in small isolated parcels at a maximum only several hundred acres in size;

2. AND WHEREAS, Missouri’s high quality remnants are characterized by a centuries old accumulation of over 500 vascular plant species that is associated with undisturbed ancient prairie soils. Added to this plan diversity is a complex array of mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians, mosses, fungi, invertebrates and bacteria living above and below the soil. Their uniqueness is further distinguished in that what remains of Missouri’s high quality prairies is divided into12 distinct natural community types;

3. AND WHEREAS, these remaining high quality remnant prairies are not only wondrous and indescribably complex systems resulting from countless thousands of organisms, but this complexity also makes them fragile. Once damaged, their former integrity is seldom retained even on the scale of decades as attested by tens of thousands of acres of permanently degraded and destroyed former prairie;

4. AND WHEREAS, because of the widespread destruction of Missouri’s tallgrass prairie for the benefit of producing livestock, hay, feed and crops for human consumption, public agencies and private conservation organizations and individuals joined efforts to acquire and preserve the remaining high quality Missouri prairies. These concerned entities include the Missouri Prairie Foundation, The Nature Conservancy, Kathryn Ordway, Ralph Lucas, Pat Jones, Missouri Department of Conservation, Missouri Department of Natural Resources, the National Park Service, US Fish and Wildlife Service and others;

5. AND WHEREAS, as for 30 years, the Missouri Department of Conservation has administered Missouri’s Natural Heritage Program that collects data on Missouri’s best remaining high quality natural
communities and sites for species of conservation concern. Biologists and natural areas professionals have inventoried Missouri prairies identifying the best quality examples based on their high plant diversity and distinctiveness. Of the 45,500 acres of high quality prairie remaining in Missouri, only 8,000 acres are distinguished in the Missouri Natural Areas Program. Natural Areas are defined as “biological communities or geological sites that preserve and are managed to perpetuate the natural character, diversity, and ecological process of Missouri’s native landscapes.” A natural community is presumably representative of the pre-European settlement vegetation of the site;

AND WHEREAS, the Missouri Department of Conservation has introduced cattle onto several prairie Natural Areas under the premise that it can use variations in patch burning to create suitable structure for a suite of declining grassland bird species. Individuals and members of private conservation organizations include the Missouri Prairie Foundation, Missouri Native Plant Society, Webster Groves Nature Study Society and the St. Louis Audubon Society upon visits to heavily grazed prairie Natural Areas became alarmed at their overgrazed appearance;

AND WHEREAS MDC staff have made the erroneous assumption that optimum grassland bird management is also optimum prairie management. Unfortunately, the ancient floristic diversity (and its associate wildlife) and its biological importance appear unappreciated in defense of applying grazing for purposes of providing habitat for a relatively few bird species. This has resulted in highly polarized and emotional outcries;

AND WHEREAS organizations and individuals have voiced their opposition to the Director of the Missouri Department of Conservation to grazing Natural Areas and high quality prairies, including The Missouri Prairie Foundation, Missouri Native Plant Society, St. Louis Audubon Society, and Webster Groves Natural Study Society;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Conservation Federation of Missouri assembled at the Lodge of Four Seasons, Lake Ozark, MO, this 27th day of February, 2011 expressed its support that domestic livestock grazing not occur on Natural Areas and other high quality prairies in Missouri.