

Originating Committee: Grasslands and Prairie

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Intended Recipients: Missouri Department of Conservation, Missouri Department of Natural Resources, The Nature Conservancy, Missouri Prairie Foundation, Ozark Land Trust, Powell Gardens, University of Missouri, United States Fish and Wildlife Service, National Park Service, Natural Resource Conservation Service, United States Army Corps of Engineers

Adoption of the Community Health Index and Implementation of Corrective Action Plans for Remnant Prairie Management Entities

WHEREAS, prairies and other native grasslands are one of the least protected and most disturbed of the major terrestrial ecosystems on the planet; and

WHEREAS, in Missouri, over 99.7% of pre-Euro-American settlement prairie has been lost and fewer than 50,000 acres of remnant prairie is known to still exist; and

WHEREAS, prairie natural communities are hotspots of native biodiversity, supporting a vast array of grassland flora and fauna, including species that are dependent on these remnants; and

WHEREAS, many species of conservation concern are found on existing remnant prairies, and the natural prairie communities themselves are all listed as state critically imperiled or imperiled; and

WHEREAS, in 2013, the *Strategic Guidance for Missouri Grasslands* was written by representatives of the Missouri Department of Conservation, Missouri Department of Natural Resources, The Nature Conservancy, Missouri Prairie Foundation, and Natural Resources Conservation Service; and

WHEREAS, the purpose of the Strategic Guidance document is to facilitate a holistic approach to sustain grassland habitats and their dependent species; and

WHEREAS, one goal of the Strategic Guidance document is to manage ecologically significant and irreplaceable grassland systems to sustain their viability and the full array of their biological diversity; and

WHEREAS, the Strategic Guidance document does not recommend a tool to evaluate whether management of a grassland sustains its viability or the full array of its biological diversity on irreplaceable grassland systems like prairie remnants; and

WHEREAS, the Community Health Index (CHI) is a rapid methodology that provides baseline biological information to assess community ecological health; and

WHEREAS, CHI surveys can be reasonably accomplished across multiple prairie sites by staff of agencies or organizations that own and manage original, remnant prairies; and

WHEREAS, initial, low CHI scores and CHI scores that decline over time should guide prioritization for the development of corrective management; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, that the Conservation Federation of Missouri assembled in Osage Beach, Missouri, this 25th day of February, 2023, urges the use of the Community Health Index methodology for prairie protection by all federal, state, and NGO entities involved in native prairie conservation.

Searchable Keywords: Strategic Guidance for Missouri Grasslands, prairies, native grasslands, Community Health Index, CHI, species of conservation concern, communities of conservation concern, prairie protection

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