

Natural Connections Program

Wildlife Habitat Management

Branchton Railway Prairie Restoration Project

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**Brant Resource
Stewardship Network**

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Healthy plant and wildlife populations require healthy habitats. The goal of wildlife habitat management projects is to encourage the rehabilitation of significant wildlife habitats and expand them where there is an opportunity.

The Branchton Railway Prairie is the last place in the Grand River Plains a person can experience the open tallgrass prairie like it was 200 years ago. The extensive remnants along the Grand River also protect many unique plant species including:

- Virginia Mountain Mint
- Upland White Goldenrod
- False Foxglove
- Tall Cinquefoil
- Green Violet

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Numerous Tallgrass Prairie and Savanna remnants lie within the southern half of the Grand River watershed, a Canadian Heritage River. Due to the once extensive tracks of tallgrass prairie and oak savanna in the area of North Dumfries Township and Brant County, the area is known locally as the Grand River Plains. This was the largest concentration of tallgrass community habitats in Ontario at the time of European settlement and is unique due to the extensive gravel deposits and extremely dry conditions over which these habitats developed.



Waynco Aggregates owns the majority of the prairie. A prescribed burn conducted in spring 2006 was the first ever on the property. Use of prescribed burns will increase the stability of the grassland by increasing the vigor of the native grasses, such as big bluestem and reducing the vigor of pasture grasses and small trees.



Today all that remain of the 30,000 hectares (75,000 acres) of native grasslands that comprised the Grand River Plains are 100 small 1/2 to 2 hectare remnants. The Branchton Railway Prairie is different because it contains 50 hectares of nearly contiguous prairie within several hundred more of old pasture. It is the only place remaining within the Grand River Plains that offers a prairie vista with large patches of tall grasses and groves of large old oak trees (pictured to the left). The size of remnant is also important for grassland birds that require large tracks of habitats.

Grassland birds, such as the eastern meadowlark (pictured to the left) are the fastest declining group of birds in North America, primarily due to habitat loss and fragmentation by buildings, roads and utility corridors. Large, un-fragmented grassland habits in southern Ontario are a conservation priority. Fragmentation in the form of estate housing threatens this significant prairie habitat.

