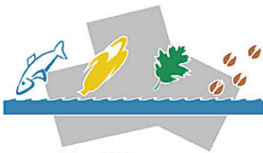


Natural Connections Program

Wildlife Habitat Management

Blue Lake Railway Prairie Restoration

Aug-06



**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 Blue Lake Railway Prairie contains a small but significant remnant of the once vast oak savanna and tallgrass prairie habitat that covered thousands of acres in the South Dumfries up to 1800. The vegetation has grown along a section of an abandoned railway line along Blue Lake Road since before settlement. After the rail line was established the land around it was only cleared up to the edge and the periodic fires and clearing activities kept the remnant open.

Financial support of the project was provided by Brant Resource Stewardship Network and National Wild Turkey Federation.

The Natural Connections Program is funded by the Ontario Trillium Foundation.

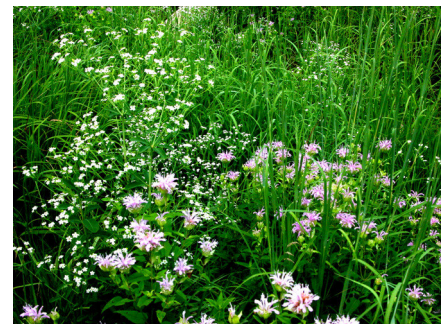
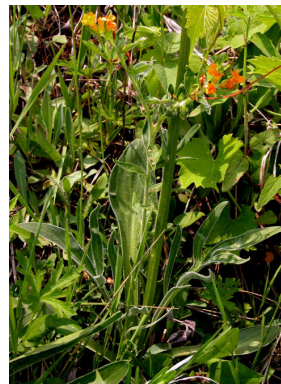


Pictured to the right are hairy valerian (with the silver edge leaf in middle and green flowers) and hoary puccoon (orange flowers). These are two of the many prairie plants that benefited from the prescribed burn along a section of the Blue Lake Railway Prairie. Hairy Valerian is one of the most rare plants in Ontario, with less than 10 known populations.



The wildflowers pictured above include butterfly milkweed (orange flower,) and to the right wild bergamot (pink flowers), and flowering spurge (white flowers). The wildflowers are growing amongst grasses. Tallgrass prairie and oak savanna are dominated by 5 species of grasses. The dominant grass at the Blue Lake Railway prairie is big bluestem along with Indian grass and little bluestem.

A prescribed burn was required to reduce the amount of shrubbery growing in a prairie remnant along an abandoned railway line paralleling Blue Lake Road. A healthy prairie burns naturally every 1 - 3 years. Only a section of the total prairie was burned in 2006 thus ensuring refuge to many rare and unique insects that are sensitive to fire. It is hoped that additional sections can be restored in the future; depending on landowner interest.



Grasses form the back bone of tallgrass prairie and oak savanna. Continuous coverage of grasses is important for creating and sustaining fire which keeps the habitat open. Grasses are also an important source of food and cover for prairie birds. Unlike the European grasses that dominate fields, roadsides and meadows, prairie grasses grow in bunches. The spaces between the plants offers places for birds to forage for food and take cover from predators. One bird that will benefit from the restored prairie is wild turkey. Several dozen of these birds live in the area and feed on insects in the spring and summer and seeds in the fall and winter.