

The Happy Prairie

Terrestrial version of Dragonfly Pond

Background

Most human use of land affects wildlife habitat, positively or negatively. What humans do with land is a reflection of human priorities and lifestyles. The search for a modern day "good life" and all of its conveniences produces mixed results for wildlife and the natural environment. Sometimes people see undeveloped areas of natural environments as little more than raw material for human use. Others believe that the natural environment is to be preserved without regard for human needs. Still others yearn for a balance between economic growth and a healthy and vigorous natural environment. Very real differences of opinion regarding balance exist between well-meaning people.

At the core of land use issues is the concept of growth. Growth in natural systems has inherent limits, imposed by a dynamic balance of energy between all parts of the system. Energy in natural systems is translated into food, water, shelter, space and continued survival. This means that the vitality of natural systems is expressed by their ability to be self-regulating. This capacity for self-regulation makes it possible for all natural members of any ecosystem to live in harmony. All the life forms of any ecosystem must be considered. The microbes in the soil are just as necessary to a habitat as the plants and predators. It is this natural dynamic balance, with all its inherent and essential parts, that human land use tends to disturb. Human activities can often go beyond the natural limits of the habitat. Humans have the ability to import energy sources that allow a system to exceed its natural limits-or to remove energy sources that are necessary for a system to stay in balance. For example, people can build dams to create power, water can be captured for irrigation, wetlands can be drained for homes and buildings. All of these activities affect wildlife habitat.

On the short grass prairie, ranchers and farmers often view prairie dogs as pests, yet the prairie dog town is an integral part of the prairie ecosystem. Cultivation of prairie soils and prairie dog control programs have resulted in the reduction of prairie dog populations up to 98% in some areas, and elimination in others.

Interest groups:

residents-want to build homes and live in the area

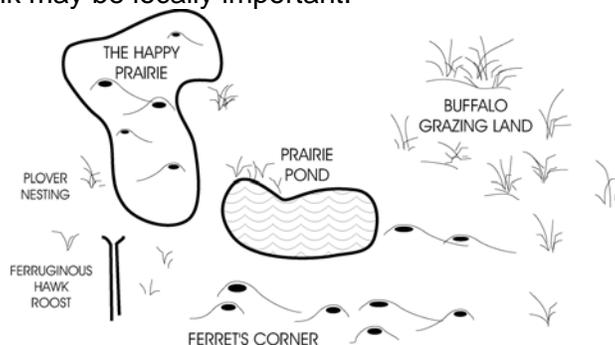
farmers and ranchers-want to use the land to raise food and livestock

parks department personnel-want people to have a place for recreation

highway department personnel-want to build roads and maintain access to the area

business representatives-want to build new industries and preserve jobs and commerce

NOTE: Add others that you think may be locally important.



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