



**UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
ENDANGERED SPECIES PROGRAM**

TELEPHONIC INTERVIEW TIME (06:04)

PRAIRIE BUSH CLOVER (HOST – SARAH LEON WITH PHIL DELPHEY)

This transcript was produced from audio provided by FWS Endangered Species Program

P R O C E E D I N G S

(Music plays.)

MS LEON: This is Sarah Leon for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and today we've got fish and wildlife biologist Phil Delphey on the line. Phil, our listeners are tuning in today to hear about the prairie bush clover. What can you tell them about this rare plant?

MR. DELPHEY: Well, it's a plant of the tall grass prairie that occurs in four states—Minnesota, Iowa, Wisconsin, and Illinois. It's a long-lived plant that is a member of the bean family, so it actually produces small, bean-like seeds. It occurs only in native tall grass prairies, and in all four of those states where it occurs, native tall grass prairie has been almost completely destroyed in the last 150 years or so, and now it occurs in just surviving remnants of that tall grass prairie ecosystem.

MS. LEON: And why are we concerned about this species?

MR. DELPHEY: We don't know a lot about this particular species' role in the prairie ecosystem, but it's more or less one of the indicators that we have of high quality prairie ecosystems. These sites are prone to being shaded by growth of shrubs and trees. So to maintain the tall grass prairie habitat and structure, and species composition that it had 150-200 years ago, it has to be maintained by either carrying out prescribed fire or carefully grazing it with bison or cattle.

When you start getting excessive growth of shrubs or trees, then prairie bush clover populations start to decline. So, it's a pretty good indicator that something

needs to be done to control the shrubs and trees in order to preserve that tall grass prairie habitat, which a wide variety of native plant and animal species rely on.

MS. LEON: So what conservation actions are currently underway, aside from managing prairie bush clover habitat?

MR. DELPHEY: One of the biggest things we need right now is to just simply protect more of the sites where the species occurs. Probably the biggest populations occur in north central Iowa and south central Minnesota, and we usually refer to that area as the species' core area. And then there are also kind of a scattering of populations in Wisconsin and Illinois—more in Wisconsin than in Illinois.

Our approach has been to try to protect a certain number of sites within the species' core range, and also make sure that those sites are managed in a way that the species will persist with prescribed fire or prescribed grazing, or something like that. Then also, protect a certain number of the species' populations outside of that core area, either in central and southern Iowa, in Illinois, and in Wisconsin. So one of the biggest things we're trying to do is just try to acquire sites that may still be owned by, say, farmers, who may be using them to graze cattle or something like that. Wisconsin has actually been really active in this area.

Over the past several years, either the state or conservation organizations within the state have acquired several pieces of property that have populations of prairie bush clover. They get those pieces of property from landowners who are willing to sell, so the landowners typically get fair market value for those properties. Then the Wisconsin DNR or there's a really active conservation organization called The Prairie Enthusiasts in Wisconsin, they start managing those sites.

A lot of times, there are some pretty significant invasive species populations and invasive plant populations, or the site hasn't been burned for a long time, or it's been overgrazed. Once those properties are in the ownership or within the management control of a conservation agency or organization, we can start putting in place the kind of management that's good for prairie bush clover and really just prairie species in general, so that's been one of our primary areas of focus.

And then also, it's a constant struggle with prairie species to try to figure out exactly how frequently to burn, what time of the year to burn, if the sites are grazed—we're always trying to figure out what time of the year should it be grazed. A lot of times what we can understand about what was the natural management, for example, when there were bison in a lot of these areas, when the areas were burned either naturally or by Native Americans.

So that's kind of our basic approach to managing prairie in general, but when we're trying to figure out how to conserve individual species like prairie bush clover within a prairie ecosystem, sometimes the general management might cause adverse impacts, so we're always trying to figure out how we should kind of tweak our management to make sure that what we're doing is going to allow the prairie bush clover to persist in those areas.

MS. LEON: So the service has had a lot of help then in working to recover this species?

MR. DELPHEY: Yeah. We definitely rely pretty heavily on the states. All four of those states have some role in conserving the species. Minnesota DNR has been really active, not only from a habitat management and habitat protection, but also doing some long-term research projects to understand how long the individual plants live, and to understand their population dynamics.

Wisconsin DNR has been very active in getting grants to protect Prairie Bush Clover habitat. Then in Illinois, the Nature Conservancy owns and manages probably the biggest population in Illinois.

MS. LEON: Well, thank you so much, Phil, for taking the time to tell us about the prairie bush clover. It was a real pleasure having you on.

MR. DELPHEY: Yeah, you're welcome.

MS. LEON: For the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, this is Sarah Leon.