

# We're Glad to Have Glades

by Kim Mitchell



Photo by Jim Rathert/Missouri Department of Conservation

**T**he Missouri bladderpod (*Lesquerella filiformis*), a beautiful yellow-flowering plant from the open glades of the Ozark mountains, has an impressive story to tell—story of hope for the future of our wild heritage.

Named for its bladder-like seedpods, the Missouri bladderpod was listed in 1987 as an endangered species. At the time, this Ozark endemic was known only from a few glades that were threatened by urban expansion, encroachment by woody vegetation, competition from nonnative species, overgrazing, and possibly overcollecting.

What is a glade? Phyllis Modeland provides a good description on her website (<http://www.runningriver.com/modeland/>). “The word glade comes

from the Old English ‘glad,’ meaning a shining place. In the Ozarks, glades are truly ‘sunlit islands’ in the forest. A parklike bench on a hillside where the bedrock is exposed or nearly so, a glade resembles a miniature prairie perched among the hills. The old-timers referred to a hilltop glade, or ‘knob,’ as a bald, a word that describes the glade’s most recognizable characteristic: treeless and brushless.”

In Missouri, some glades do resemble prairies, with plants that include big and little bluestem, Indian grass, Indian paintbrush, prairie larkspur, purple

coneflower, and blazing stars. Other glades are drier and resemble a bit of the southwestern desert dropped into the middle of the Ozarks. These hot and dry rocky slopes support scorpions, tarantulas, collared lizards, pygmy rattlesnakes, roadrunners, and prickly pear cacti.

Historically, the openness of the glades was a result of frequent burning caused by lightning or fires purposely set by Native Americans.

After the Missouri bladderpod was listed as endangered, the Missouri Department of Conservation (MDOC), The Nature Conservancy, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service joined forces to save the species. Recovery actions centered on protecting and properly managing the glades. The Nature

Conservancy and the MDOC have purchased and permanently protected 400 acres (160 hectares) of glade habitat at 9 sites. They have also developed outreach material and worked one-on-one with landowners on partnerships for managing glades. Research on the ecology and life history of the Missouri bladderpod has provided the necessary data to restore and enhance glade habitats. At the same time, botanists have surveyed for new bladderpod sites and monitored known populations. The species was recently discovered for the first time in Arkansas, and the number of known extant sites rangewide has increased from 11 in 1987 to 64 today.

Although not glitzy or exciting, work to save the Missouri bladderpod has been coordinated and consistent. More important, it’s been successful! Today, we believe the Missouri bladderpod is no longer in imminent danger of extinction, and we expect to propose reclassifying it soon from endangered to the less critical category of threatened. Thanks to the concerted efforts of land owners and federal, state, and private agencies, the Missouri bladderpod should survive for future generations to enjoy. It’s an encouraging story and a lesson for us all as we work to save rare species.

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