

Prairie Restoration at Fisher Oak Savanna Continues to Thrive

In December of 2004, one of Indiana's highest quality prairie restorations commenced with a dormant sowing at the Fisher Oak Savanna Property owned by the NICHES Land Trust in Jasper County Indiana. Located at the interface between the Kankakee Sands Natural Region and the Grand Prairie Natural Region, this property contains a diversity of habitats and plant communities. The first restoration was relatively small, consisting of one acre of dry sand prairie and 12 acres of diverse black soil prairie. The mix consisted of entirely Yellow-Tag certified Indiana genotype seed supplied from Spence Restoration Nursery. The majority of the seed had genetic origins from the Grand Prairie Natural Region of Indiana where the project is located, some as close as five miles from the site.



By July of 2005 it was quite evident that the new planting had germinated very well. Seedling of conservative prairie graminoids such as Prairie Dropseed (*Sporobolus heterolepis*) and Prairie Oval Sedge (*Carex bicknellii*) were thriving as well as nearly every one of the thirty-two forbs contained in the mix. By the third growing season, all 40 species in the black soil mix had been located in the restoration. The less diverse dry sand prairie was equally successful with all species in the mix represented in the restoration by year three. Floristic quality surveys done in year two confirmed the establishment of a high quality prairie restoration.

NICHES acquired an additional 67 acre field adjacent to the south edge of the original restoration in 2008. Tile removal was performed to restore wet prairie and sedge meadow hydrology to the lowest portions of the property. A wet prairie seed/ sedge meadow seed mix containing 42 species was sown to the wettest acreage. The balance of the 67 acres received a mesic to wet mesic prairie mix consisting of 48 total species. These mixes were dormant sown during the winter of 2009-2010. Since this larger parcel had the potential to support grassland bird populations, the mesic mix omitted the aggressive tall grasses, favoring the matrix of prairie dropseed and little bluestem preferred by grassland songbirds. This second phase of sowing was also characterized by excellent seedling recruitment. Of particular interest was the success of the Bottle Gentian (*Gentiana andrewsii*) in the 2nd phase. Although only 0.1 ounce per acre went into the restoration, this species is common and widespread in the restoration.

Ten years after this restoration began, it continues to thrive. Minor invasive plant issues along the edges such as white sweet clover and black locust trees are being managed by NICHES stewardship staff. Several prescribed fires have encouraged the establishment of the prairie species. The preserve is open to public and is 5 miles north of Wolcott Indiana.

PLANT FEATURE: SMOOTH ASTER (*ASTER LAEVIS*)



A handsome species of prairies and savannas, Smooth Aster thrives in cultivation in sun or partial shade. Growing 2 to 3 feet in height, it sports handsome bluish-green foliage throughout the growing season. The light blue flowers appear primarily in September. Requiring only well-drained soil and at least one half day of sun, smooth aster is easily cultivated in perennial borders, adapting to a wide range of soil types. It is very drought resistant.

In a restoration, Smooth Aster is appropriate to include in mesic to dry prairie and savanna mixes with associates from our [Mesic Prairie](#) and [Low Stature Prairie](#) mixes.