



Building a Legacy of Conservation



American Prairie Reserve (APR) is spearheading a historic effort to assemble the largest wildlife park of any kind in the lower 48 states. Scientists have identified the area of American Prairie Reserve in northeastern Montana as **one of only four remaining areas in the world** that are viable options for landscape-scale grasslands conservation.

When stepping onto the plains of Montana, it is not difficult to imagine the landscape as Lewis and Clark and Native Americans saw it, with thundering herds of bison, racing bands of pronghorn antelope and prairie dog towns dotting the horizon. In every direction a blanket of sage brush and healthy prairie grasses paint the canvas of Montana's wide open spaces, creating an experience both serene and stirring that is rapidly becoming scarce in the developed world. Native American tipi rings can still be seen along the remote ridges and coulees of the Larb Hills and in drainages of Kill Woman Creek, calling to mind the indigenous peoples whose culture and spirituality are intimately tied to the prairie's rolling hills and boundless skies.

The unique history and vast, untilled grasslands are what make American Prairie Reserve one of the most compelling places in modern America for conservation on a landscape scale the way it's been done in the African Serengeti. When complete, the Reserve will consist of more than three million acres of private and public land (using the existing 1.1 million acre Charles M. Russell National Wildlife Refuge as the public land anchor). The result will be a wildlife complex the size of Connecticut, set aside for conservation and public access. APR believes that the rich natural heritage of North America's native prairie is a gift of immeasurable value for the global community. By conserving it for the enjoyment and benefit of future generations, America can once again emerge at the forefront of worldwide conservation leadership.

Background

Less than 5% of the world's temperate grasslands are under some form of protection and the idea of preserving a piece of the American prairie has been studied and promoted in books and papers for well over 100 years. In 1999, The Nature Conservancy (TNC) published *Ecoregional Planning in the Northern Great Plains Steppe*, pinpointing for the first time areas of the Northern Great Plains that were most viable for restoring the region's habitats and conserving the existing diversity of plants and animals.

Shortly after TNC published its findings, World Wildlife Fund (WWF) decided to initiate a conservation effort in the Montana Glaciated Plains, one of the key areas identified by TNC. During the same period, the Northern Plains Conservation Network, a coalition of local and national organizations, endorsed the importance of initiating a conservation program in the same area, and the idea of building a prairie reserve in the Montana Glaciated Plains was born. All agreed that such an effort would require forming an independent entity existing solely to acquire land and comprehensively manage the proposed reserve based upon sound scientific principles. In June 2001, American Prairie Reserve was officially formed, with the exclusive focus of assembling a fully functioning ecological park on Montana's Glaciated Plains.

The area of American Prairie Reserve is particularly appealing:

- It's 95% untilled, and it is a lot easier to restore native grasslands that have never been sod-busted.
- It's depopulating at about 10% per decade as children grow up and leave the area for better economic opportunity, so there's ample acquisition opportunity.
- There's a tremendous amount of public land to leverage including Bureau of Land Management tracts and the 1.1 million acre Charles M. Russell National Wildlife Refuge. By purchasing a relatively small amount of private acreage, APR gains access to the associated public land.



Progress to Date
(As of September 2013):

- **Fundraising:** \$63 million in cash and pledges since 2002.
- **Land Acquisition:** APR owns or leases nearly 274,000 acres of public and private land. (see map)
- **Science and Wildlife:** APR is engaged in a range of field studies, projects and management discussions with its science partner, WWF, as well as with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks, and the Bureau of Land Management. Ongoing projects include bison reintroduction, noxious weed control, controlled fire regimes, riparian restoration trials, cougar and pronghorn range monitoring, prairie dog restoration and studies to track imperiled long-billed curlews nesting in the Reserve area.
- **Public Access:** American Prairie Reserve is open for a variety of uses including hiking, biking, hunting, wildlife viewing and horseback riding. There is a campground and a visitor's map with suggested sites of interest. APR is beginning to install trails and signage to improve the visitor experience.

