

Native Orchid Conservation Inc.
Tall Grass Prairie Preserve, Agassiz Trail, Field Trip, July 4, 2015

The Agassiz trail of the TGPP is the only place in Canada to see the globally rare western prairie fringed-orchid (*Platanthera praeclara*), as here in Manitoba it is at its northernmost range. It is labelled extremely rare and endangered in Canada and Manitoba. It grows in remnant native prairies and wet meadows in the United States and Canada. It is estimated there are fewer than 4,000 plants in the TGPP. The western prairie fringed-orchid is a sturdy, long-lived perennial with creamy-white to white flowers in a cluster 25 centimetres or more in height. The lower petal of each flower is delicately fringed. Blooming generally begins in early-July and lasts for three weeks. It is believed that sphinx moths play an important role in pollinating the orchids. These orchids require a companion fungus, known as mycorrhizae, to survive; this fungus is easily destroyed when the plant is dug up. Purple and white prairie clover lend contrasting colours to the prairie while enriching the soil with nitrogen. The composites begin their showy displays from black-eyed susans to blazing stars and the early goldenrods. This is when the greatest diversity of butterflies can be sighted -- 20 or more kinds on a good day -- including the rare Powesheik skipper, a species found only in the preserve area within Canada.

Over 2000 hectares of tall-grass prairie are protected within the TGPP. Like many remnant grasslands, these lands escaped destruction because the land was too difficult to plough. Large boulders, aspen groves and far-reaching swamps discouraged the early settlers in turning the sod, allowing this unique plant and animal system to endure. Today the area is home to over 150 plant species, from flowers and grasses to shrubs and trees, and a variety of animals from butterflies, frogs and songbirds to voles, deer, moose and an occasional bear.

Much of the land in the TGPP was originally settled by pioneers from Bukovina in the western Ukraine. The first Bukovinians arrived in Canada in 1896 and settled in the Stuartburn-Gardenton area. By 1900 several churches had been constructed in the area. The most notable was St. Michael's, the first permanent Ukrainian Greek Orthodox church built in Canada. This structure, in continual use since its consecration, stands as a symbol of the Ukrainian immigrants' faith and determination to preserve their religion in a new land. Original homesteads, typifying the materials and construction used by the early settlers, are found throughout the area. Artifacts from this settlement can be seen in the Gardenton Ukrainian Museum.

WPFO - the Field House road, north of 209 between the 1 and 2 mile marks. She also suggests the Prairie Shore (has a trail) or the Nature Manitoba piece across the road and a bit east of the Prairie Shore Trail. It has some nice sand ridges that "sport" a good variety of wildflowers including comandra, lousewort, harebells, lilies, yellow LS, twayblade and ladies'-tresses. Here's a link to a map that shows some of the Prairie Shore Trail, etc.

http://www.gov.mb.ca/conservation/wildlife/habcons/pdf/tgpp_map.pdf