

Ojibway Prairie Complex

As part of the Detroit River International Crossing study, potential impacts on the Ojibway Prairie Complex are being evaluated. The Ojibway Prairie Complex is one of the few remaining tallgrass prairies in Ontario. It is estimated that tallgrass prairies once covered between 80,000 and 200,000 ha of Southern Ontario; now, approximately 2,100 ha, or 1%, remains.

Prairies are an assemblage of grasses, sedges and wildflowers with minimal trees. Prairies have 0% to 10% tree cover; savannahs have 10% to 35% tree cover; and, woodlands have more than 35% tree cover. Precipitation is the determining factor, with wetter conditions in Ontario resulting in tallgrass prairies, as opposed to mixed or shortgrass prairie types found elsewhere.

Tallgrass prairies develop under the right combination of soil type, precipitation and fire. Prairies typically require deep sandy soils with wet springs and dry summers and can withstand droughts. Fire plays an important role in prairie communities because it causes die-back of non-fire tolerant plants and trees that are not part of the tallgrass community. Prairie species are fire tolerant due to extensive root systems. Several plants form the basis of tallgrass communities - big bluestem grass, Indian grass, yellow star grass, and giant sunflower.

The Ojibway Prairie Complex covers an area of approximately 350 ha including:

- three parcels that are managed by the City of Windsor (Ojibway Park, Tallgrass Prairie Heritage Park and Black Oak Heritage Park) totaling 127 ha
- the Ojibway Prairie Provincial Nature Reserve totaling 105 ha
- the Spring Garden Natural Area totaling 117 ha.

Collectively, these sites are designated the Ojibway Prairie Remnants Area of Natural and Scientific Interest (ANSI). ANSIs are publicly or privately owned areas of land and associated waters, selected on the basis of earth or life science features that have provincially important natural heritage, scientific or educational values. The Ojibway Prairie Remnants is designated as a Provincially Significant Life Science ANSI which includes significant landscapes, environments, biotic communities and native flora and fauna of provincial interest. Most parcels of the Ojibway Prairie Remnants are also designated as an Environmentally Sensitive Area by the Essex Region Conservation Authority.

The Ojibway Prairie Complex supports several vegetation communities that are critically imperiled and extremely rare globally and in Ontario. The Complex also supports a number of significant species with federal and provincial status. A total of ten species are listed as Schedule 1 under the federal *Species at Risk Act* (SARA), with four of these species also listed under the provincial *Endangered Species Act* (ESA). Schedule 1 species and their habitats are currently protected under SARA. Schedule 2 and 3 species are being re-assessed to determine if they should be listed in the regulations. An additional 11 species are currently listed as threatened and five species are listed as special concern. There are also over 100 provincially uncommon, rare or extremely rare species located in the Ojibway Prairie Complex.

The Ojibway Prairie Complex is protected by several levels of government. At the federal level, species at risk and their habitat are regulated by the *Species at Risk Act*. The Ontario *Endangered Species Act* regulates endangered species and their habitat at the provincial level. The Provincial Policy Statement passed under Section 3 of the *Planning Act* commits the provincial government to protect provincially significant ANSIs and significant portions of the habitat of threatened and endangered species. The Ojibway Prairie Provincial Nature Reserve, one component of the Ojibway Prairie Complex, is regulated as a Provincial Nature Reserve under the *Provincial Parks Act*. At the local municipal level, the Ojibway Prairie Complex is designated for environmental protection in the City of Windsor Official Plan. The Essex Region Conservation Authority also seeks to protect lands designated Environmentally Sensitive Areas within their jurisdiction.