



Tree and Brush Clearing

Who practices tree and brush removal?

- Conservation groups such as The Prairie Enthusiasts, federal and state agencies, and private landowners who are managing lands for open grassland habitat.
- Professional contractors and conservation group volunteers who specialize in restoration of native plant communities will use low-impact techniques and equipment to remove trees and brush from sensitive habitats.
- Sometimes commercial loggers are hired to do large-scale tree removal in less sensitive habitats.

When is the best time to clear trees and brush?

- Trees and brush should ideally be cleared outside the growing season when the soil is firm, to limit erosion and damage to prairie plants. This timeframe includes autumn, when the ground is dry, and winter when the ground is frozen.

Why is tree and brush removal important?

- Native prairies have been reduced 0.01% of their range in Wisconsin, partly as a result of fire suppression. Fire prevented tree and brush encroachment into the prairie and eventual succession into forest.
- Rare butterflies such as the state-endangered regal fritillary won't cross woody barriers, and are thus restricted to rapidly shrinking remnant prairie habitat patches.
- Most prairie plants need full sunlight to survive. The shade that develops under the developing canopy can eliminate prairie plant species which are replaced by shade-tolerant forest species.
- Trees and brush provide refuges for common predators of grassland birds. Also, many grassland birds will bypass grasslands that are chopped into small 'compartments' by tree lines and plantations as they seek a place to nest.

How can I remove trees and brush from my property?

- Prescribed fire is a cost-effective way to keep trees and brush at bay on large acreages of grassland.
- Chainsaws, power brushcutters, brush hogs and heavy-duty walk-behind mowers can all be useful for tree and brush removal.
- Large trees can be "girdled" by removing a complete ring of bark from around the tree's trunk. A chainsaw can be used to cut two two-inch deep rings around the trunk while an axe can be used to remove the bark within the rings.

The Military Ridge Prairie Heritage Area is a cooperative project of 9 partner groups representing the private, state and federal sectors. Goals of the partnership include: 1) Provide and maintain viable prairie, savanna, grassland, and aquatic habitat, for the many plants and animals that depend on these habitats for their survival; 2) Maintain an economically viable rural and agricultural landscape; 3) Provide and encourage traditional recreational opportunities which are compatible with the conservation goals; and 4) Integrate best applied science through the use of continued monitoring and adaptive management. For more information, contact Katie Abbott, Project Coordinator, at (608)935-2791 ext. 134, or at katie.abbott@rcdnet.net.



- Heavy equipment can be used to clear trees and brush on a large scale. The ‘forestry mower’ grinds dense areas of brush down to wood chips, while efficient processors such as the ‘tree shearer’ mechanically cut trees and transfer them to a transport vehicle or landing.
- Stumps should be sprayed with an herbicide to prevent resprouting. As an alternative, resprouting brush and weeds can be sprayed in cleared areas with a broad-leaf herbicide, as long as there are no desirable plants there.
- Make sure to quickly get desirable plants, especially grasses, established in cleared areas, to prevent weed invasions!

Where is tree and brush removal a priority?

- Treelines and hedgerows that border prairie or grassland, to decrease predator habitat.
- Any trees that separate grassland parcels, in order to create larger areas of open grassland.
- High-quality remnant prairie
- Not every tree on the prairie needs to be removed. Widely scattered oak trees form a native oak savanna ecosystem. Additionally, some brushy thickets should be left for the state threatened Bell’s vireo.

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