



## Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie Volunteer Position Description

**Title:** Midewin Floristic Quality Monitor

**Purpose:** Midewin is the largest prairie restoration effort east of the Mississippi River. Of the approximately 30 square miles, about 2.5% of Midewin is comprised of remnant natural plant communities. Vegetation inventories and surveys of existing and newly acquired land at Midewin are needed to determine their floristic quality and the presence of threatened or endangered plant species. In addition, floristic inventories and vegetation surveys can be used to determine if restorations at Midewin are reaching the levels of species diversity that are found in prairie remnants. Floristic quality monitors provide Midewin with valuable species lists that is used to evaluate native prairie restoration areas and respond with tailored management. Monitors help directly with part one of Midewin's mission to conserve, restore, and enhance the native populations and habitats of fish, wildlife, and plants.

**Duties and Responsibilities:** Monitors are responsible for their own transportation to Midewin's Welcome Center meeting location. Monitors work as a team to identify native and non-native plant species present in each of Midewin's restoration areas and compile a species list. A staff member or experienced volunteer will lead the monitoring team and assist with or confirm identification. Unknown species must be collected and pressed for later identification. Monitors locate transects via GPS coordinates and identify species within random quadrats along each 100-meter transect. Data sheets, materials and hours of service must be submitted to the volunteer coordinator at the end of monitoring season.

**Department and Location:** Under the direction of Midewin's botanist, volunteer time and data is contributed to Midewin's Restoration Team. Surveys will take place on restoration areas such as Route 66 Prairie, South Patrol Road Prairie, Blodgett Road Prairie, and additional areas as they are restored.

**Qualifications:** Knowledge of local flora and plant identification skills are desired. It is important to be able to identify plants during various stages of growth. Monitors must be available during the day weekdays, see time commitment. Schedule should be flexible because ending time varies slightly and a couple monitoring sites are within locked gates. Monitors must walk long distances through tall vegetation to get to each transect.

**Time Commitment:** Monitors gain more experience every year and therefore data collection gets more accurate and efficient, so a multiple year commitment is preferred but not required. It is most beneficial for monitors to commit at least twice a week for the duration of the monitoring season, which can vary within the growing season (June-August). Typically three days a week are scheduled by a staff member or lead volunteer monitor. Monitoring days usually start at 8am and last 3-5 hours depending on team experience, site distance and weather.

**Training:** The best training happens in the field and over time. New monitors are certainly welcome to come and learn as they go. Additional responsibilities could become applicable or available to this position in the future that might require additional training and/or certification. These additional responsibilities will be determined by the program managers and offered to selected volunteers.

**Working Conditions/Physical Effort:** *Floristic quality monitors are covered by the Volunteer Agreement (Form 301a) while performing duties described by this position description during the season(s) listed or scheduled shifts.* This season may vary depending on climate and availability. Monitors may work in variable conditions including:

- Exposure to outdoor weather conditions, especially heat & allergens
- Walking on uneven, possibly wet terrain and/or through tall vegetation
- May be working near hazardous plants or insects
- Monitors are bending, standing or walking for 3-5 hours at a time

**Benefits:** Monitors have the unique experience of being completely surrounded by Midewin's prairie restorations and witnessing them mature. Volunteer monitors further the citizen scientist movement by contributing valuable data to program managers. Midewin's volunteer staff receives ongoing recognition from their supervisor and other staff. Volunteers that contribute three or more individual volunteer visits in the fiscal year will receive an invitation to an annual volunteer recognition banquet in November. Midewin's volunteer staff receives the bimonthly Prairie Telegraph. Volunteers may be featured in the telegraph, newspaper articles and/or US Forest Service success stories. Awards can be received for outstanding, innovative and/or long term, core volunteers.

**Related Opportunities:** Plants of Concern monitors, coordinated by the Chicago Botanic Garden, monitor Midewin's rarest plants to assess trends in their populations and provide important data used to conserve our rapidly declining floral heritage. Data collections include population counts, size of the area that a population covers, percent reproductive, native plant associates, invasive species, and threats such as brush or deer browse. Monitors will search for the extent of these species in known locations and sometimes in potential new locations with appropriate habitat.