



Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie

Welcome Center Hours 8 am-4:30 pm (Mon-Fri)

Open Saturday, April -October

30239 South State Route 53, Wilmington IL 60481

815-423-6370

<http://www.fs.usda.gov/midewin>

History and Mission

Midewin is a Potawatomi word that closely means 'healing society'



Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie is commonly recognized as 'the old Joliet Arsenal' because this site was the former Joliet Army Ammunition Plant, a 23,500-acre site where TNT was once produced for the U.S. Army. Still remaining are dilapidated warehouses, a fire station, 380 grass covered bunkers (photo, left), and more. Today, most of the former arsenal is the largest contiguous piece of protected open space in northeastern Illinois and the first national tallgrass prairie in the United States. The Illinois Land Conservation Act of 1995 was signed into law on February 10, 1996 and established the Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie on 19,000 acres of the former Joliet Army Ammunition Plant. The additional land was carved out for the Abraham Lincoln National Cemetery,

CenterPoint Intermodal, Local 150's Heavy Equipment Operator Training School and a Will County landfill.

Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie is not only the first national tallgrass prairie in the country, but also one of the largest prairie restoration efforts east of the Mississippi River. Midewin has been listed as a National Treasured Landscape by the National Forest Foundation (<https://www.nationalforests.org/conservation/programs/conservation>). Midewin is administered by the U.S. Forest Service, with the support of hundreds of volunteers and partner agencies, businesses, and organizations. Presently, Midewin consists of 19,000 acres (~30 square miles) of pasture and agricultural land with a few prairie, dolomite prairie, and wetland remnants. Located just south of Chicago in Will County, Midewin is home to over 100 bird species. An additional 68 bird species use Midewin during migration or as winter range. Midewin is home to about 27 mammal and 53 fish species, and over 600 plants have been identified so far. Midewin supports the state's largest population of upland sandpipers, a state endangered species (<http://www.gpnc.org/upland.htm>). Midewin provides the best opportunity to provide adequate habitat for these species. Midewin land will consist mainly of ecosystems restored as wet prairie/sedge meadow, grassland (short, medium), and upland tallgrass prairie with smaller areas of savanna and woodland. The prairie plan considers that a balance between restoration and recreation is essential to provide the best experience for visitors because Midewin is part of the national public lands system. Midewin's mission includes four objectives which are described below.



1. Midewin will manage the land and water resources of the Prairie in a manner that will conserve and enhance the native populations and habitats of fish, wildlife, and plants.

This is an ongoing effort by staff and volunteers to plant seedbeds, harvest seed from the seedbeds or from wild populations, clean seeds, propagate plants, then use the new plants or broadcast the seed throughout restoration plots (photo mid- left). Midewin manages invasives with mowing, herbiciding, grazing, and prescribed fire. Prescribed fire is one of Midewin's best alternatives in controlling invasive shrubs while helping fire dependant plants thrive (photo mid-right). These fires are organized and controlled by Midewin's very own Interagency Hotshot crew.

As farm fields are converted to wetlands by removing drainage tiles, it takes a dedicated staff and many volunteers to monitor

wildlife. Volunteers monitor frogs, birds, rare plants, butterflies and streams in order to track trends over the years (photo above). This data is shared with partners such as Illinois Natural History Survey, Illinois Butterfly Monitoring Network, The Nature Conservancy, Illinois RiverWatch and Chicago Botanic Garden (Plants of Concern Program). The data collected at Midewin is used to reflect progress on site and also contributes to the larger monitoring effort regionally or state-wide. Midewin's goal is to increase the numbers and diversity of wildlife by healing the ecosystems they depend upon.



2. Midewin provides opportunities for scientific, environmental, and land use education and research. We always have research opportunities for scientists, professors, and students. Staff and volunteers lead educational tours in a variety of categories to appeal to people's different interests such as habitat restoration and arsenal history. Midewin has 5 pioneer cemeteries on site and volunteers occasionally do research about the individuals and families buried there. Volunteers have also been busy curating some artifacts from several historic farmsteads on site.

Another program that volunteers assist with is the very popular Mighty Acorns Program which is an environmental education program for local grade schools (photo right). The classes visit Midewin to do nature activities and stewardship such as seed harvest and planting.



3. We intend to allow the continuation of agricultural use of lands within Midwin National Tallgrass Prairie for the next 20 years or for compatible resource management uses thereafter. Through special land use permits, farmers and ranchers lease Midwin property and the revenue generated from the leases goes in a restoration fund. Agriculture benefits Midwin, as a form of land management in areas not ready to restore because row crops keep invasive weeds out of these areas.



Cattle grazing keep grasses to a short or medium height, providing bird habitat, in our grassland areas.

Certain bird species require shorter vegetation such as the Upland Sandpiper and Loggerhead Shrike. Birds such as Henslow's sparrows favor the tall grasses. Keep your eyes peeled; it will be a treat if you see some of these birds on your visit!!



Henslow's Sparrow



Eastern Meadowlark



Loggerhead Shrike



Bobolink

4. Midwin will provide a variety of recreation opportunities that are not inconsistent with the preceding purposes.

Currently, Midwin has over 9000 acres open to the public including 34 miles of trails, most of which are for shared use by hikers, bicyclists and equestrians. These trails have only been possible with the help of seasonal crews and volunteers building bridges, installing fences and maintaining trails. Midwin invites deer hunters in the fall and turkey hunters in the spring. There are a variety of tours and programs that are offered including bird watching, bike tours, photo tours, Midwin for Kids' programs and presentations by local professionals.





The volunteer program at Midwin is managed by The Nature Conservancy in partnership with the U.S. Forest Service.

Midwin has many opportunities and volunteers are essential to Midwin National Tallgrass Prairie in order to meet goals to stay true to our mission.

Please contact us if you would like more information on how to become involved at Midwin. It is easy to donate time or money to our programs.

We also encourage you to stop by the Welcome Center within the Supervisor's Office Complex to pick up trail maps, brochures, gifts and books.

Peacefully,
Allison Cisneros, Volunteer Coordinator
815.423.2149 or amcisneros@fs.fed.us

[Link to Volunteer webpage](#)

Additional Resources about Midwin

Prairies in the Prairie State: Midwin
<http://exhibits.museum.state.il.us/exhibits/midwin/frames.html>

A Midwin Almanac, Arthur Melville Pearson Blog
http://midwinrestoration.net/?page_id=47

The Wetlands Initiative and Midwin Partnership
<http://wetlands-initiative.org/what-we-do/midwin-national-tallgrass-prairie.html>

Rare Plants success Story, Plants of Concern and Midwin
http://www.fs.fed.us/wildflowers/rareplants/conservation/success/midwin_plants_of_concern.shtml

The Nature Conservancy at Midwin
<http://www.nature.org/ourinitiatives/regions/northamerica/unitedstates/illinois/placesweprotect/midwin-national-tallgrass-prairie.xml>