**Endangered Ecosystem**

Less than 1% of Palouse Prairie remains today. In fact, by 1900, 90% had already been converted to agriculture! The Palouse is home to some of the most productive agricultural land in the world, but in the interest of biodiversity and soil conservation, we must conserve the remnants and re-establish ecologically viable prairie patches. Currently, restoration techniques are being developed and the U.S. Department of Agriculture is helping restore retired agricultural fields back to prairie through conservation programs. If you are interested in restoring native Palouse Prairie vegetation on your land, you have a fascinating challenge in store. Regardless of whether you have a small yard or acres of land, growing native Palouse Prairie plants can be very rewarding. For more information, contact the Palouse Prairie Foundation.

**Where to Experience Palouse Prairie**

**Kamiak Butte**
http://www.whitmancounty.org/Parks/ Index_Pages/Kamiak.htm

**Steptoe Butte**
http://www.parks.wa.gov/parkpage.asp? selectedpark=Steptoe%20Butte&pageno=1

**Rose Creek Nature Preserve**
http://nature.org/wherewework/northamerica/ states/washington/preserves/art6368.html

For website updates, check [www.palouseprairie.org](http://www.palouseprairie.org)

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**For More Information Contact the**

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[www.palouseprairie.org](http://www.palouseprairie.org)

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Above photo and photo on front panel by Alison Meyer

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**What is Palouse Prairie?**

The region of southeastern Washington and adjacent Idaho that has rolling hills of deep soils is known as the Palouse.

On its eastern border, this region is bounded by the forests of northern Idaho, and the Snake River forms its southern boundary.

To the north and west of the Palouse are areas of flat terrain and shallow soils, places that were scoured by ice and water during past glaciations and floods.
One hundred-fifty years ago, the Palouse was carpeted by perennial bunchgrasses growing in tufts or clumps, accompanied by many different kinds of wildflowers. In spring and early summer, the grasses and flowers gave the appearance of a colorful, lush meadow, or Palouse Prairie.

Its beauty was wild and untrammeled and the undulating hills were covered with luxuriant grasses.

~ Moscow homesteader, 1880s

This type of vegetation occurs where the climate is almost wet enough to support the growth of trees. The principal bunchgrasses of Palouse meadows were Idaho fescue, bluebunch wheatgrass, and prairie junegrass. Short shrubs, especially snowberry and wild rose, were common. Mosses and lichens were an important but inconspicuous feature.

Luxuriant camas meadows grew in low-lying areas and swales that were wet in spring.

The indigo-flowered camas grew so densely that in 1806 Meriwether Lewis wrote in his journal that the camas meadows resembled "a lake of fine clear water, so complete is this deception that on first sight I could have sworn it was water." The camas roots were harvested by first peoples and served as a nutritious, starchy food and trade item.

Right: Nez Perce woman with part of the camas harvest.
Photo courtesy of the National Park Service, Nez Perce National Historical Park, Spalding, ID. (Photo Number NEPE-HI-0773.)

First Peoples

Prior to Euroamerican settlement, the Palouse River drainage was inhabited primarily by the Palouse people. The Nez Perce people spent much of their time in the southern part of the Palouse Prairie. The northern fringes were used by the Coeur d'Alenes and Spokanes, and the Cayuses used the area to the southwest. These patterns were fluid, however, with much overlap between the different groups. The annual cycle of hunting and gathering tracked seasonal changes in plant productivity. The cycle began with gathering roots at low elevations in spring; as the seasons progressed, plant and animal resources were harvested at progressively higher elevations. Visit the Spalding Museum in Lapwai, Idaho to learn more about the first peoples on the Palouse, or Pah-loots-pu. Additionally, local tribes hold the annual Pah-loots-pu Pow Wow each spring at Washington State University, and the Tutxinmepu Pow Wow each fall at the University of Idaho.

In 1855, Stevens was astonished at the “luxuriance of the grass” and the “richness of the soil” in the Palouse watershed. “The whole view,” he commented, “presents to the eye a vast bed of flowers in all their varied beauty.”

Quote above and lithograph in background from:
I.I. Stevens, 1860. Reports of explorations and surveys, to ascertain the most practicable and economical route for a railroad from the Mississippi River to the Pacific Ocean. Made under the Secretary of War in 1853-5, 36th Congress 1st Session, Senate Executive Document Part I, General Report.