

## Shortgrass Prairie



### **What is a shortgrass prairie?**

Shortgrass prairie habitat is flat to rolling terrain dominated by short grasses that form a nearly continuous carpet across the landscape. Grama grass and buffalo grass make up 70% to 90% of the plants growing on the shortgrass prairie. A few mid-grasses and forbs also grow there. Shortgrass prairie is the westernmost and driest of the true North American grasslands. Average annual precipitation is 10 to 12 inches.

### **Why are shortgrass prairies important?**

Shortgrass prairies provide essential habitat for many species of wildlife that live nowhere else. Grazing buffalo, deer, and pronghorn as well as burrowing mammals are the iconic animals of this landscape. However, the grasses are the real star of this ecosystem. They can withstand the harsh climate better than any other plants and help to protect the essential topsoil. Without the grasses, we'd have no plant or animal life, just dust.

### **Where are shortgrass prairies in Wyoming?**

Basically, shortgrass prairie is found in the eastern one-third of Wyoming, in the rain shadow of the Rocky Mountains. It gradually turns into sagebrush, grasslands and foothills shrub land as the terrain rises westward toward the Rocky Mountains.

Shortgrass Prairie Ecosystem Flashcards

American Badger



White-tailed Jackrabbit



Swift Fox



Northern Pocket Gopher



Ferruginous Hawk



Short-eared Owl





Shortgrass Prairie Ecosystem Flashcards

Western Meadowlark



Lark Bunting



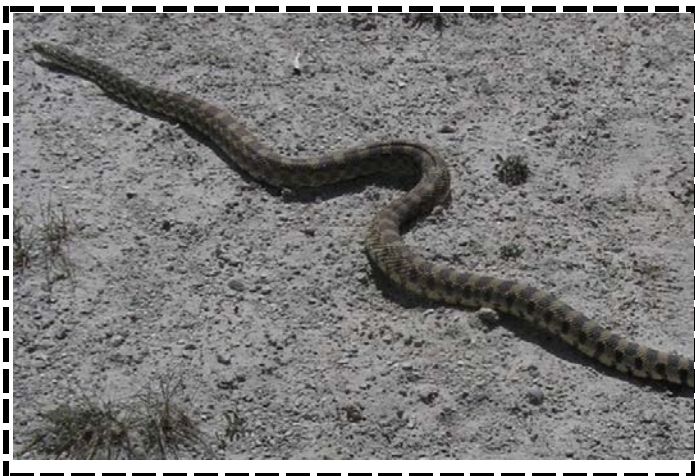
Upland Sandpiper



Plains Spadefoot Toad



Bullsnake



Two-striped Grasshopper





Shortgrass Prairie Ecosystem Flashcards

Blue Grama



Prairie Sandreed



Plains Prickly Pear



Prairie Sunflower



The Sun



American Badger

Name: American Badger  
Scientific Name: *Taxidea taxus*  
Predators: Coyotes, fox, mountain lions, wolves, raptors, humans  
Prey or Food: Burrowing mammals, eggs, insects

Did you know? Many animals depend on abandoned badger holes for shelter.

White-tailed Jackrabbit

Name: White-tailed Jackrabbit  
Scientific Name: *Lepus townsendii*  
Predators: Coyotes, fox, mountain lions, wolves, raptors, humans  
Prey or Food: Plant matter

Did you know? In addition to hearing, the long ears of this rabbit help to keep body temperatures cool.

Swift Fox

Name: Swift Fox  
Scientific Name: *Vulpes velox*  
Predators: Coyotes, humans  
Prey or Food: rabbits, small rodents, birds, berries

Did you know? Pairs court for months before settling on a lifelong mate

Northern Pocket Gopher

Name: Northern Pocket Gopher  
Scientific Name: *Thomomys talpoides*  
Predators: Badger, fox  
Prey or Food: underground plant parts

Did you know? Named for its fur-lined cheek pocket it uses to store food.

Ferruginous Hawk

Name: Ferruginous Hawk  
Scientific Name: *Buteo regalis*  
Predators: Larger Raptors, mammals and snakes will eat eggs  
Prey or Food: Burrowing mammals, rabbits, birds, reptiles

Did you know? This is North America's largest hawk; it has a wingspan of almost 5 feet.

Short-eared Owl

Name: Short-eared Owl  
Scientific Name: *Asio flammeus*  
Predators: Raptors, large mammals  
Prey or Food: Small mammals, other birds

Did you know? Unlike most owls, Short-eared owls nest on the ground.

Western Meadowlark

Name: Western Meadowlark  
Scientific Name: *Sturnella neglecta*  
Predators: Raptors, large mammals, reptiles  
Prey or Food: Insects

Did you know? This is Wyoming's "State Bird."

Lark Bunting

Name: Lark Bunting  
Scientific Name: *Eremophila alpestris*  
Predators: Raptors, large mammals, reptiles  
Prey or Food: Insects, seeds

Did you know? Because they often coincided with the end of bad weather, some farmers would wait until Lark Buntings came back from their migration to plant crops.

Upland Sandpiper

Name: Upland Sandpiper  
Scientific Name: *Bartramia longicauda*  
Predators: Raptors, large mammals, reptiles  
Prey or Food: Insects

Did you know? Early settlers used to eat the eggs.

Plains Spadefoot Toad

Name: Plains Spadefoot Toad  
Scientific Name: *Spea bombifrons*  
Predators: Birds, mammals, reptiles  
Prey or Food: Insects, snails, caterpillars, plant matter

Did you know? These toads are named for the spade-shaped growths on their hind feet that they use to dig the holes where they spend most of their time.

Bullsnake

Name: Bullsnake  
Scientific Name: *Pituophis catenifer sayi*  
Predators: Raptors, skunks  
Prey or Food: Mammals, birds, bird eggs

Did you know? Bull snakes hibernate in underground dens - often with other types of snakes such as rattlesnakes and gopher snakes.

Two-striped Grasshopper

Name: Two-striped Grasshopper  
Scientific Name: *Melanoplus bivittus*  
Predators: Birds, reptiles, amphibians, mammals  
Prey or Food: Plants

Did you know? Grasshoppers have been known to destroy entire crops of cotton, clover, alfalfa and other grains.

Blue Grama

Name: Blue Grama  
Scientific Name: *Bouteloua gracilis*  
Predators: Birds, mammals  
Prey or Food: Water, sun, soil, air

Did you know? Blue grama is a type of grass, the fruits of grasses are what we call grain.

Prairie Sandreed

Name: Prairie Sandreed  
Scientific Name: *Calamovilfa longifolia*  
Predators: Birds, mammals  
Prey or Food: Water, sun, soil, air

Did you know? This grass begins to grow earlier in the spring than other grasses.

Plains Prickly Pear

Name: Plains Prickly Pear  
Scientific Name: *Opuntia polyacantha*  
Predators: Birds, mammals including pronghorn and deer, humans  
Prey or Food: Water, sun, soil, air

Did you know? A cactus doesn't have leaves, instead the fleshy pads carry out photosynthesis.

Prairie Sunflower

Name: Prairie Sunflower  
Scientific Name: *Helianthus petiolaris*  
Predators: Birds, mammals  
Prey or Food: Water, sun, soil, air

Did you know? In early spring, sprouts provide food for caterpillars, as the flower blooms in summer, they are a food source for pollinators; as seeds begin to develop in the fall, they feed birds and mammals.

The Sun

Plants use the sun's energy to grow through a process known as photosynthesis. Because plants are the beginning of all food chains, all plants and animals transfer the sun's energy when they eat.