THE (OFF) ROAD TO RECOVERY IN WESLEYVILLE

Grassland Monitoring for Conservation

1 Background

Wesleyville is 10 km West of Port Hope along the shores of Lake Ontario. The rural site is home to many declining species and rare natural heritage features deserving of protection. In light of ecological damage from trespassing off-road vehicles (Figure 2), members of a Joint Working Group (JWG) between the **Willow Beach Field Naturalists** and the **Northumberland Land Trust** have begun monitoring the impacts within the old-growth hemlock forests. The grasslands have many indicator species, but agricultural activity that subsided 50 years ago might have disturbed what was once a prairie (Figure 1).

2 Rationale

This project aims to develop monitoring methods that are possible within constraints of time, budget, and expertise available to volunteers. In Wesleyville, the the current monitoring primarily focuses on the wetlands, ravines, and forests. This research seeks to assist the JWG in determining the means to gathering more information about the grassland ecosystem.

3 Approach

Using materials and methods familiar to the JWG, research was conducted to refine monitoring approaches on the grasslands and suggest priority aspects to consider. This knowledge came from peer-reviewed literature, meetings with the host organization, discussions with professors, and reading reports of findings from previous monitoring efforts on the surrounding ecosystems.

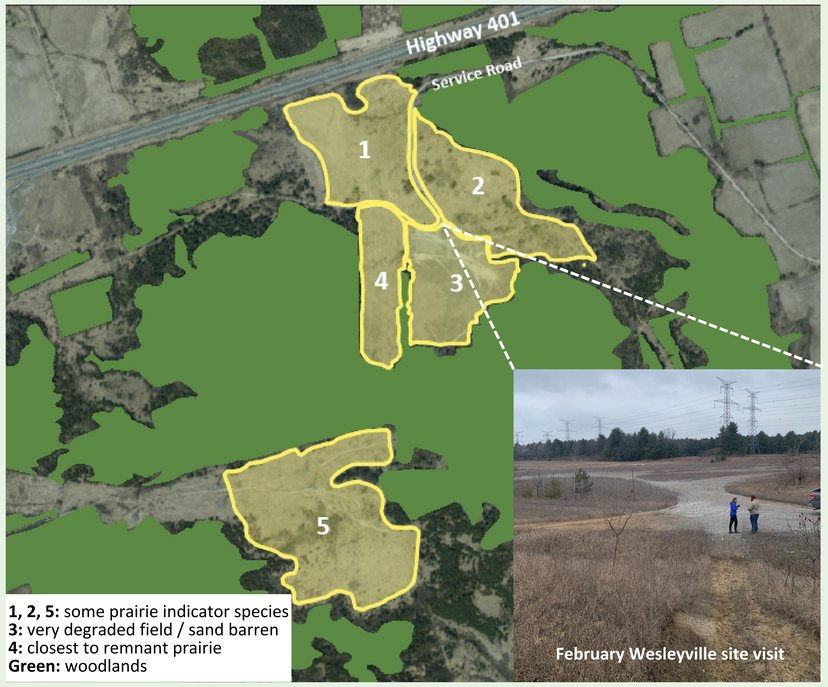

Figure 1: Five major grassland zones of Wesleyville

Figure 2: Off-road vehicle disturbance. Photo credit: Jennifer Jackman

4 Findings

Monitoring approaches to suggest to the JWG were chosen based on their history of effectiveness and their minimal equipment requirements.
Recommended monitoring approaches:

- **Long-term photography:** Capturing landscape changes over time using pictures taken in the same location
- **Acoustic monitoring:** Recording and analyzing sounds to understand the bird species inhabiting the landscape
- **Conducting a bioblitz:** Establishing priority locations for permanent monitoring plots through collection of species sighting records

5 Conclusion

Expanding monitoring efforts to the grasslands enables the JWG to establish more comprehensive species inventories, generate compelling biodiversity indices, monitor encroachment of trees into the grasslands, and ultimately its changes over time. It is our hope that the health of the grasslands improves long-term and monitoring reveals the positive effect of regulating trespassing.

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