

NATIVE PRAIRIE

MONTANA FOOTHILLS

Welcome to the Fire Science Laboratory's native prairie. Fire Lab staff planted this area in 2010. Perennial grasses and forbs like these once covered Montana's valleys and foothills. Bluebunch wheatgrass, Idaho fescue, prairie Junegrass, and needle-and-thread grass dominate these prairies. Penstemons, arrowleaf balsamroot, and aspen fleabane add spring color. Montana's prairies provide habitat for elk, mule deer, coyotes, and mountain cottontails. Long-billed curlews, vesper sparrows, and western meadowlarks fill the prairies with song. Foothill prairies once provided corridors for grizzly bears traveling between mountain ranges. Wildfires were historically common in Montana's foothill prairies, with fires burning about every 10 years. Fire-return intervals ranged from 3 to 40 years.



Coyote

Ann Hough



Mule deer fawn

Tom Koerner



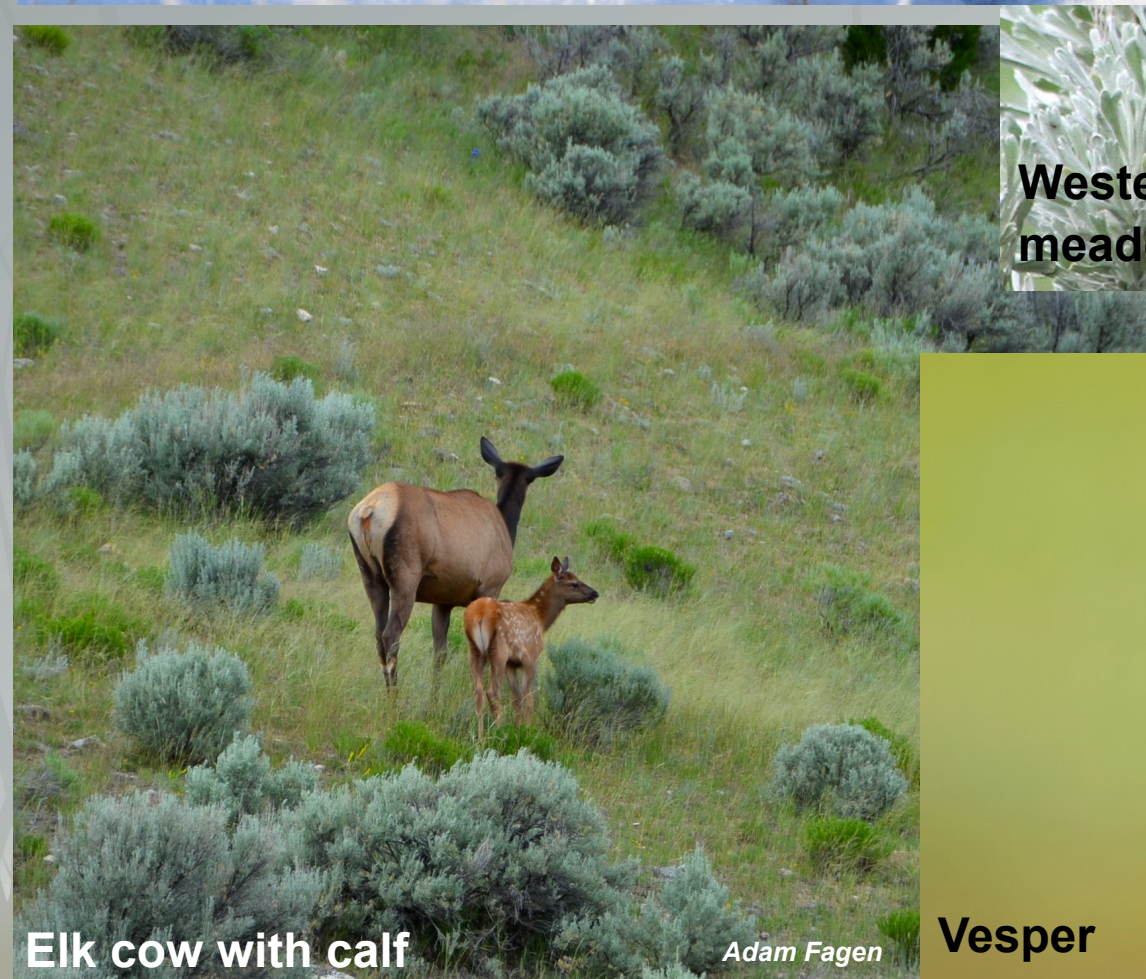
Mountain cottontail

Tom Koerner



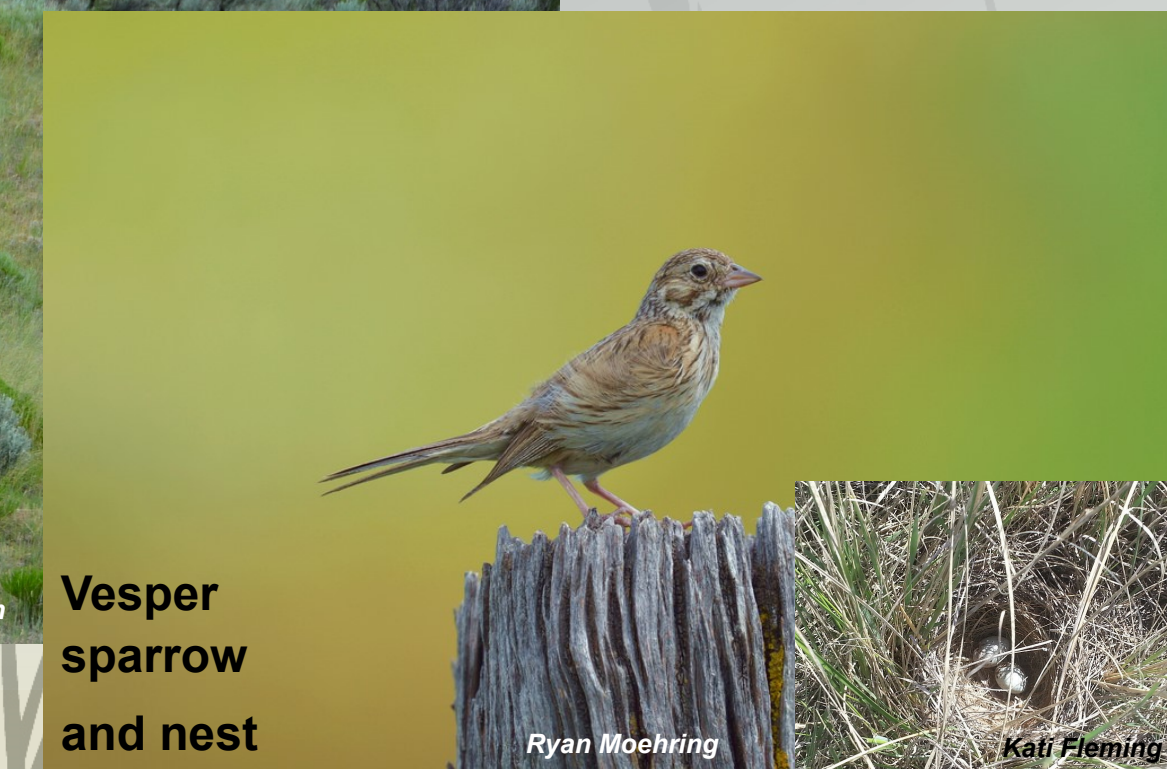
Western meadowlark

Kathy Munsel



Elk cow with calf

Adam Fagen



Vesper sparrow and nest

Ryan Moehring

Kati Fleming

Learning your local flora

Can you find these native plants in the prairie today? *Fun Facts!*



Matt Lavio

Elk calves know to avoid this plant since their mothers (cow elk) teach them not to graze it. (**Silky lupine** can be toxic if consumed in large quantities).



Matt Lavio

Did you know Montana has a state grass? Though fire consumes the leaves, **bluebunch wheatgrass** grows back from the root crown.



Matt Lavio

Does hide their fawns beneath the branches of **silver sagebrush**. This shrub sprouts and establishes from seed after fire.



Pamela Pavok

Blanketflower may be resistant to burning. If it does burn, it grows back quickly. The showy blooms attract bees and butterflies.