



Western Gulf Coastal Grasslands



Harmed by Hurricanes

Characteristics

The grasslands of the western Gulf of Mexico occur in northwestern Mexico and the southern U.S. and extend in a coastal band along the western Gulf, including many near-shore islands. Occasional tropical storms come ashore in this area and can greatly modify coastal habitats and reduce populations of some species. This tall grass coastal prairie has a distinctly temperate climate moderated by the Gulf of Mexico. With rainfall levels in much of the area of less than 12 inches per year, the plant species that grow here are predominantly tall bunchgrass and prairie grass.



Plants

Along with the tall bunchgrass and prairie grass, other species can be found. These species include seacoast bluestem, eastern gamagrass, Gulf muhly, Gulf cordgrass, sedges, rush, and saltgrasses. Occasional shrublands contain ash and persimmon.



Clockwise: Bluestem,
persimmon, and salt grass

Animals

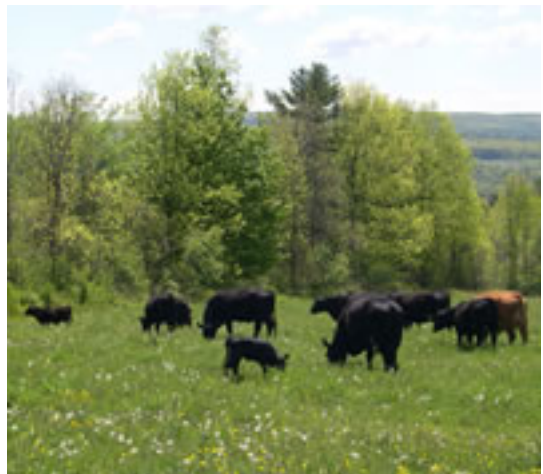
This habitat is home to bobcats, lizards, and many other species. Over 700 species of vertebrates have been identified in this region. Scientists estimate 86 are endangered or threatened. Attwater's prairie chicken and the whooping crane are both endangered species in this ecoregion. There are many birds, reptiles, and mammals, including eastern cottontails, red-billed pigeons, brown jays, olivaceous cormorants, doves, and others. American alligators can also be found in this ecoregion, as can nutria - an introduced species that has critically damaged some areas.



Clockwise from left: Nutria,
Eastern cotton tail,
whooping crane

Threats

Less than one percent of this community type remains intact. Conversion to row crop and rice production, overgrazing, introduction of tame pasture grasses, urbanization, exotic plant invasion and expansion, and a lack of fire management have all contributed to the loss and degradation of this habitat. Several species have become extirpated, and many more are critically endangered. Extreme fragmentation and woody encroachment are also important causes for concern.



The Western Gulf Coastal Grasslands traditionally dominated this area of Louisiana.

