

Glossary to Life Along a Prairie River

Abiotic – non-living or physical components of an ecosystem; for example soil type, weather, or slope of a hill.

Alien – a species from a different continent or region that has been introduced to a new area by humans.

Aquatic – of the water; living in or near the water.

ATV – all terrain vehicle; for example four-wheeler, dirt bike, or truck with four-wheel drive.

Biodiversity – the variety of different organisms that live in an area.

Benthic – organisms that live in the sediment at the bottom of a body of water.

Biotic – living parts of an ecosystem; for example the plants and animals.

Breeding habitat – the location where animals find mates, reproduce, and raise their offspring.

Camouflage – appearance that helps an organism blend in with its surroundings.

Carnivore – organism that only eats animals.

Channel – the area between the riverbanks, most of the river water flows down this part of the river; prairie rivers can have more than one channel, referred to as braided.

Colonization – the process of organisms establishing in new or open habitat.

Competitors – organisms that are fighting each other for the same resources; for example two neighboring plants competing for water in a dry environment.

Conservation – protecting and restoring native habitat.

Consumer – an organism that consumes others to obtain energy for metabolism.

Decomposer – an organism that obtains energy or nutrients from dead organisms or organic material.

Dichotomous – dividing into two parts.

Disturbance – a natural or human made disruption of ecosystem; for example flood, fire, or sand mining.

Dredge – to scoop out sediment such as mud, sand, or organic material from the bottom of a river or other body of water.

Ecosystem – a community of organisms interacting with each other and the physical environment.

Endangered – a species that is likely to go extinct without human intervention and protection.

Environmental conditions – the abiotic components affecting an organism's existence; for example sunlight, temperature, or water.

Extinct – a species that has no living individuals; for example *Tyrannosaurus rex*, passenger pigeon, and dodo.

Filamentous algae – single-cell algae that form long threads, or filaments, that bind to form a mat; also known as pond scum.

Floodplain – low-lying area along a river that is subject to regular flooding, the soil of the floodplain is usually made up of river deposits and sediments.

Fungicide – a chemical that kills fungus.

Habitat – natural home or environment of an organism.

Herbicide – a chemical that kills plants.

Herbivore – an animal that only eats plants.

Introduce – the movement of an organism by humans to a new area from its native region.

Invasive – an alien organism that out-competes native organisms for environmental resources such as food or water; these species usually cause environmental or economic harm.

Invertebrate – an animal without a backbone, 95% of all animals species are invertebrates; for example insects, spiders, and snails.



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Larva – immature form of an animal that usually looks very different from the adult form.

Levee – a barrier built along a river to prevent flooding, often made of earth.

Migrate – to move from one habitat to another, often in response to a seasonal change (noun – migration).

Monoculture – growth of a single species in an area; for example, a wheat field.

Native – a species that is found and grows naturally in an area and was not introduced to the area by humans.

Niche – the habitat and role of an organism within its environment.

Nymph – immature form of an animal that looks like a small version of the adult form.

Omnivore – an organism that eats both plant and animal material.

Organic – from living organisms; contains carbon.

Pesticide – a chemical that kills any organism that is considered a pest.

Predation – an animal hunting and killing another for food.

Predator – an animal that hunts and kills another for energy (food).

Producer – an organism that converts solar energy or inorganic molecules into chemical energy; for example, a plant that uses photosynthesis to convert sunlight into plant material.

Reach – a stretch of river, often between river bends or inlets of creeks.

Reproductive potential – a measure of the reproductive success of an organism based on the number of offspring and how often offspring are produced.

Riparian habitat – the transition zone between aquatic and upland habitat, usually found on margins of streams, lakes, ponds, wetlands, seeps, and ditches.

River corridors – a term used to refer to both the river habitat and the habitat found on adjacent land.

Riverbed – the bottom of the river, usually under water.

Sandbars – a long, narrow area of bare sand that is above the water line of the river, it can be an island within or along the side of the river channel.

Saturate – be thoroughly soaked with water.

Sediment – particles, usually of rock or soil, that flow with the river water and are deposited on the riverbed.

Species – a group of organisms that are similar and can produce offspring with each other.

Species diversity – the variety of species that live in a given area.

Subspecies – a group of organisms within a particular species that are set apart from the rest of the species; for example they are separated geographically or they have a different coloration.

Substrate – a layer that is underneath, a surface on which an organism lives.

Terrestrial – pertaining to the land; an organism that lives on land.

Threatened – a species that is likely to become endangered in the foreseeable future.

Trophic – relating to the transfer of energy from one organism to another in a food web.

Turbid – cloudy or muddy from sediment.

Vegetation – all of the plants of a habitat.

Wetland – land that is usually saturated with water; examples are marshes, bogs, or swamps.