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## Review of *Where the Sky Began: Land of the Tallgrass Prairie* By John Madson

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*Where the Sky Began: Land of the Tallgrass Prairie.* By John Madson. Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1995. Appendices, references, index. xii + 340 pp. \$24.95.

Originally published in 1982, this is a most welcome revised edition of John Madson's classic study of probably the least appreciated of North America's original landscapes--the tallgrass prairie. Unlike its western neighbors, the mixed and shortgrass prairies, almost all tallgrass prairie has been plowed over. Larger remnants of this prairie type persist only in the Nebraska sandhills, the Flint Hills of Kansas, and the Osage Hills of Oklahoma, where soil conditions do not favor cultivation.

*Where the Sky Began* vividly portrays the original landscape. Characterized by plain but impressive grasses, beautiful forbs, rich wildlife, and immense continental climate, the tallgrass prairie possesses striking aspects that are splendidly described by Madson. In addition to the land itself, Madson includes people, but only the European settlers, in his account. Human thought and action on the landscape is detected from the first explorers and settlers

to modern farmers. Their awe before the vast inland sea of grass, their hardships in conquering it for agriculture, and their sense of loss once the deed was done receive a fine and highly personal portrayal in Madson's work, though a non-native to the Plains may occasionally find his narrative slightly sweet.

Closely following the recent advances in protection and restoration of the tallgrass prairie, the final chapter has been significantly expanded in the updated edition. In "People's Pastures," Madson lovingly describes the efforts required to restore a patch of old farmland to its original condition. Anyone harboring dreams of a backyard miniprairie will find his accounts encouraging. Madson, an Iowa native, could still have paid more attention to significant on-going restoration and research efforts in Nebraska, Kansas, and Oklahoma. For example, the Konza Prairie Research Natural Area near Manhattan, Kansas, with over 8,000 acres of prime tallgrass prairie, hardly gets a mention, and the most ambitious restoration project today, the Nature Conservancy's Tallgrass Prairie Preserve in the Osage Hills of Oklahoma occupying over 32,000 acres, receives only two short paragraphs. Reasons for the consistent failure to create a tallgrass national park could have been addressed in more detail as well.

Appendices include a useful list of prairie nurseries and seed sources and a directory of representative tallgrass prairies. Although the directory is by no means intended to be comprehensive, one can still complain about the omission of sites such as the Rockefeller Experimental Tract near Lawrence, Kansas.

*Where the Sky Began*, possibly supplemented by a localized and biologically more detailed study (e.g., O. J. Reichman's *Konza Prairie: A Tallgrass Natural History*), will give the general reader a highly enjoyable introduction to the history and biota of the tallgrass prairie.

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