

Austin College - Sneed Prairie Restoration

TEEA 2020 Winner: Education



Austin College's Sneed Prairie Restoration seeks to restore 100 acres of former Blackland Prairie while providing educational opportunities for college and elementary school students. Austin College students restore the prairie, monitor the progress of the restoration, and lead schoolchildren on field trips. To date, around 1,100 college students, faculty, and staff have contributed to the restoration effort, and more than 11,600 schoolchildren and teachers from more than 20 school districts have visited the site for field trips.

The prairie restoration uses different combinations of prescribed burns, grazing, and mowing in a formal experimental design across nine fields of a former farm. Restoration progress is compared to two reference prairies also belonging to the college, and is tracked using a peer-reviewed monitoring protocol developed by Dr. Pete Schulze.

Austin College undergraduate students set prescribed burns, build and repair fences, collect seeds, cut invading trees, and maintain the prairie land. These students come from a wide variety of majors and backgrounds and go on to work in various careers, carrying these land management practices through broad communities of professionals.

The Sneed Prairie Restoration provides many children with their first opportunity to experience and connect with an environment more natural than a city park. Advanced undergraduates lead schoolchildren and their teachers on hundreds of field trips every year, teaching them about the endangered ecosystem and the efforts to restore and protect it.