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.

Learning your local flora
Can you find these native plants in the prairie today?

Fun Facts!
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).

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

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

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