Summary: Grassland Restoration Plan — The Homesteads at Walker Branch

This summary explains the comprehensive 26-page Grassland Restoration Plan, which is transforming The Homesteads at Walker Branch from overworked agricultural land into thriving native prairie habitats—the foundation for a return of native Wildlife.

Who Handles the Work

Wildlife Habitat Federation of Texas (WHF) performs all grassland restoration services at The Homesteads at Walker Branch. This includes soil assessment, invasive species control, native seed establishment, ongoing management, annual monitoring, and all required documentation.

This kind of professional planning, execution, and documentation is a core feature of every Wildlife Communities® development by Land Within Reach®.

Why Professional Conservation Matters

Grassland prairie restoration is both art and science. Success requires:

- **Species-specific knowledge:** Which plants work where and why
- **Timing expertise:** When to plant, spray, and manage for best results
- **Specialized equipment:** No-till drills, precise herbicide application
- **Long-term commitment:** Monitoring and adjusting over multiple growing seasons

Many landowners who attempt DIY prairie restoration see mixed results at best, and lessons learned are paid for in both lost time and money. Professional restoration dramatically improves the odds of success compared to DIY, and saves land stewards like you many years of trial and error.

When performed at scale and using professionals, such as in The Homesteads at Walker Branch, the cost of grassland prairie restoration typically ranges between $600 and $1,000 per acre. This is expensive work (paid for by Land Within Reach) that's important to do well and correctly, the first time.

The Challenge We're Solving

The Homesteads at Walker Branch's 71 acres of grassland (out of 88 acres total) currently rank as low-quality grassland prairie habitat. Years of agricultural use have reduced native plant diversity and allowed invasive species to dominate:

- King Ranch bluestem and bermudagrass form dense stands that crowd out native plants and provide little wildlife value
- Texas wintergrass dominance signals past overgrazing and disturbance
- Missing key species of prairie grasses and wildflowers that define healthy Blackland Prairie

For native wildlife, much of this land currently functions as a "green desert". It looks like habitat but provides minimal food, shelter, or nesting opportunities.

What We're Creating Instead

Our restoration efforts will establish an authentic Texas Blackland Prairie featuring:

Native Grass Foundation

- Little bluestem, Indiangrass, switchgrass, and sideoats grama
- Eastern gamagrass, big bluestem, and Virginia wildrye
- Deep root systems that improve soil structure and drought resilience

Native Wildflower Diversity

- Partridge pea, Illinois bundleflower, and purple prairie clover
- Maximilian sunflower, lemon beebalm, and dotted gayfeather
- Native milkweeds essential for Monarch butterflies
- Year-round blooming sequence supporting pollinators

This creates structurally diverse habitat that supports: - Northern bobwhite quail (grass clumps, bare ground, insect-rich areas) - Grassland songbirds (meadowlarks, dickcissels, field sparrows) - Native pollinators (native bees, butterflies, beneficial insects) - Small mammals that form the base of the wildlife food chain

The Goal

Within 5 years (by 2030), this restoration is expected to create: - High-quality native prairie supporting diverse wildlife populations - Resilient ecosystem requiring minimal long-term maintenance - Beautiful, authentic landscape that changes seasonally with native plant cycles - Educational demonstration of successful Blackland Prairie restoration - Certified Texas Prairie Community status through our NPAT partnership and individual Certified Texas Prairie status for each of the eleven (11) homesteads

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The Restoration Process

Where things stand now (Fall 2026): The property is in Phase 3. The summer cover crop is being terminated and the entire grassland acreage is being replanted in native seed mix this fall.

Two-Section Approach

- **22-acre intensive restoration area:** Soil rehabilitation and native seeding
- **49-acre enhancement area:** Spot treatment of invasives plus overseeding with natives

Phase 1: Site Preparation of 22-Acre Section (Summer 2025) — Complete

Clear the Slate - Mechanical shredding to knock down thick, overgrown invasive vegetation - Targeted herbicide application to eliminate non-native grasses - Creates clean, competition-free environment for native seed establishment

Phase 2: Soil Building of 22-Acre Section (Fall 2025 through Summer 2026) — Complete

Winter Cover Crops: Barley, oats, wheat, triticale, winter peas, hairy vetch, clover, radishes, and turnips - Suppress invasive species regrowth - Build organic matter and improve soil structure - Fix atmospheric nitrogen naturally through legumes - Create channels for air and water through deep-rooted species

Summer Cover Crops: Millet, sorghum, cowpeas, and partridge peas - Continue soil building through hot Texas summers - Provide tall canopy and extensive root systems - Support beneficial insect activity

Phase 3: Planting Native Seed in 22-Acre and 49-Acre Sections (Fall 2026) — Underway now

Precise Native Seeding of All Grassland Acreage - No-till seed drill plants native seed at precise depths (¼ to ½ inch) - Minimizes erosion and retains soil moisture - 75% native grasses, 25% native wildflower mix - Species selection based on specific soil types and ecological sites

Phase 4: Long-Term Management (Indefinitely) — Upcoming

Ongoing Grassland Prairie Maintenance - **Invasive species monitoring:** Annual spot-spraying of Old-World bluestems and other invasives - **Strategic mowing:** Wildlife-friendly patterns that create habitat diversity - **Supplemental seeding:** Fill gaps and enhance species diversity over time

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Why This Scientific Approach Works

Baseline Data Collection (performed by WHF in August 2025)

- Line-point transect surveys measuring vegetation composition
- Floristic Quality Assessment (FQA) to evaluate ecological integrity
- Soil analysis and ecological site mapping
- Photo point monitoring for long-term tracking

Current Baseline Results

- **Mean Conservatism Value:** 4.5 (low-quality habitat)
- **Floristic Quality Index:** 23.4 (degraded prairie)
- **Native grass coverage:** 49% (mostly lower-value species)
- **Invasive species coverage:** 35% (primarily on the 22 acres of grazing land)

Success Metrics

Annual monitoring will track: - Increase in native species coverage, especially high-value grasses and forbs - Reduction in invasive species like King Ranch bluestem and bermudagrass - Improvement in plant diversity, particularly pollinator-friendly wildflowers - Rising Conservatism Values and Floristic Quality Index scores

Timeline and Coordination

The restoration follows a three-year establishment timeline:

Year	Focus
Year 1 (2025)	Site preparation and winter cover crops
Year 2 (2026)	Summer cover crops and native seed establishment
Year 3 (2027)	Native prairie establishment, nurturing, and ongoing management

All timing coordinates with Land Within Reach's development schedule and adjusts for seasonal weather patterns, soil conditions, and seed availability.

What This Means for You

As a land steward at The Homesteads at Walker Branch, you get: - Professional native prairie surrounding your homestead - Seasonal beauty from native wildflowers and grasses - Wildlife habitat that brings the land to life - Demonstration of authentic Texas land stewardship - All work completed for you, paid for by Land Within Reach, regardless of when you purchase or build your homestead

What you don't get: - Any maintenance responsibilities - Guesswork about what plants work where - Years of waiting to see if your efforts succeed - The learning curve and expense of DIY prairie restoration

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Final Thoughts

The full 26-page plan contains all of the technical details, like site assessments, protocols, and monitoring requirements. This summary helps you understand what that plan means in practice.

You own the land. You enjoy the native grasses and fields full of seasonal wildflowers. The professional restoration work is handled for you.

Questions? Your Land Within Reach team can connect you with Wildlife Habitat Federation of Texas (WHF) to discuss any part of this restoration program.