

The Role of Disturbances in Grasslands  
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Disturbances are an integral part of grassland environments. They fall usefully into two categories: natural and human caused. I will provide an overview of the common disturbance types in each category emphasizing size, frequency (return time) and intensity as key characteristics. I will use evolutionary history as a framework to distinguish between natural and human caused disturbances as well as to talk about how and why they may have contrasting effects on grassland plant communities. My discussion of effects of disturbances will be placed in the context of plant community principles to provide a conceptual foundation and segue way into a discussion of disturbance as a conservation tool. I will end with some cautionary comments about how grassland responses to disturbance will be very different in the 21<sup>st</sup> century than they were in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.