

Burner Bob®

Goes to

Nebraska

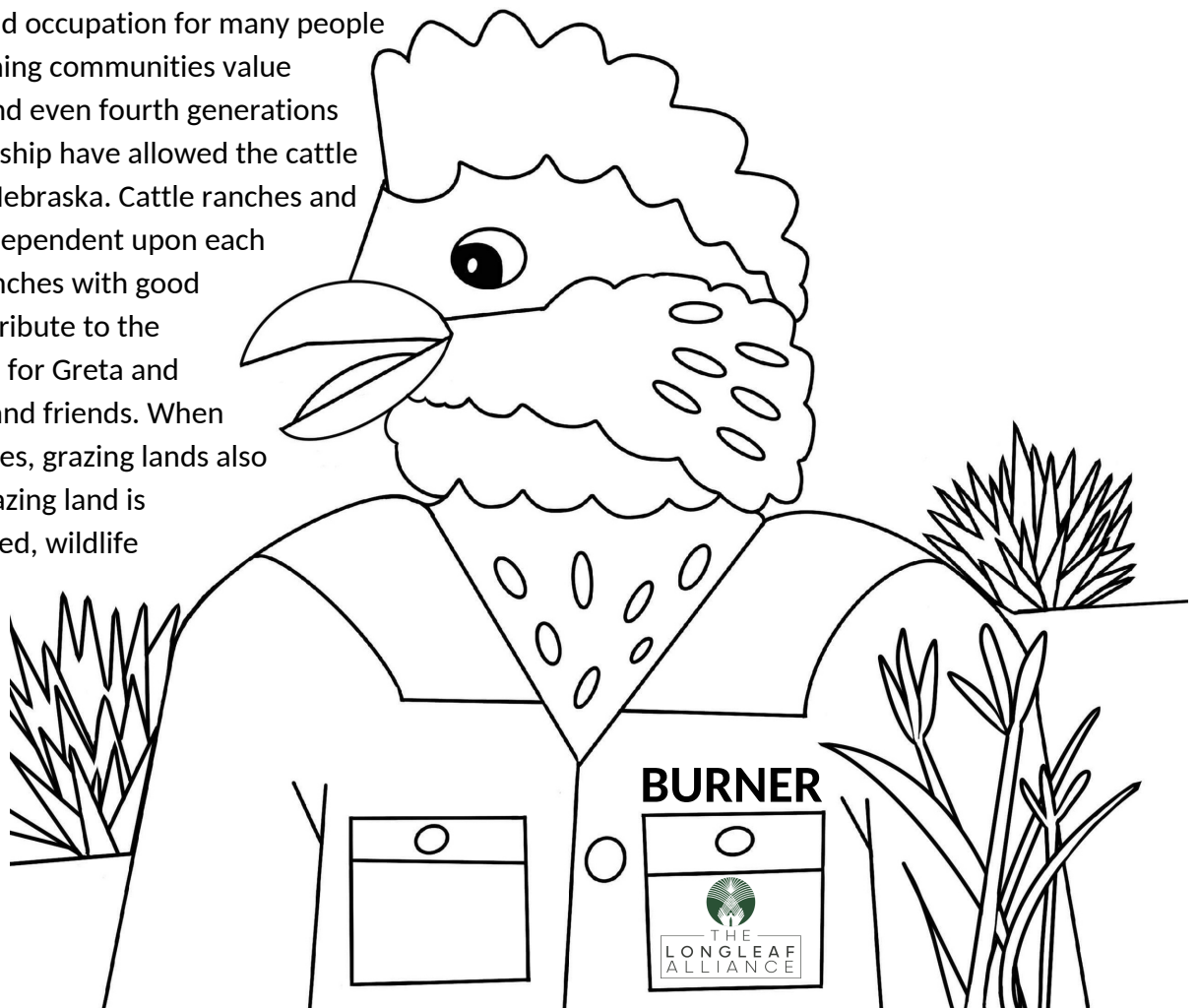


Burner Bob® Goes to Nebraska

Once upon a time, there was a Bobwhite Quail named Burner Bob®. He saved his home, the Longleaf Forest in the Southeastern United States. The original Longleaf Range stretched from Virginia to Florida to East Texas, consisting of 92 million acres. The ecosystem evolved with its many sensitive plants and animals, being burned every two or three years from strikes. Due to fire suppression and land conversion, the Longleaf ecosystem has been reduced by 97%, making it one of the most imperiled in the nation. Burner realized that his forest family friends were losing their habitat. He decided to devote his life to traveling across the land, telling the story, and showing how to burn safely. Hence, he earned the name Burner Bob®.

One day Burner got a call from his good friend Greta. Greta is a sharp-tailed grouse who lives in the Sandhills of Nebraska. Greta tells him all about the Sandhills and her grassland family. It is home to her cousin, the Greater Prairie-Chicken, which does a springtime dance in the meadows, attracting mates to produce the next generation of birds. The Sandhills provide one of the last remaining habitats for this bird in the United States. She talks about how bees and butterflies, including the Regal Fritillary, glide through the prairie in the summer, pollinating flowers and grasses along the way. Regal Fritillaries begin their lives as caterpillars and depend upon the numerous violet plants that grow in the region. She tells him about the Autumn, when the prairie turns all sorts of reds, oranges, and yellows, and how the Mule Deer bucks start picking fights with other bucks to see who gets the doe. And in winter, when snow covers the rolling hills, she says that livestock ranchers can be seen feeding their cattle hay.

Greta explains how the Sandhills is one of the last remaining native grasslands in North America. The Sandhills provides more than 19,000 square miles of rolling grass-covered hills, making it a prime grazing area for cattle. Ranching is a long-held occupation for many people in the area. The ranching communities value tradition, and third and even fourth generations of private land ownership have allowed the cattle industry to thrive in Nebraska. Cattle ranches and wildlife habitats are dependent upon each other in this area. Ranches with good livestock grazing contribute to the much-needed habitat for Greta and her grassland family and friends. When wildlife habitat declines, grazing lands also decline, and when grazing land is appropriately managed, wildlife habitat thrives.



Greta tells how ranchers thought they were helping the landscape after the Dust Bowl of the 1930s by planting Eastern red cedar trees as windbreaks and suppressing natural fires. The windbreaks protected their cattle from harsh winter storms and stopped the blowing sand. Fires burned native grass that was needed by grazing cattle. People did not know Eastern red cedar trees would invade grasslands or that fire suppression would contribute to this invasion. Over time, the rolling grasslands became overrun with cedar trees.

When Greta finishes talking about her beloved Sandhills, Burner feels like he has already been there. He sees multiple similarities between the Sandhills and his native longleaf pine habitats of the southeastern US. Both ecosystems are dependent on good fires to maintain healthy and productive habitats. He tells Greta that he will come to Nebraska to teach people about the negative impacts of Eastern red cedar and how people can use prescribed fire to save the Sandhills, just as it saved his home in the Longleaf Forest.

Burner Bob® teaches us that Eastern red cedar can have a lot of negative impacts on native grasslands and the species that use them. When a grassland becomes invaded with cedars, the amount of grass available for cattle to graze decreases significantly. This is because the Eastern red cedars shade out the grasses beneath the canopy and take away grass available to cattle. Not just cattle are affected, when Eastern red cedars invade, grasslands become fragmented and less desirable for Greater Prairie Chickens and other grassland-dependent songbirds.

He explains that fire is a part of nature, just like the wind, rain, and sun. However, you may think of it more like a thunderstorm—scary when it is happening but often beautiful when it is over. The prairie comes back after a natural or prescribed fire with renewed life. The grass is greener, wildflowers are colorful, and animals like mule deer and cattle love to eat the new sprouts. Fire naturally burns Eastern red cedars and makes room for other plants. It allows the native grassland habitat to remain intact for grazing livestock and wildlife habitat. This burning and growing cycle keeps the prairie healthy. Burner enjoys teaching others about fire, and he was so glad that Greta called and invited him to Nebraska. Not only did he make some new friends, but he was also able to continue his mission of showing people how to prescribe burn safely.

Nebraska Story By:

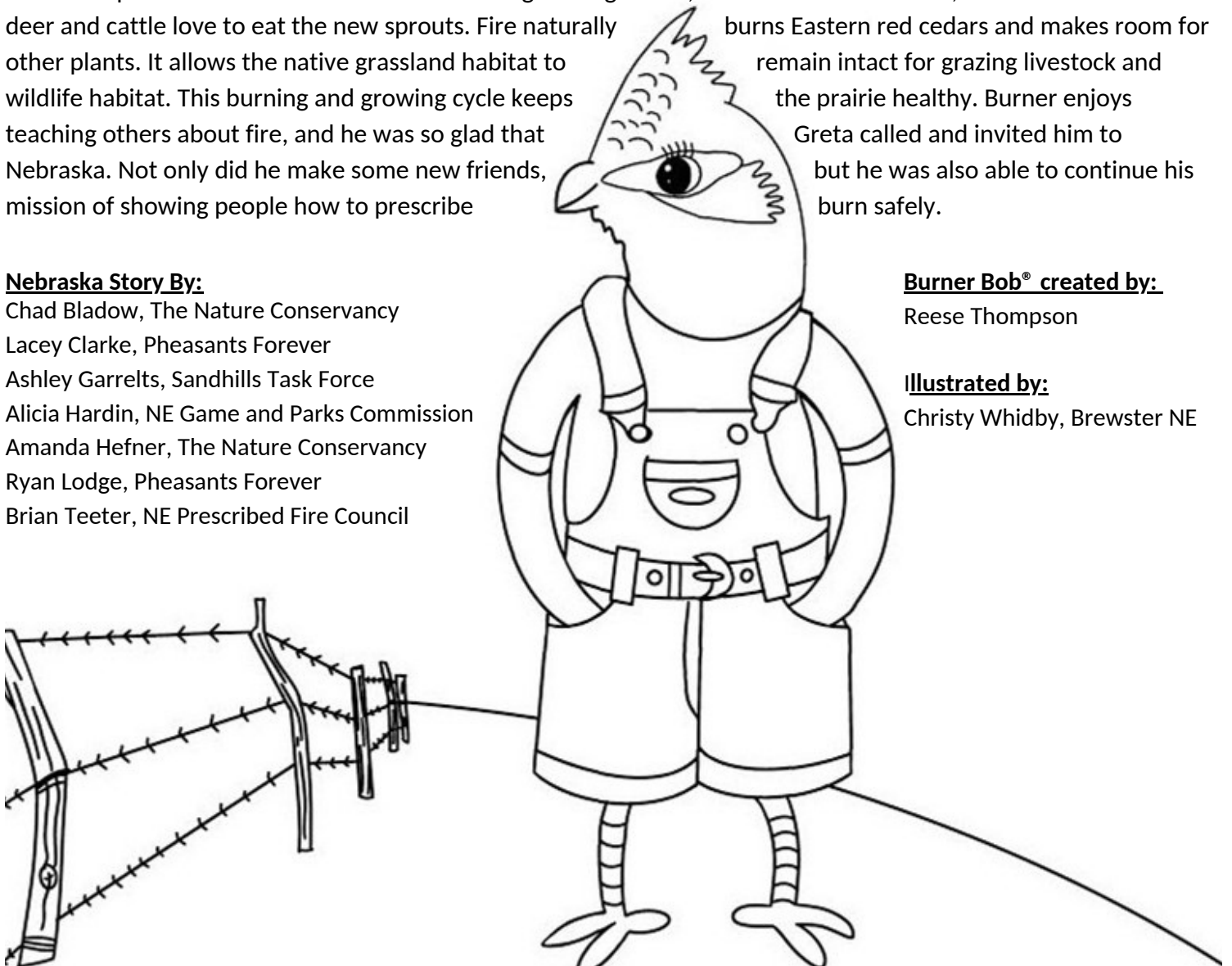
Chad Bladow, The Nature Conservancy
Lacey Clarke, Pheasants Forever
Ashley Garrelts, Sandhills Task Force
Alicia Hardin, NE Game and Parks Commission
Amanda Hefner, The Nature Conservancy
Ryan Lodge, Pheasants Forever
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Burner Bob® created by:

Reese Thompson

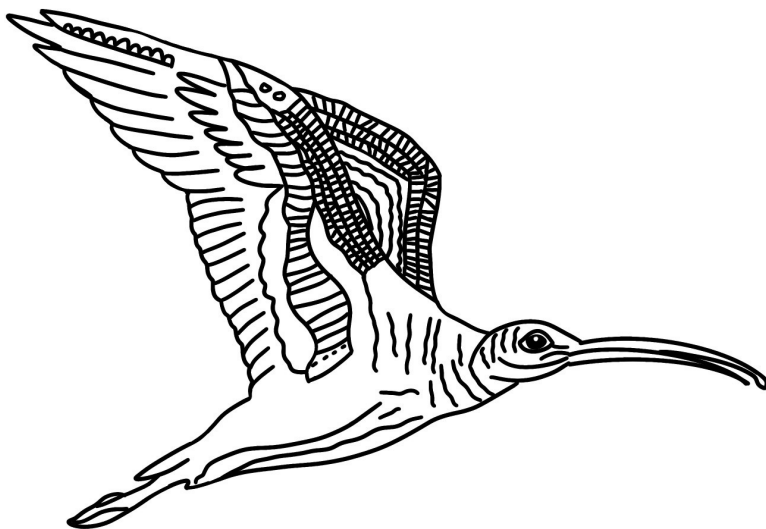
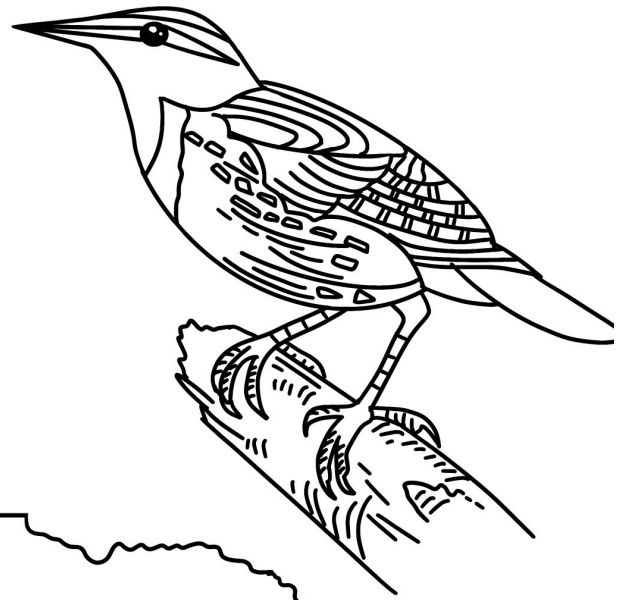
Illustrated by:

Christy Whidby, Brewster NE



The Western meadowlark is Nebraska's state bird and can usually be found sitting on fence posts singing.

Location of the Sandhills

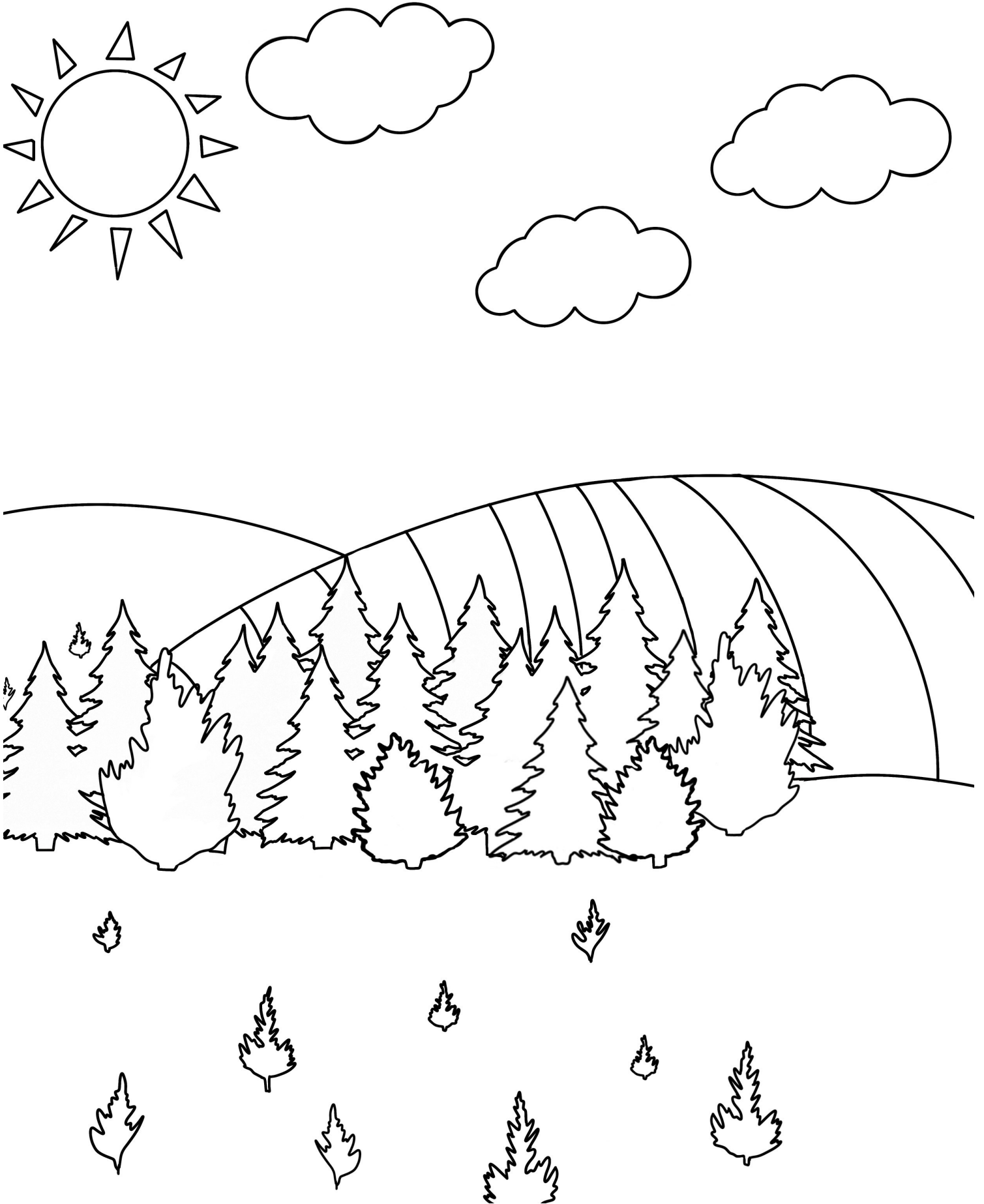


The long-billed curlew nests in Nebraska's Sandhills, raising their chicks in the spring and summer months. Then, during the winter months, the birds will migrate to beaches in California or Mexico.

A healthy Sandhills ecosystem is made up of many kinds of grass, including sand bluestem, Indian grass, prairie sandreed, and little bluestem.



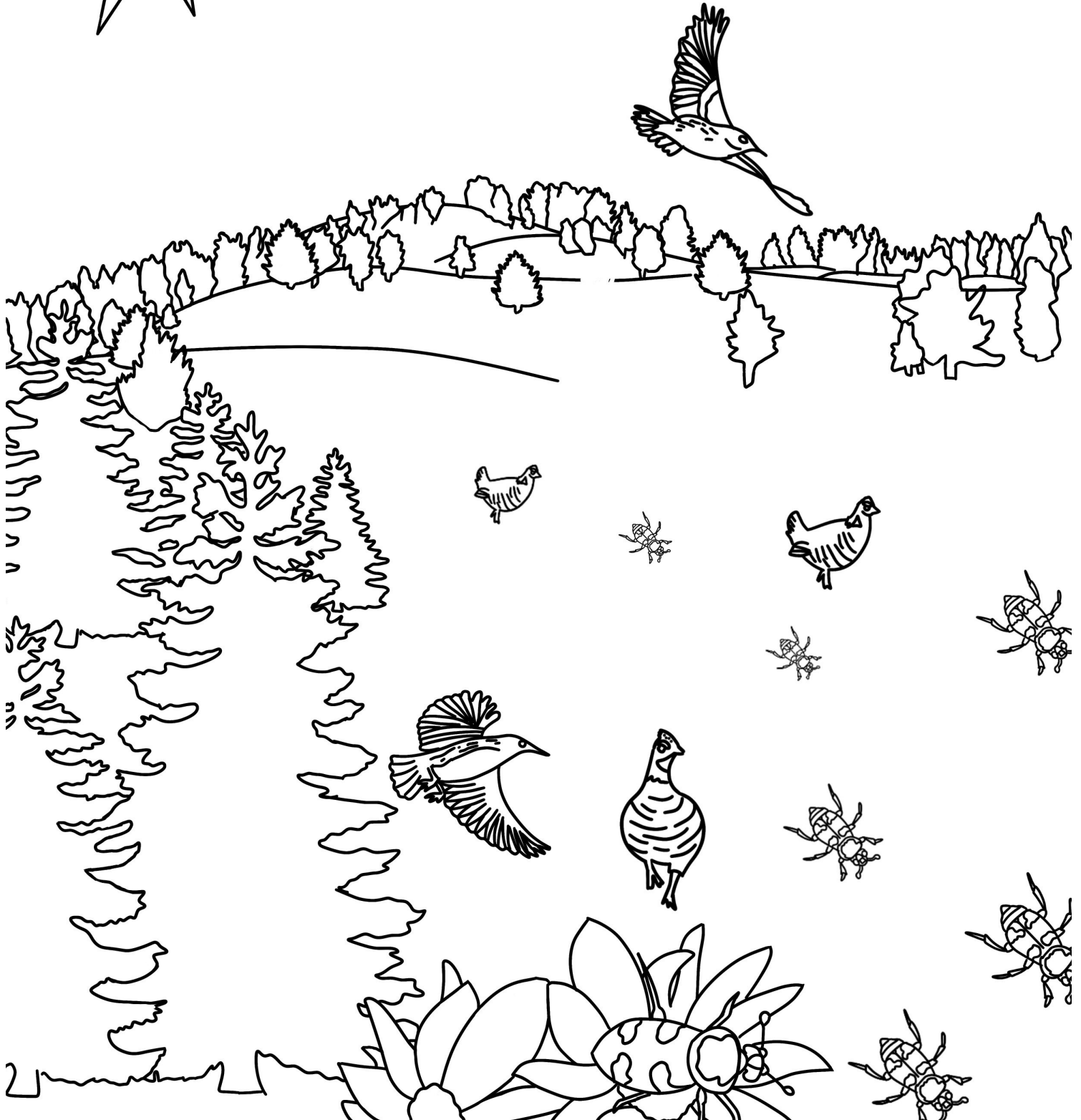
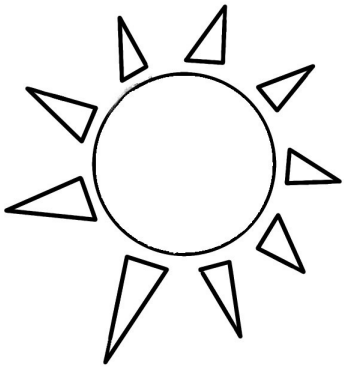


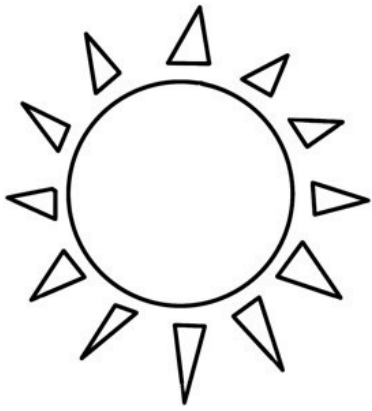


Ranchers thought they were helping the landscape by planting Eastern red cedar trees as windbreaks and suppressing natural fires. But unfortunately, trees did not stay in their neat little rows.

Over time, the rolling grasslands became overrun with cedar trees. Sharp-tailed grouse, like Greta and her family left, as well as her friends the Western Meadowlark and American Burying Beetle

The American burying beetle is an endangered species found right here in Nebraska. The beetles help clean up small dead animals by burying them underground and laying their eggs with the carcass. The beetle larvae will grow up feeding on the small animal their parents buried for them.

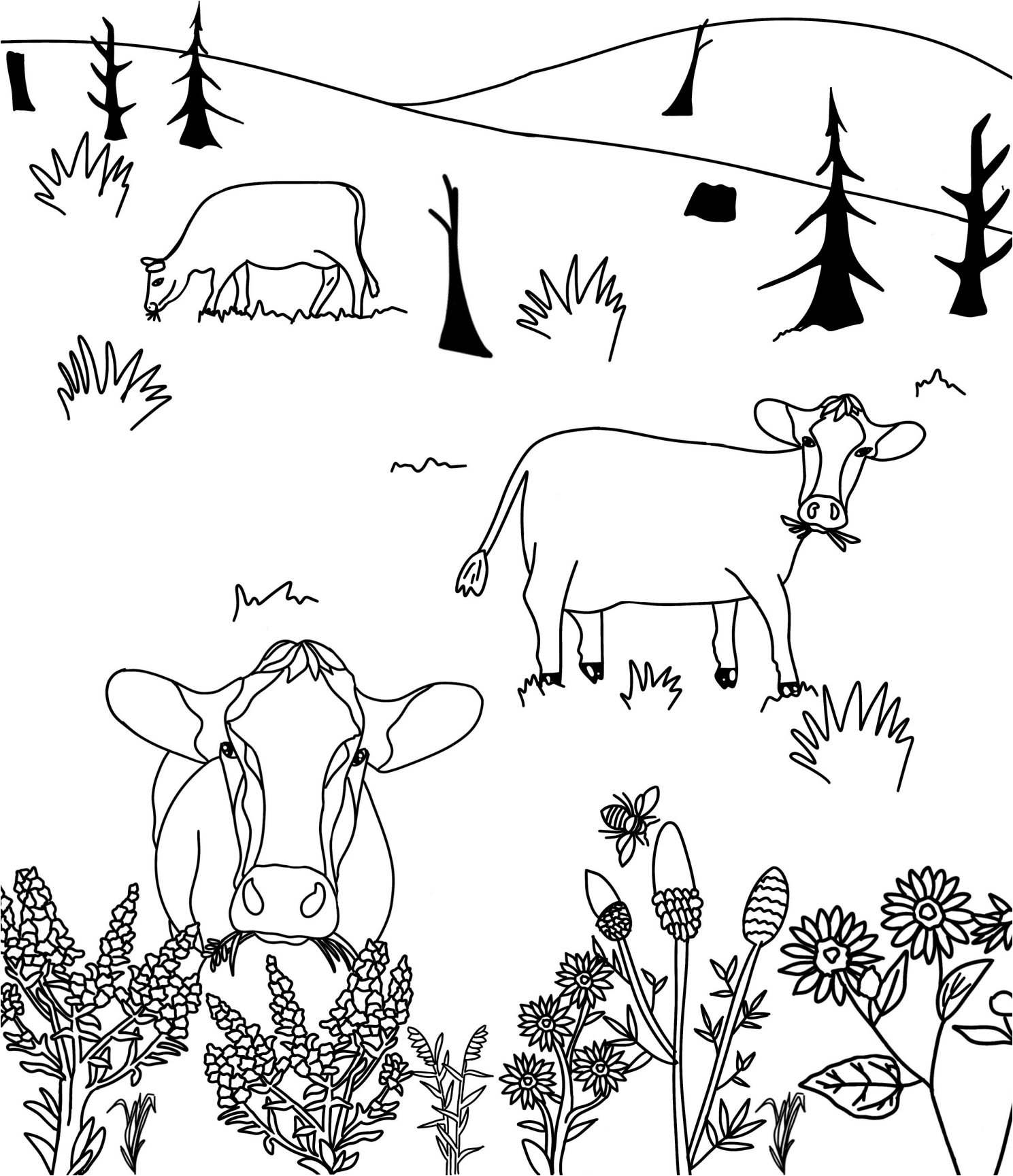
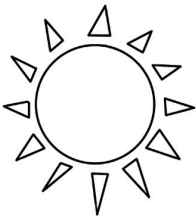




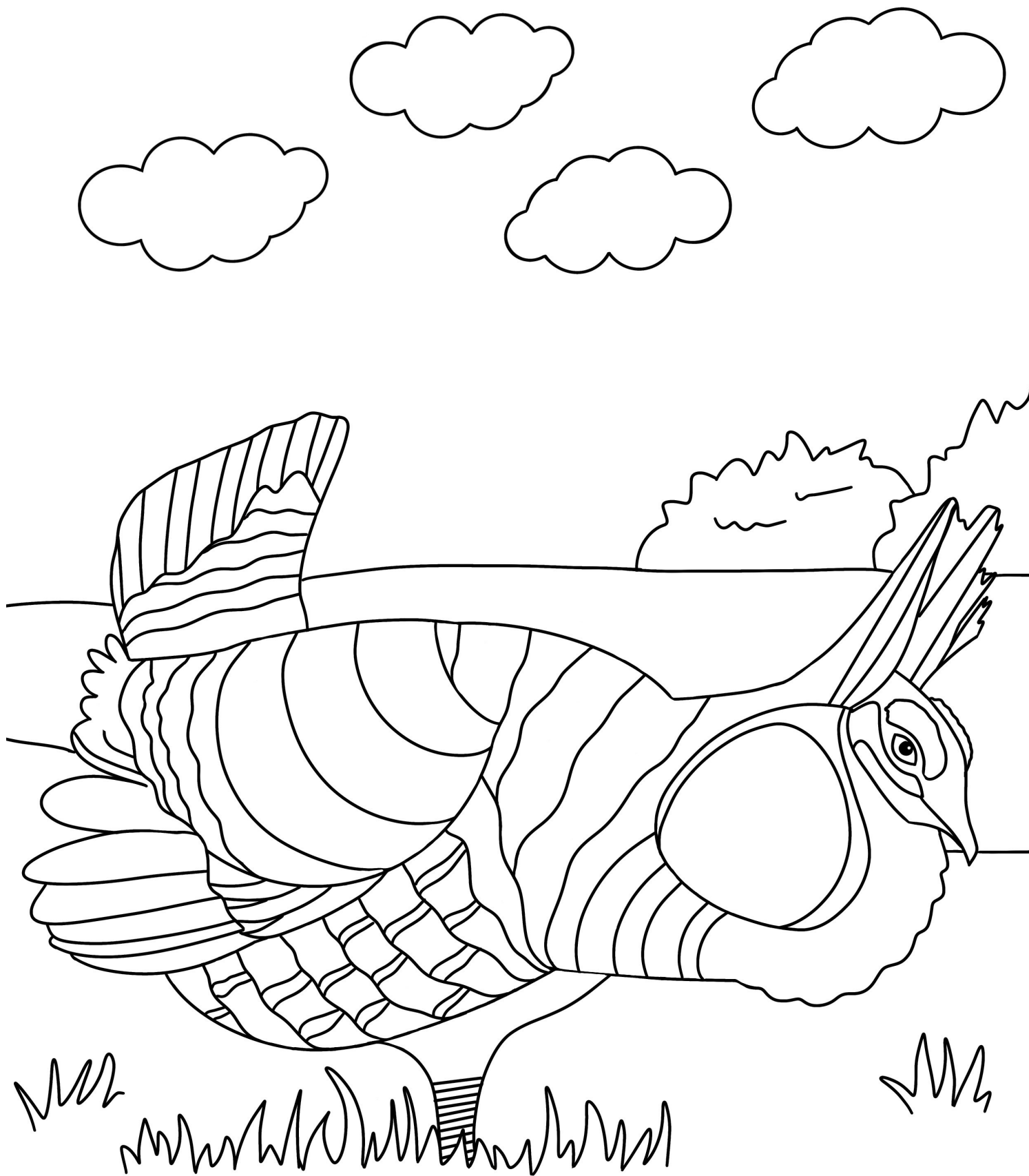
Burner Bob helps Greta and the rancher use prescribed fire to restore habitat.



Broad-leaved plants such as goldenrod, purple prairie clover, and stiff sunflower are some of the many plants that grow well after a prescribed fire.



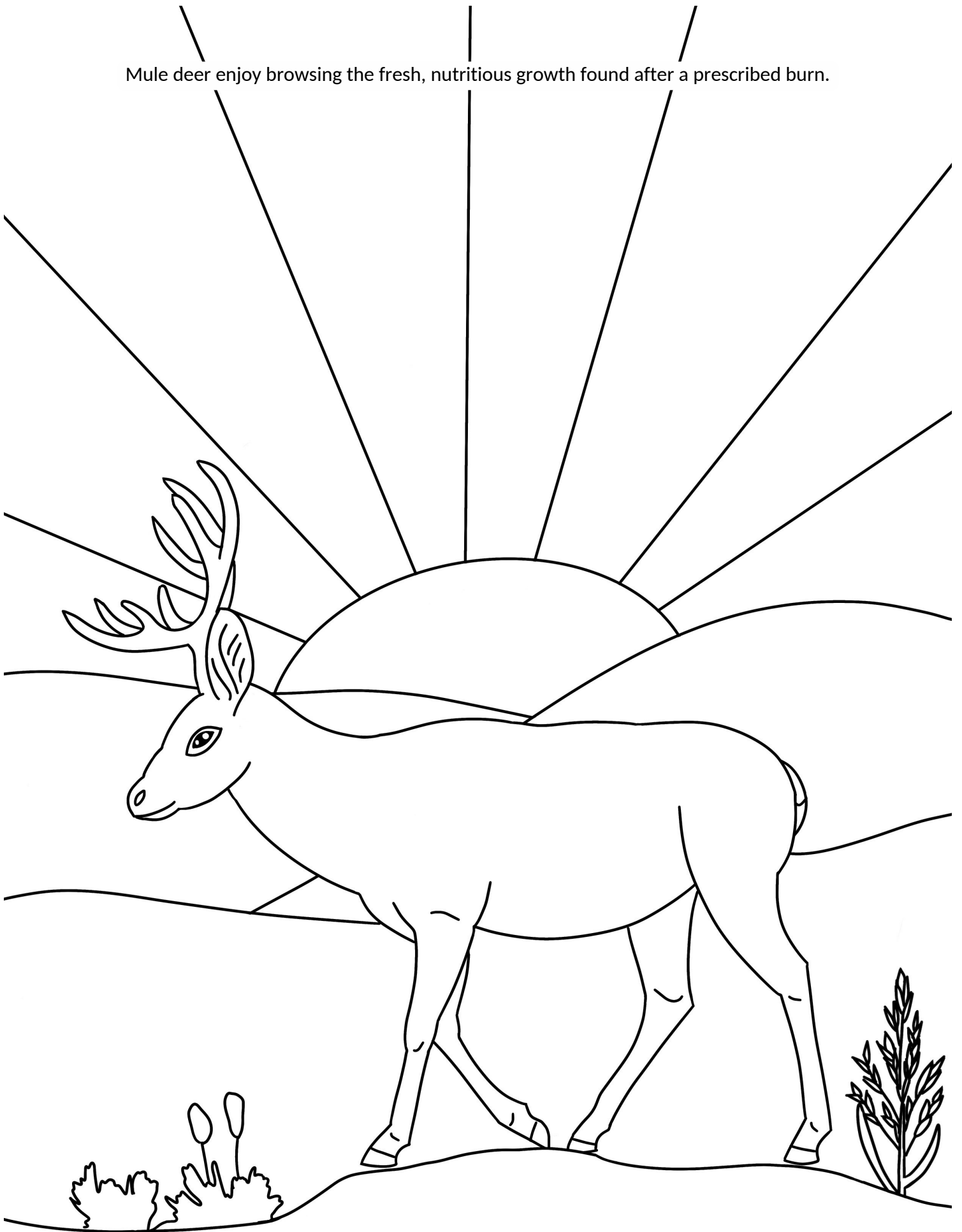
Greater prairie chickens love eating the many insects and forbs that grow after a prescribed burn.
Prairie chickens also need tree-less prairie to dance and attract a mate.



Regal fritillaries lay their eggs on the prairie violets and drink the flowers' nectar. A caterpillar will hatch from the eggs and feed on the violet leaves.



Mule deer enjoy browsing the fresh, nutritious growth found after a prescribed burn.



The rancher takes care of his livestock and takes care of the land for the wildlife.



Burner Bob® Helps Save These Species

American Burying Beetle

Blazing star

Burrowing Owl

Goldenrod

Grasshopper Sparrow

Greater Prairie-Chicken

Hairy Grama

Indiangrass

Little Bluestem

Long-billed Curlew

Mule Deer

Prairie Sandreed

Pronghorn

Purple Prairie Clover

Regal Fritillary

Sand Bluestem

Sand Cherry

Sharptailed Grouse

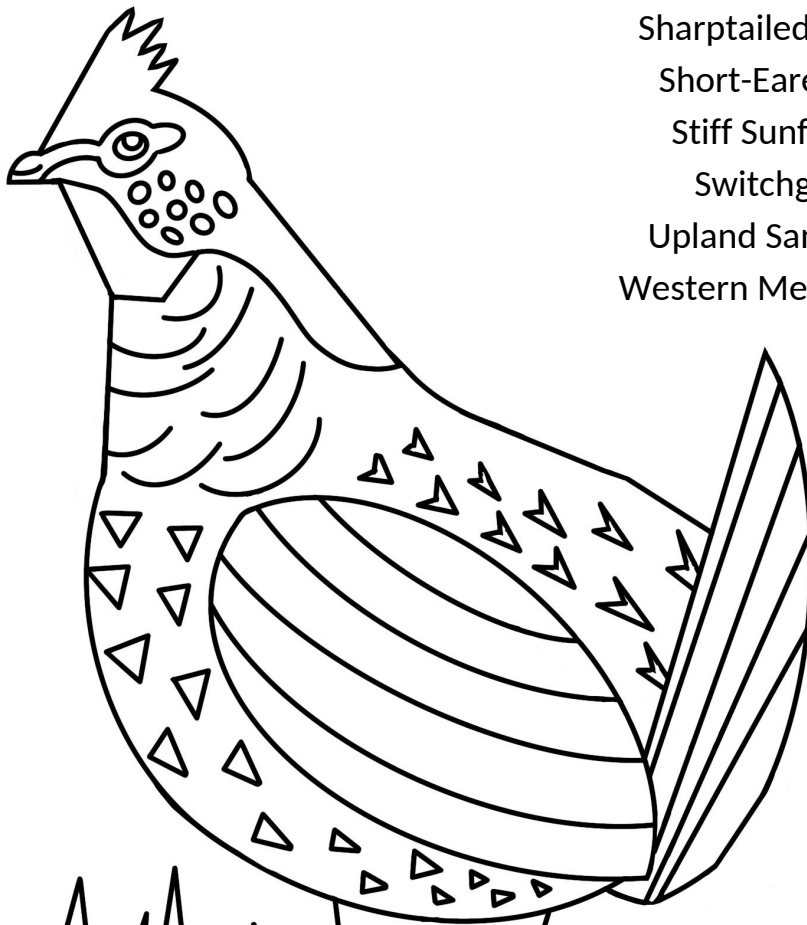
Short-Eared Owl

Stiff Sunflower

Switchgrass

Upland Sandpiper

Western Meadowlark



Words to Learn



Dust Bowl: A time in history during the 1930s when areas of land were bare of plants and affected by severe soil erosion.

Fragmented: To be broken into smaller pieces. For example, when grassland is fragmented, the landscape is broken into smaller areas by fences, trees, roads, and houses.

Forbs: Non-woody plants with broad leaves.

Larvae: The not fully developed form of an insect. A baby insect.

Natural Fire: Fire started by an act of nature, such as a lightning strike.

Pollinating: The act of moving pollen from flower to flower.

Prescribed Fire: Fire started on purpose by a person and used as a tool to control Eastern Red Cedar trees or other types of plants.

Burner Bob® and Greta Grouse thank the partners listed below for their support!



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