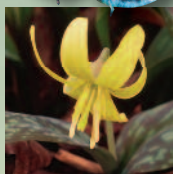
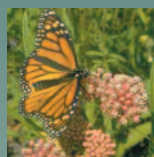


# Guide to Natural Areas in Northern Illinois



**Natural Land Institute**

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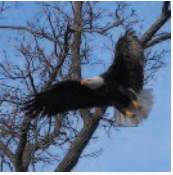
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# Rules & Reminders

- **Please don't litter in these beautiful locations.** Kindly place all trash in receptacles or carry it out, if no receptacles are provided.
- **Since these are protected areas, please don't remove anything from the sites.** This includes rocks, fossils, plants, and parts of plants, such as leaves, flowers and seeds.
- **Please do not bring your pets unless you have confirmed with the landowner in advance that it is acceptable.**
- **Please obey all posted signs.**
- **Please visit often.** These lands are spectacular and deserve to be admired.
- **Some of the sites in this booklet are owned by the Natural Land Institute.** These sites have guided tours available for Natural Land Institute members and their guests. Burr Oak Valley Preserve, Pecatonica Ridge Prairie and Nieman Marsh can be visited only with permission due to location and access agreements with neighbors.
- **Some of the sites are owned by park or forest preserve districts.** Most of these properties are routinely open to the public. Please contact the individual districts to determine specific rules for these areas.
- **Some of the properties are owned by the Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR).** These locations are typically open to the public, but please contact IDNR or the site supervisor for days, times, and rules.
- **The owner of the property is listed with each entry.** Contact information for each of the owners is listed in the contact section.

# Introduction

*In every walk with nature one receives more than he seeks.*  
– John Muir



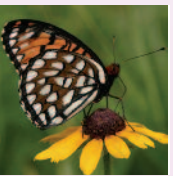
In this guide for members of the Natural Land Institute, we highlight 22 outstanding natural lands with some of the best prairies, wetlands and forests in northern Illinois. The Natural Land Institute played a role in protecting each of these rare, special places that we all cherish.

Names and descriptions of some of the native birds, mammals and plants known to live at the preserves are provided. Maps are included, and addresses are given when applicable.



Natural lands like those described in this guide are vanishing quickly. We are working to reverse the trend of land loss by protecting additional areas through acquisition, conservation agreements, advocacy and stewardship. This work is possible thanks to the generous help of our members and volunteers and our partnerships with other conservation organizations.

In 2008, we mark the 50th anniversary of our founding as a private, not-for-profit land conservation organization. We want to assure that all species of native plants and animals in northern Illinois will survive for another 50 years and beyond.



The Natural Land Institute's vision for northern Illinois is that children born today will be able to see a pasque flower and hear the sound of a flock of sandhill cranes flying overhead. These are experiences you can have now at many of the beautiful natural areas listed in this guide.

**Enjoy your visits!**

*Several preserves have limited access. Guided tours of these areas are available to Natural Land Institute members. You will find the dates listed in our newsletters, "Land and Nature" and "Volunteer Vision."*

# Ogle County



*Beach Cemetery Prairie was acquired by the Natural Land Institute in 1972 from the descendents of people buried in the cemetery. A 0.64-acre buffer was purchased by the Prairie Preservation Society of Ogle County and donated to the Natural Land Institute in 1992. Beach Cemetery Prairie is a dedicated Illinois Nature Preserve.*

**Owner:**  
**Natural Land Institute**  
For information: [nli@aol.com](mailto:nli@aol.com)  
or 815.964.6666

# Beach Cemetery Prairie

4 acres

2¼ miles east of Meridian Road on Big Mound Road  
Southwest of Davis Junction

Every season is a good time to visit Beach Cemetery Prairie Nature Preserve, because this tiny prairie is ablaze in color much of the year. In early spring, the pasque flower plant sends up a flower stalk in advance of leaves, so what you see are delicate lavender-purple blooms nestled in the muted tan tangle of last year's prairie grass.

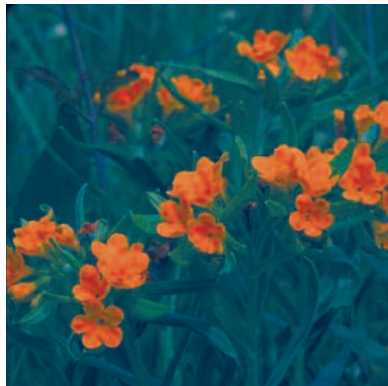
Springtime is also when you'll see a display of shooting stars. These small flowers get their name from their petals, which shoot sharply backwards, and from the nodding characteristic of their blooms. They put on their show from April through May.

Yellow blossoms of puccoon appear in late spring and early summer, followed in July by the purple hues of leadplant. Don't neglect the autumn and winter, however, for this is when you'll see the reddish-brown of little bluestem as it stands above the prairie.

The overlapping blooming seasons of the various wildflowers and grasses will ensure a stunning view whenever you choose to visit.



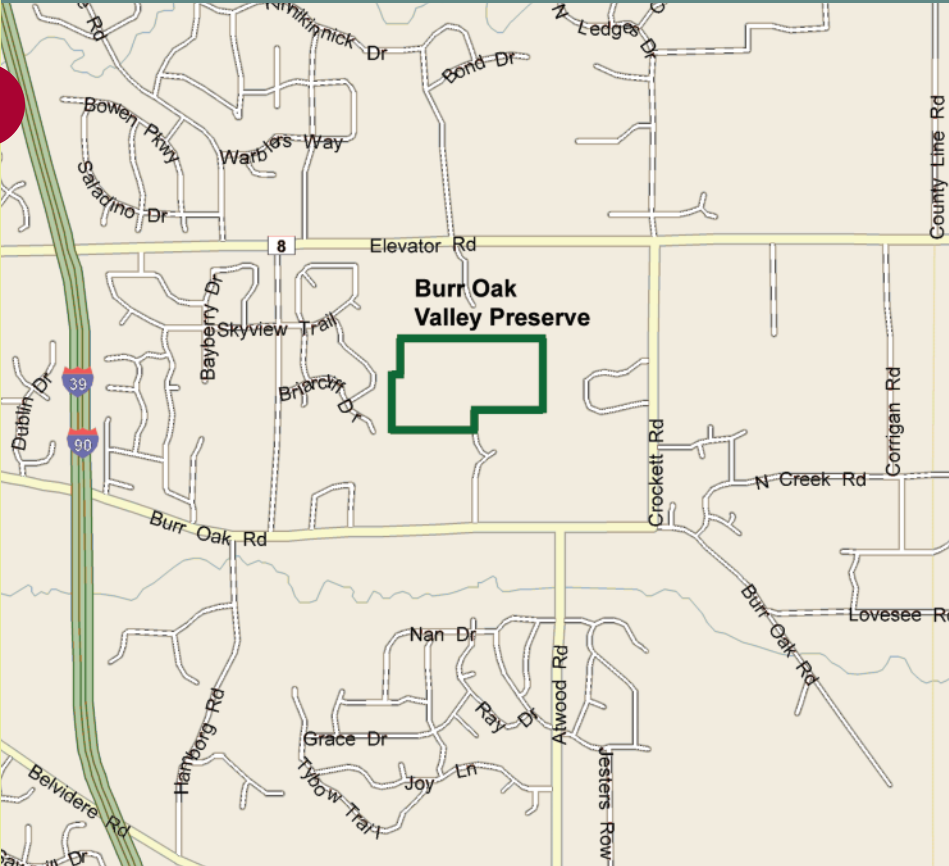
Shooting star



Hoary puccoon

# Winnebago County

2



*Burr Oak Valley Preserve was purchased by the Natural Land Institute in 1986 with a donation from McCleary Industries of South Beloit.*

**Owner: Natural Land Institute**

**Access is limited.**

**For permission to visit, call or email:**

**815.964.6666 or [nli@aol.com](mailto:nli@aol.com)**



# Burr Oak Valley

63 acres

East of Roscoe

½ mile north of Burr Oak Road.

Turn north on Kristi Hills Drive and follow to Tina Lynn Court.

**B**urr Oak Valley Preserve is home to several natural communities: mesic upland forest, dolomite prairie, dolomite cliff and intermittent stream. It is one of only a few woodlands in the area that remains untouched by development. Come in the spring for a superb woodland wildflower display.

Three small dolomite hill prairies provide you with a lovely view of little bluestem, side oats grama and purple prairie clover. Purple prairie clover blooms in early summer. It is a slender, erect plant, typically about two feet tall. The flowers are in dense cylindrical spikes at the tops of the stems and branches. The bright purple-magenta flowers at the bottom of each spike are the first to bloom, forming a brilliant wreath that climbs the spike as flowering progresses.

As you walk through the plants that brush your ankles and knees, don't forget to also look around at the trees. Enjoy the beauty of red oak, black walnut, shagbark hickory and hackberry.



*Dolomite hill prairie*



*Purple prairie clover*

# Carroll County

3



*Camp Merrill Benson was protected in 2005 when it was registered as a Land and Water Reserve with the Illinois Nature Preserves Commission. The Natural Land Institute secured funding for the project and assisted with the preservation agreement and registration. The camp is allowed to continue traditional land uses, such as recreational and education opportunities for children. Other uses are restricted to protect the more sensitive natural features from overuse.*

**Owner: Sterling-Rock Falls Family YMCA**

**Access is limited.**

**For information:**

**YMCA at 815.535.9622 or the camp at 815.244.8722**

# Camp Merrill Benson

**73 acres**

**16355 Scenic Palisades Road  
Mt. Carroll, Illinois 61053**

**W**augarusa Creek has carved a deep canyon through this land west of Mt. Carroll, creating geologic, botanic and zoologic features that are unusual in northern Illinois. Walls of the canyon rise up to 100 feet from the creek.

Since the early 1900s, botanists have known that rare plants such as dwarf scouring rush, cliff goldenrod, scented oak fern and *Sullivantia* are here and should be protected. This is the only known location for the scented oak fern in Illinois. Plants that typically grow in the northern Great Lakes region like white pine and Canada yew are also found here.

At least four species of bats use the caves within the dolomite cliffs. One state endangered animal, an isopod (*Caecidotea spatulata*) is found within Smith Park Cave.



# Ogle County

4



*Based on George Fell's initial acquisitions and favorable reports of additional available acreage, the Illinois Department of Conservation hired him to act as a land acquisition agent for the state, promising to establish a new state park if a minimum of 1,000 acres could be acquired. By the time Castle Rock was dedicated as a state park in 1978, George had acquired 15 tracts through the Natural Land Institute, which were sold to the state at cost. He negotiated the sale terms of another 15 tracts on behalf of the Department of Conservation to acquire outright. More than once, George and his wife, **Barbara**, contributed personal funds to acquire options or pay significant portions of the full purchase price in advance of the state's ability to secure funding. The total acreage they acquired was 1,040 acres.*

**Owner: Illinois Department of Natural Resources**  
**For information: Castle Rock State Park at 815.732.7329**

# Castle Rock

**2,000 acres**

*(includes the 709-acre George B. Fell Nature Preserve)*

**1365 W. Castle Road  
Oregon, Illinois 61061**

In the 1960s, **George B. Fell**, founder of the Natural Land Institute, acquired several key parcels of land in an area located outside of Oregon on the Rock River and named for its prominent sandstone feature — Castle Rock. **Jens Jensen's** *Friends of Our Native Landscape* first had recommended the area as a state park in 1921.

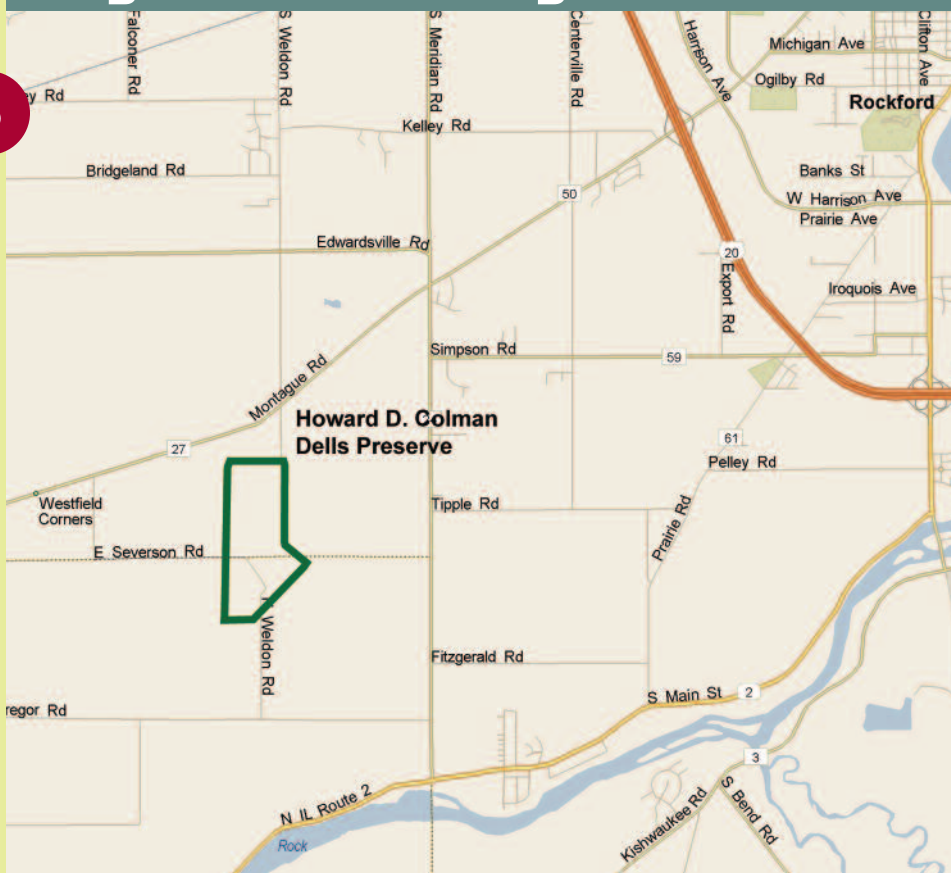
Castle Rock State Park was a place well known to George Fell's father, **Dr. Egbert W. Fell**, who collected 27 different species of ferns and recorded the presence of relict boreal plants including native white pine, bunchberry, hairy woodrush, round-leaved shinleaf and wild sarsaparilla.

In addition to the wide variety of plants you will find at Castle Rock State Park, you'll see a remarkable diversity of birds, some that are rare in Illinois. Depending on the time of year, you may see migrating waterfowl or catch a glimpse of a bald eagle or an osprey. Cooper's hawks, wild turkeys and barred owls breed in the preserve, and in the spring a variety of thrushes and at least 15 types of warblers are found there.



# Ogle & Winnebago Counties

5



*Dorothy C. Wallace* donated the 93-acre Howard D. Colman Dells Preserve to the Natural Land Institute in 1997. Her contribution was a tribute to her father, the late Rockford industrialist Howard D. Colman. In 1998, the 55-acre portion of the preserve located in Winnebago County was dedicated as an Illinois Nature Preserve.

**Owner: Natural Land Institute**  
**For information: [nli@aol.com](mailto:nli@aol.com)**  
**or 815.964.6666**

# Colman Dells Preserve

93 acres

6 miles southwest of Rockford, along Hall Creek.  
South on Meridian Road, west on McGregor Road,  
north on Weldon Road

The Howard D. Colman Dells Preserve offers a piece of natural history unique to Winnebago and Ogle counties. It is a prime example of a high-quality northern Illinois forest. An array of unusual plants fill the area, including Canada yew, chinquapin oak and the only remaining native white pines in Winnebago County. A clear and shallow stream, Hall Creek, meanders through the shadows of vertical dolomite dells.

The preserve is rich in cultural history as well. **Aldo Leopold**, famed Wisconsin naturalist and author of “A Sand County Almanac,” worked for **Howard D. Colman** on a deer-forest management project in 1936. This was Leopold’s first work in the Midwest on deer-forest management and the implications of overgrazing on the health of the natural community. In the 1950s, **Egbert Fell**, the father of the Natural Land Institute’s founder **George B. Fell**, documented plant species from the area in his publication “Flora of Winnebago County.”

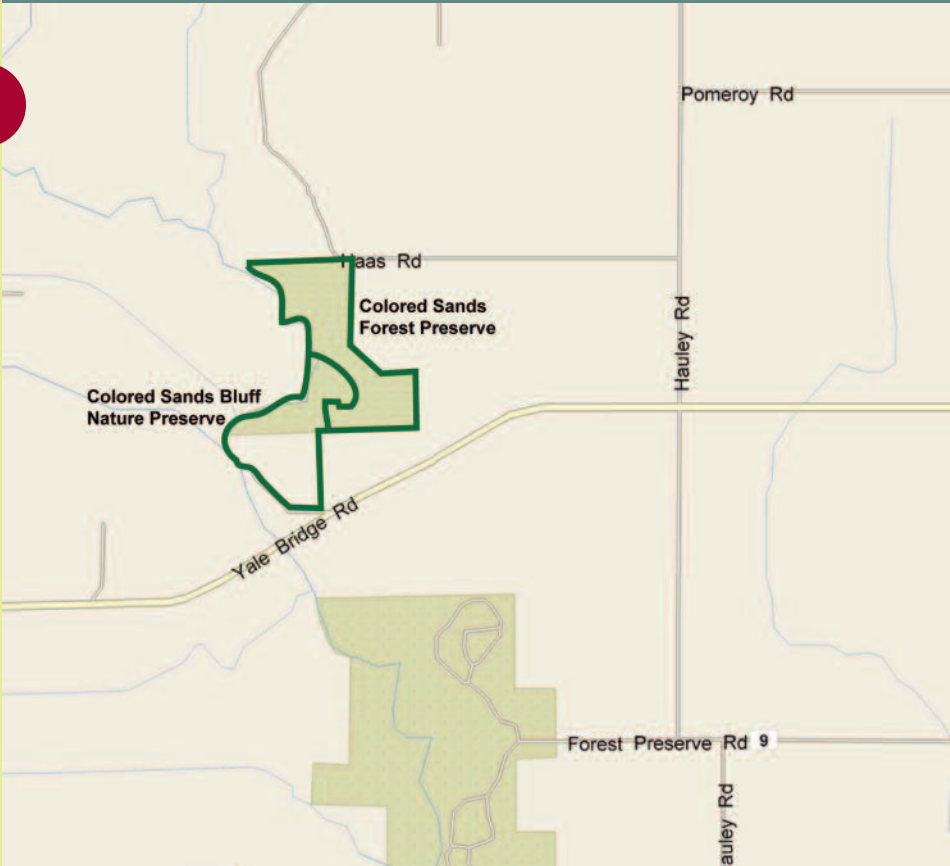
Restoration of a nine-acre field at the preserve began in 1999 with the planting of native hardwood seedlings, including oak, hickory, walnut and butternut. In 2002, volunteers again planted seeds, nuts and acorns to close the opening in the forest canopy. Volunteers are also helping with stewardship at the preserve by assisting with the control of invasive honeysuckle.



Reforestation monitoring

# Winnebago County

6



*Lee Johnson, founder of the Sand Bluff Bird Observatory, sold the land to the Winnebago County Forest Preserve District. The Natural Land Institute helped dedicate part of the area as an Illinois Nature Preserve and provided record keeping and financial services for the Sand Bluff Bird Observatory (then named the Sand Bluff Bird Banding Station) from 1973 through 1998.*

**Owners: Winnebago County Forest Preserve District**  
**Contact information: 815.877.6100;**  
**Sand Bluff Bird Observatory 815.629.2671**



# Colored Sands

**304 acres**

**10602 Haas Road  
Shirland, Illinois 61079**

**C**olored Sands Forest Preserve is named for the St. Peters sandstone found on the southern end of the preserve. The iron oxide in the stone darkens when it is exposed to the weather, creating magnificent colors. In midspring to midsummer, in the sandy open woodlands, you have the opportunity to see a spectacular display of wild lupine with beautiful, elongated blue flower clusters at the tops of the stems.

Birds find an array of habitats in the prairies, low marshy areas, steep sand bluff and bottomland forest. Nearly every migrating or nesting warbler, wren, vireo, sparrow, thrush, blackbird and hawk recorded in Winnebago County has been found in the fields and woods of the extensive property. The Sand Bluff Bird Observatory established in 1967 is the largest banding station in the Mississippi Flyway and one of the few banding stations open to the public. It monitors bird populations through bird banding on facilities furnished and maintained by the Winnebago County Forest Preserve District.



*Wild lupine*

Within the forest preserve is the 55-acre Colored Sands Bluff Nature Preserve. This area features bluffs on the Sugar River, dry sand savanna, dry dolomite prairie, and dry sand prairie. The nature preserve is home to unusual reptiles and amphibians, including fox snake, milk snake, western hognose snake, Blanding's turtle and the uncommon blue-spotted salamander.

# Jo Daviess County

7



*The Illinois Department of Natural Resources purchased Falling Down Prairie in 2001 with the help of the Natural Land Institute and a grant from the McKnight Foundation. Natural Land Institute staff assists landowners to explore options to permanently protect their properties in the Mississippi bluffslands.*

**Owners: Illinois Department  
of Natural Resources**  
**For information: 217.782.6302**

# Falling Down Prairie

109 acres

**3½ miles south of Hanover, just off Route 84;  
access from a gravel parking lot located off South Airhart Road  
along the southern border of the property.**

**F**alling Down Prairie is located between Hanover Bluff Nature Preserve and Mississippi Palisades State Park. You might want to visit in the fall to enjoy the colors, but a trip here at any time of the year is a great experience.

Falling Down Prairie is called a “goat prairie,” a name often given to hill prairies located on steep, thin soils where you imagine only goats could walk. These prairies are found mainly along the bluffs of the Mississippi River but can occur elsewhere.

The prairie is small and surrounded by woodland. Plants common to hill prairies include little bluestem, Indian grass, big bluestem, goat’s rue, and Scribner’s panic grass. Hiking is difficult due to the steep topography. Hunting is allowed.

Areas near the Mississippi River provide critical habitat for many migrating birds. Species you are likely to see at Falling Down Prairie include woodpeckers, red-eyed vireos, Eastern wood peewees and wood thrush.

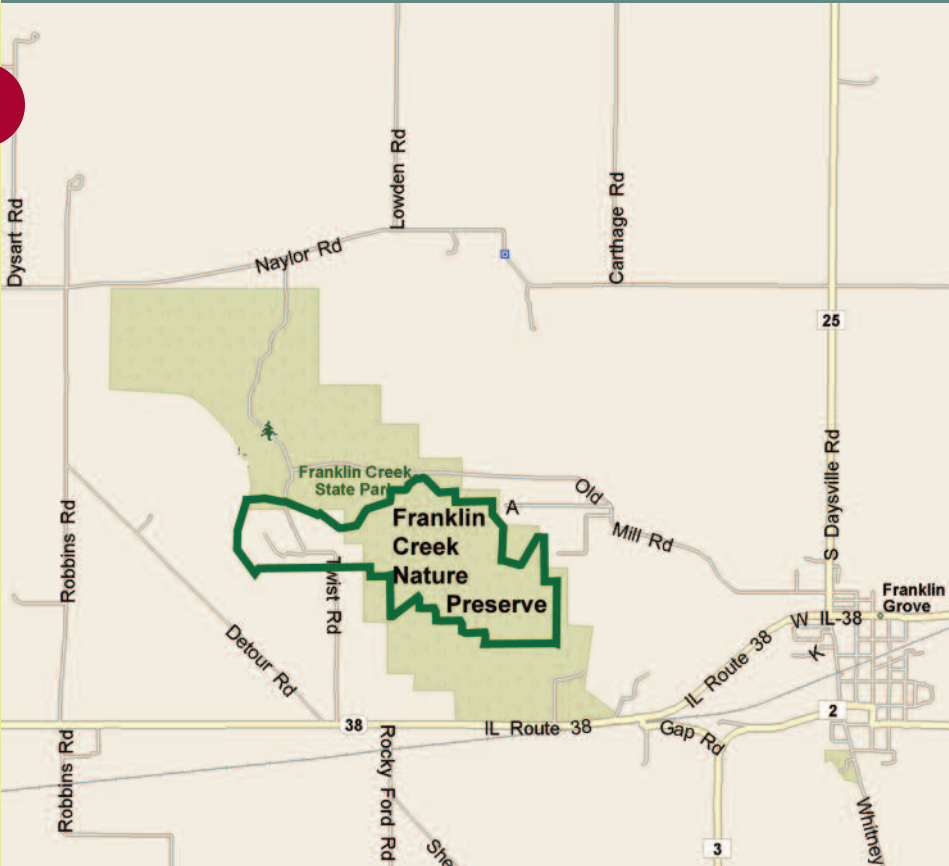
Mixed forests are rapidly colonizing open grasslands along the Mississippi River. Human suppression of natural fire has greatly reduced the number of goat prairies. However, the low moisture content of the slopes, the winter freeze-thaw cycle and the thin layer of soil help to keep these areas free of trees.



Red-headed woodpecker

# Lee County

8



*George B. Fell, founder of the Natural Land Institute, secured the first parcel of land in the area. Winifred Knox later donated more than one hundred acres in honor of her pioneer ancestors. Through the 1970s, the Natural Land Institute acquired additional tracts for the Department of Natural Resources.*

**Owner: Illinois Department of Natural Resources**  
**For information: 815.456.2878**

# Franklin Creek

189 acres

1872 Twist Road  
Franklin Grove, Illinois 61031

**F**ranklin Creek Nature Preserve is located within the 664-acre Franklin Creek State Park. The park has 4½ miles of easy hiking trails so you can enjoy the beautiful creek, several natural springs, hardwood forests and geological outcroppings. Mill Spring, which once served as a source of water for a mill, is located just northeast of the preserve. Nineteen species of fish have been identified from Franklin Creek, with the smallmouth bass, channel catfish and rock bass being of the most interest to anglers.

The nature preserve is the most outstanding part of the park. The gorge area is highly scenic and rich in both natural and historic features. The north facing slope overlooking Franklin Creek is dotted with a mesic forest of sugar maple and basswood.

Forest interior birds, such as pileated woodpecker, use this critical habitat for breeding. The seeps and springs support unusual plant life such as skunk cabbage, wild black current and swamp rose. Sheltered cliffs provide habitat for Canada yew, bulblet fern, smooth cliffbrake and downy arrowwood. Outcroppings along Franklin Creek are the oldest exposed geologic formation in the state.



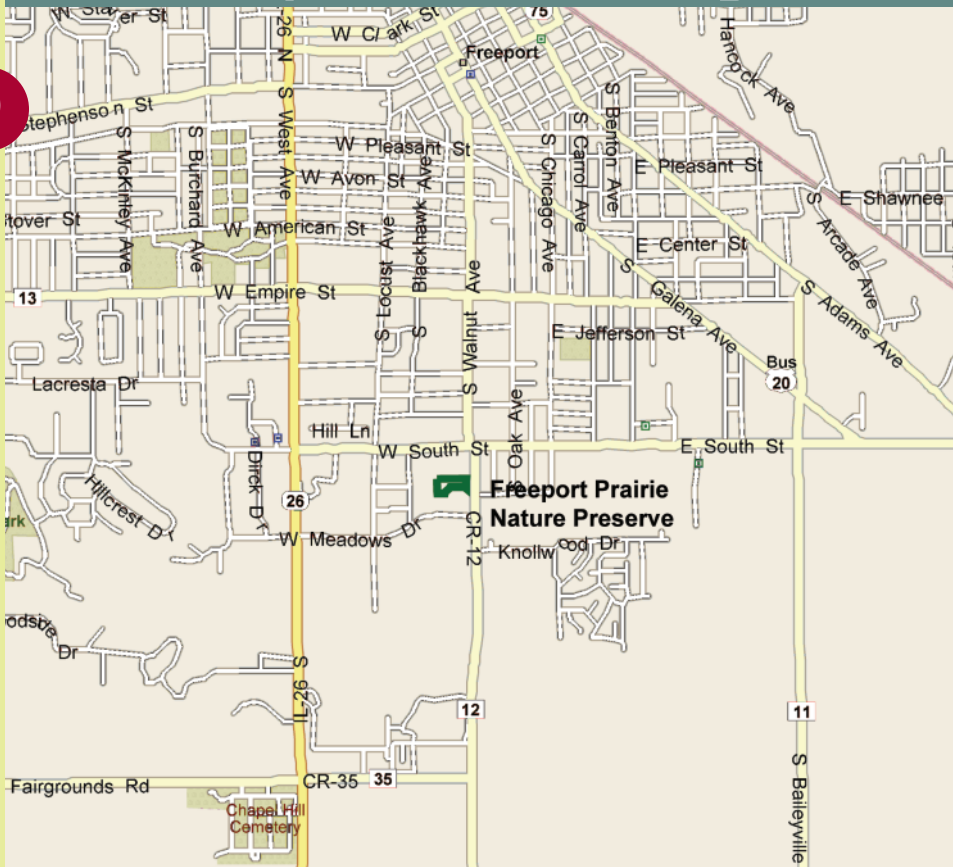
*Jack-in-the-pulpit*



*Trillium*

# Stephenson County

9



*The Natural Land Institute's executive director, **Jerry Paulson**, recognized the value of the prairie in the summer of 1974 when he worked for the Illinois Nature Preserves Commission. The prairie was owned by **Frank and Alice Larson** of Loves Park, who also owned the adjoining Freeport Raceway Park. Paulson, the Larsons and the Jane Addamsland Park Foundation worked together to transfer ownership of the prairie to Jane Addamsland in 1976. With the assistance of the Natural Land Institute, the prairie was dedicated as an Illinois Nature Preserve in 1977.*

**Owner: Jane Addamsland  
Park Foundation**  
**For information: 815.235.6114**

# Freeport Prairie

4.5 acres

Approximately ½ mile south of South Street on Walnut Road next to Freeport Raceway Park

Freeport Prairie Nature Preserve lies on a steep, north-facing bluff on the edge of an ancient channel of Yellow Creek, a tributary of the Pecatonica River. It represents the last of the original upland prairie known as Shannon Prairie, named for the town of Shannon located south of Freeport.

In June, pale purple coneflowers are in bloom at Freeport Prairie, making this one of the best times to visit. Dominant plants are little bluestem, prairie dropseed and side-oats grama. Many beautiful flowers add to the diversity, including downy yellow painted cup, rock sandwort, pasque flower and prairie smoke.

Prairie smoke is one of the earliest of spring-blooming flowers. The purplish plumes of its seed-heads have been likened to smoke rising from the prairie. This member of the rose family grows on the thinnest soil, where dolomite bedrock is right at the surface. Freeport Prairie is at the very southern limits of its distribution in the mid-continent.



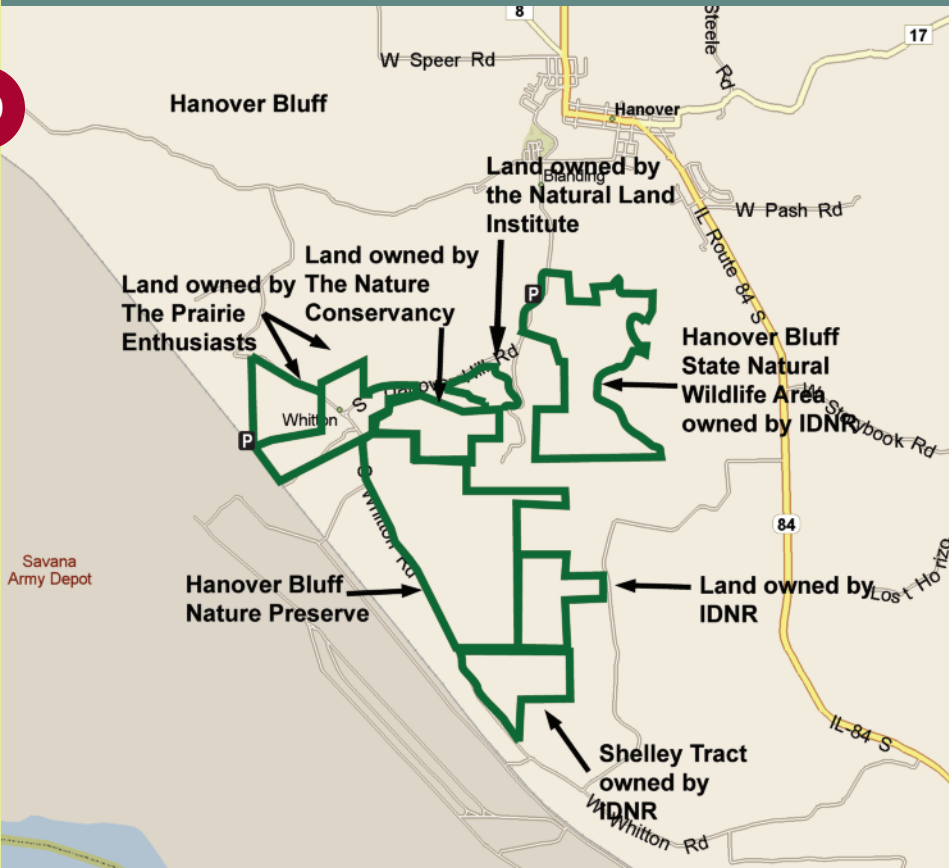
Prairie smoke



Pale purple coneflower

# Jo Daviess County

10



*The Natural Land Institute helped the Illinois Department of Natural Resources acquire the first parcels of land in 1979. The Nature Conservancy acquired 116 acres and dedicated 30 acres as an addition to the Nature Preserve in 2004. In 2003, the Natural Land Institute purchased the 35-acre Hanover Forest. It also protects 250 acres of privately-owned land with conservation agreements, including 125 acres owned by The Prairie Enthusiasts.*

**Owners: Natural Land Institute, The Nature Conservancy,  
The Prairie Enthusiasts and the Illinois Department  
of Natural Resources**

**For information: [nli@aol.com](mailto:nli@aol.com) or 815.964.6666**



# Hanover Bluff

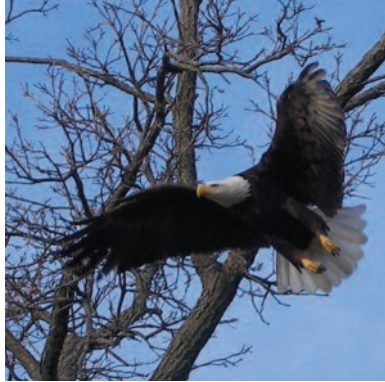
**1,100 acres**

Increasingly rare in Illinois are expansive landscapes like Hanover Bluff Land and Water Reserve in Jo Daviess County. The Natural Land Institute and its partners are working to protect and restore the fabric of this precious landscape in the western part of our state, where some of the more intact wooded bluffs are still found.

Hanover Bluff harbors threatened and endangered plant species. Bald eagles, barn owls and songbirds such as the Eastern wood pewee, veery and cerulean warbler depend on this uninterrupted, diverse area for nesting.

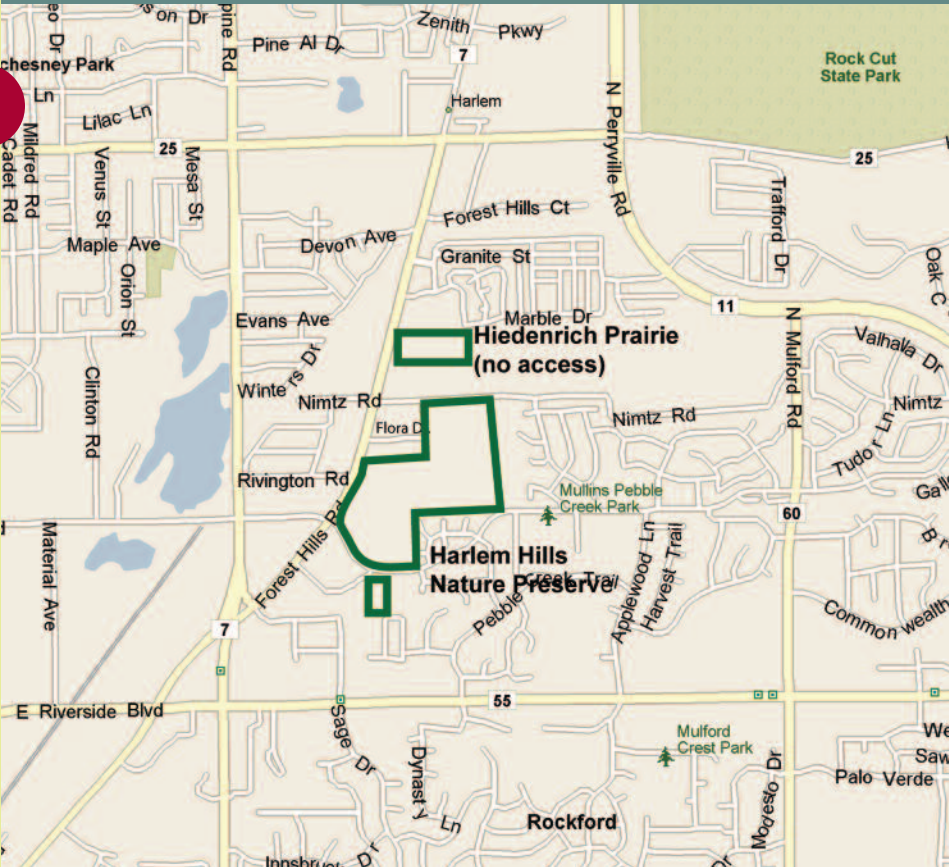
Visitors are welcome to many parts of Hanover Bluff, but public use varies according to property ownership. Trails and parking are available on S. Hanover Hill Road at Hanover Bluffs State Natural Area owned by the Illinois Department of Natural Resources. Fishing and limited hunting are allowed. You will also find hiking trails, parking and a prairie display garden at Hanley Savanna on S. Whitton Road, an area owned by The Prairie Enthusiasts.

Public use is limited on the Hanover Bluff Nature Preserve and on properties owned by The Prairie Enthusiasts, The Nature Conservancy and the Natural Land Institute due to the remote location and limited access. Private property is not open to the public.



Bald eagle

# Winnebago County



In the early 1960s, **George B. Fell**, the founder of the Natural Land Institute, negotiated the acquisition of the first tract of this prairie and later several additional tracts. The Natural Land Institute managed the land for about 25 years. The Natural Land Institute helped expand the prairie in 2005 by purchasing the last remaining undeveloped four acres near the preserve and transferring ownership to the Illinois Department of Natural Resources.

**Owner: Illinois Department of  
Natural Resources  
For information: 217.785.8686**

# Harlem Hills

60 acres

Loves Park, Illinois (from Forest Hills Road,  
turn east on Flora Drive)

**H**arlem Hills Nature Preserve is Illinois' largest and finest remaining example of a gravel hill prairie and is regarded as one of the ten most significant prairies east of the Mississippi River. Plant and wildlife species are diverse and include several insects that are threatened or endangered in Illinois.

A remarkable feature of this preserve is the large number of prairie wildflowers. In the spring, pasque flowers are the first to bloom. In late June and early July, come to see one of the best displays of pale purple coneflowers in our region. You will be delighted throughout the seasons by the beauty of plants that include cream indigo, leadplant, pink milkwort, downy yellow painted cup and prairie buttercup.

At Harlem Hills Nature Preserve, the regal fritillary feeds on milkweeds, thistles, and other prairie flowers. This butterfly is endangered in northwestern Illinois, its range mostly coincident with a band of sandy, original, true prairie.



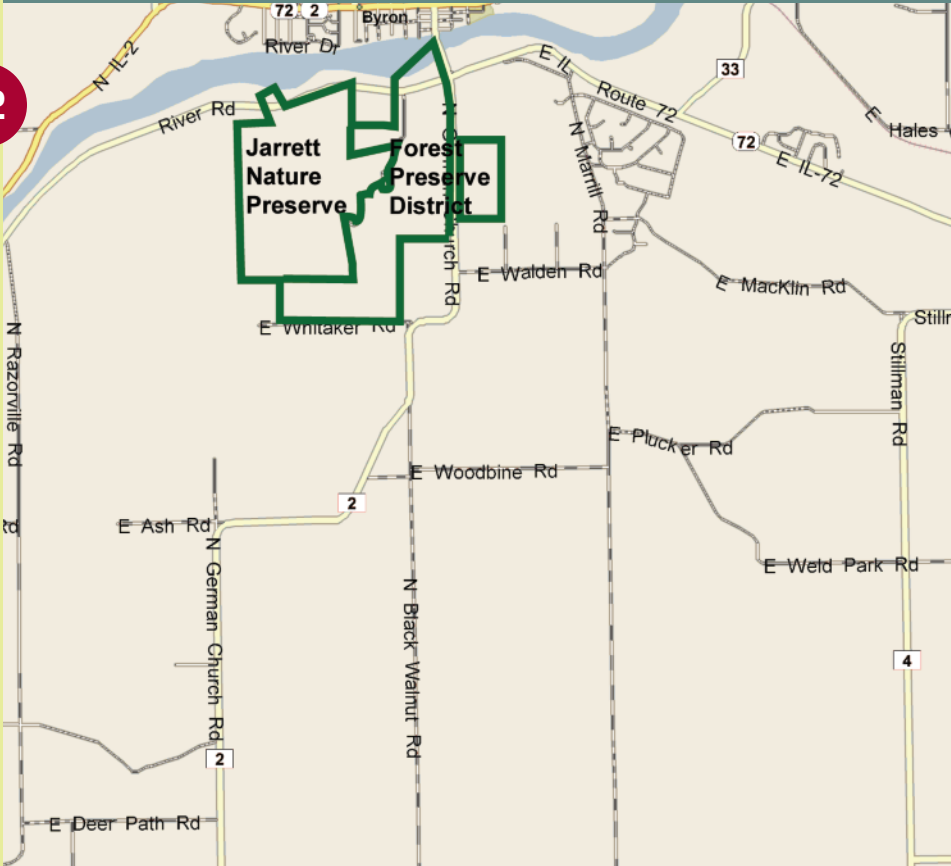
*Pale purple coneflower*



*Regal fritillary*

# Ogle County

12



*The Natural Land Institute helped to acquire an addition to the preserve in 2003 and assisted the forest preserve district to restore the original prairie on the parcel.*

**Owner: Byron Forest Preserve District**

**For information: 815.234.8535**

# Jarrett Prairie

**116 acres**

*with 25 acres of buffer*

**7993 North River Road  
Byron, Illinois 61010**

**J**arrett Prairie Nature Preserve is the highest quality portion of the 450-acre Byron Forest Preserve District “Prairie Preserve.” Parking, trail access and trail maps are available at the Jarrett Prairie Center.

The preserve is a large complex of dry dolomite and dry-mesic dolomite prairie remnants. Much of the preserve is undergoing restoration. The best quality prairie, including those areas that are habitat for endangered and rare species, and the best of the restored prairie, make up an important core area that has been dedicated as the Jarrett Prairie Nature Preserve. The nature preserve includes two sites where large bur oaks with spreading branches suggest a savanna-like community.

Nestled among the ridges and swales are numerous wildflowers, including fringed and downy gentian. The wood betony will delight you in mid-to-late spring, when it displays its distinctive, pale yellow flowers amidst leaves that appear fernlike. Prairie bushclover and woolly milkweed also thrive at Jarrett Prairie Nature Preserve.



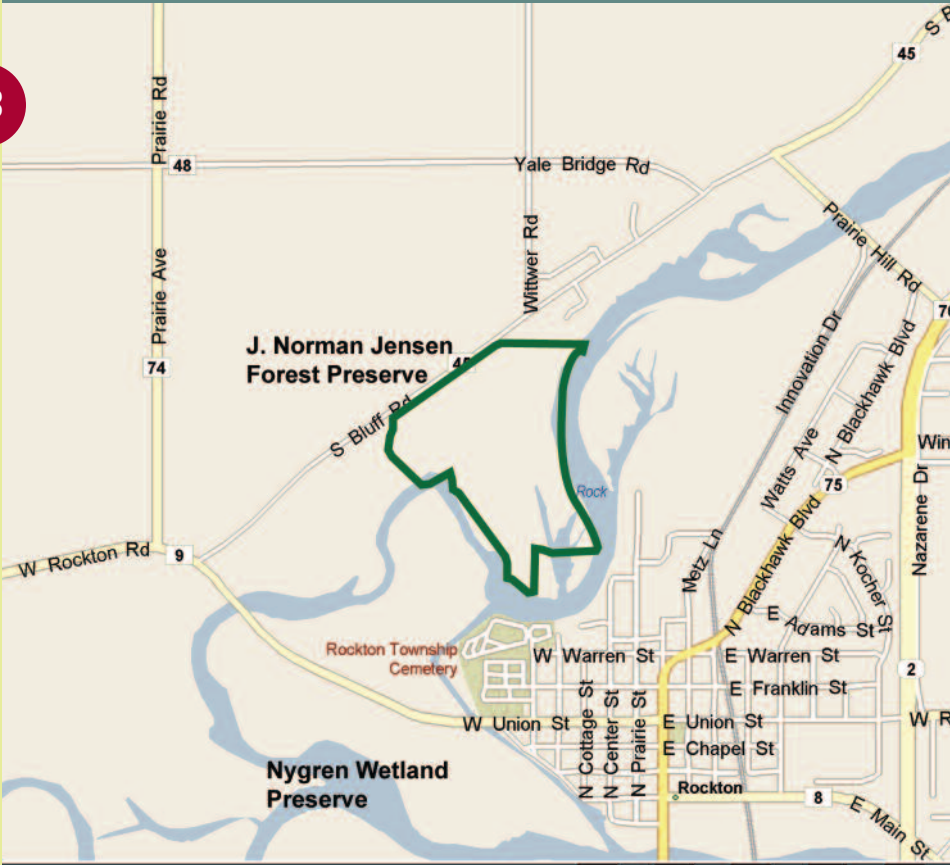
*Barred owl*



*Fringed gentian*

# Winnebago County

13



*The Natural Land Institute received funds to purchase the land from the will of **J. Norman Jensen**, who passed away in 2002. The funds were entrusted to the Natural Land Institute to purchase prime conservation land and then transfer it to the Winnebago County Forest Preserve District. The Natural Land Institute and the district worked together to identify the land, and the Natural Land Institute contributed seeds for restoring the prairie.*

**Owner: Winnebago County  
Forest Preserve District  
For information: 815.877.6100**

# Jensen Forest Preserve

112 acres

1440 South Bluff Road  
Rockton, Illinois 61072

**J**. Norman Jensen Forest Preserve has about a mile of frontage on the Rock River and is located north of the millrace dam across from the Village of Rockton. It includes about ten acres of dry prairie on a gravel bluff above the river where it makes a sharp bend below the dam.

The prairie was identified 50 years ago by **Dr. Egbert Fell**, author of the “Flora of Winnebago County” and father of **George B. Fell**, founder of the Natural Land Institute. Dr. Fell documented several rare plants at the prairie, including one of the only known populations in Illinois of the state endangered dragon wormwood.

Bring your binoculars for your visit to these forests and wetlands that harbor many species of migratory birds, duck and other waterfowl. This is a favorite roosting area for bald eagles and osprey that fish along the river. Watch, too, for hawks, owls, great blue herons and sandhill cranes.

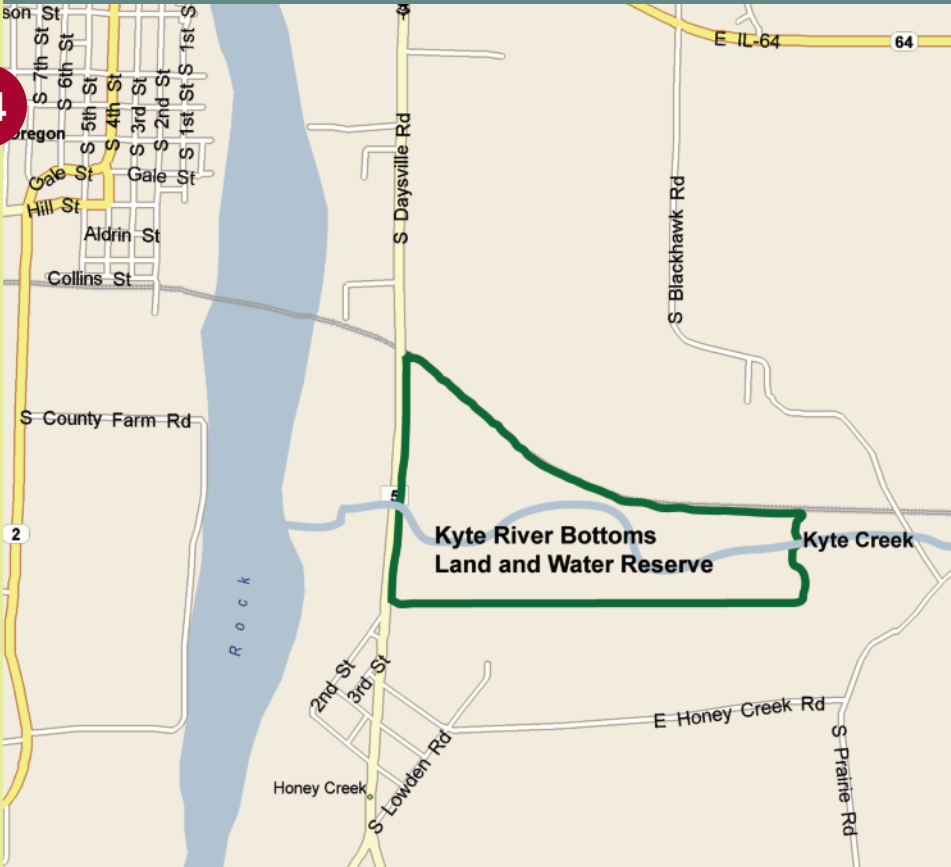
The Winnebago County Forest Preserve District is restoring native prairie and oak savanna at the preserve. Non-native, invasive species that have choked out native trees and grasses in many parts of the property are being removed.



Red-shouldered hawk

# Ogle County

14



*In 2003, the Natural Land Institute purchased this land using grants from the Illinois Department of Natural Resources (Conservation 2000 program) and the Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation. Kyte River Bottoms was registered as a Land and Water Reserve with the Illinois Nature Preserves Commission in 2004.*

**Owner: Natural Land Institute**

**For information: [nli@aol.com](mailto:nli@aol.com) or 815.964.6666**



# Kyte River Bottoms

235 acres

## Southeast of Oregon on Daysville Road

**F**loodplain forest makes up most of the Kyte River Bottoms Land and Water Reserve, but several other types of land are also present: upland forest, sedge meadow, sand savanna and stream. When the river floods, large portions of this 235-acre preserve are covered with water. Visit at different times of the year and you will discover that where there once was no pond, now there is. These seasonal ponds are part of the nature of a floodplain forest.

The forest towers high above you with its silver maple, swamp white oaks, green ash, American sycamore and American elm. You'll be able to watch the birds and animals enjoy the sweetish fruit of the honeylocust and the hackberry trees. Discover plants with whimsical names: pagoda dogwood, starry campion, water crowfoot, rice cut grass and rattlesnake fern.

There is an abundance of wildlife to admire at Kyte River Bottoms. In the spring, the sounds of chorus frogs and spring peepers will add delight to your visit. Be on the lookout for the Blanding's turtle, a state-threatened species. This unique area offers more than 90 species of birds, including the state-threatened red-shouldered hawk, red-headed woodpecker, veery, yellow-billed cuckoo and northern flicker.



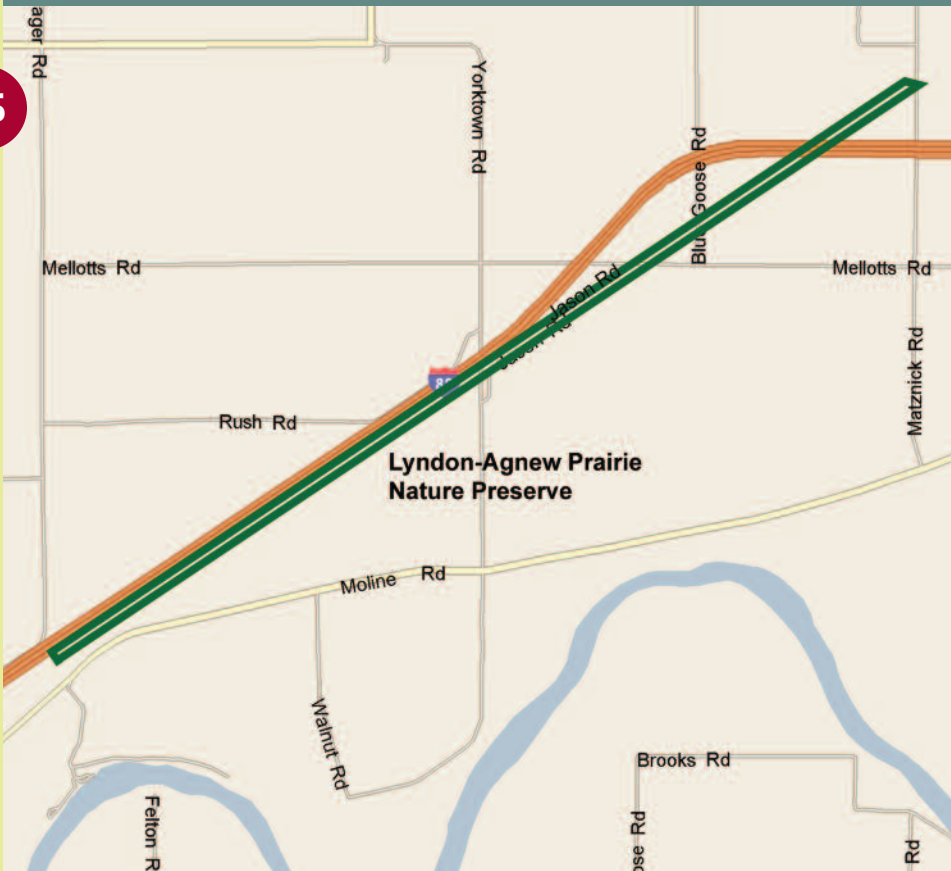
Dragonfly



Western chorus frog

# Whiteside County

15



*The Natural Land Institute purchased the railroad right-of-way in 1990 by quit claim deed and turned over management to **Tim Keller** of Sterling, who had been leasing the property since 1978 in order to protect it. Keller and the Whiteside County Natural Area Guardians, a committee of the Whiteside County Soil and Water Conservation District, manage the prairie. The Whiteside County Natural Area Guardians also own a ten-acre, high-quality wet prairie next to Lyndon Prairie.*

**Owner: Natural Land Institute**

**For information: [nli@aol.com](mailto:nli@aol.com) or 815.964.6666**

# Lyndon Prairie

**36 acres**

**5 miles southwest of Rock Falls along I-88**

Lyndon Prairie Nature Preserve lies in a narrow, seven-mile corridor along the abandoned Burlington Northern Railroad, five miles southwest of Rock Falls, and links the rural villages of Lyndon and Agnew.

Local residents call the 78-acre Lyndon-Agnew Prairie a “treasure in our midst.” It has some of the finest and rarest black soil prairie left in Illinois. Thirty-six acres qualified for dedication as an Illinois Nature Preserve in 1995, a status granted only to very high-quality natural lands. At this preserve, you will find more than 80 native plant species that once covered Illinois prairies.

Visit often during the growing season to see the ever-changing succession of blooming plants such as coneflowers, milkweeds and asters. Look for the brilliant orange blossoms of butterflyweed in late spring and early summer, and diverse grass species that include big bluestem, little bluestem, Indian grass and porcupine grass.

Land along this area of the Rock River was originally a mixture of prairie, marsh, and bottomland forest. It was owned in the mid-1800s by various individuals and taken over by the Rockford, Rock Island & St. Louis Railroad Company in 1868 – 69. When the Burlington Northern Railroad announced plans to abandon the right-of-way in 1978, local conservationists began efforts to secure its preservation.



*Tim Keller conducts prescribed prairie burn*



# Nachusa Grasslands

**2,500 acres**

*and 400 additional acres protected by conservation agreements*

**8772 S. Lowden Road  
Franklin Grove, Illinois 61031**

Imagine visiting numerous natural communities in one place. Nachusa Grasslands offers a rolling vista of prairie, sedge meadow and streamside marsh, as well as bur oak savanna and sand savanna.

The grasslands provide habitat for birds, butterflies, and animals that are rare or uncommon in Illinois. See gorgone checkerspot butterflies among the prairie grasses. These pretty little butterflies were reintroduced here after being rescued from smaller prairie fragments that had fallen victim to development.

You will see many of the 600 native plant species that Nachusa Grasslands is home to, as well as many of its 180 bird species. Listen to the songs of the grasshopper sparrow and the Henslow's sparrow as you walk through the kittentails, forked aster, downy yellow painted cup and prairie bush clover. The preserve has one of the state's largest populations of prairie bush clover, a federally-threatened plant.

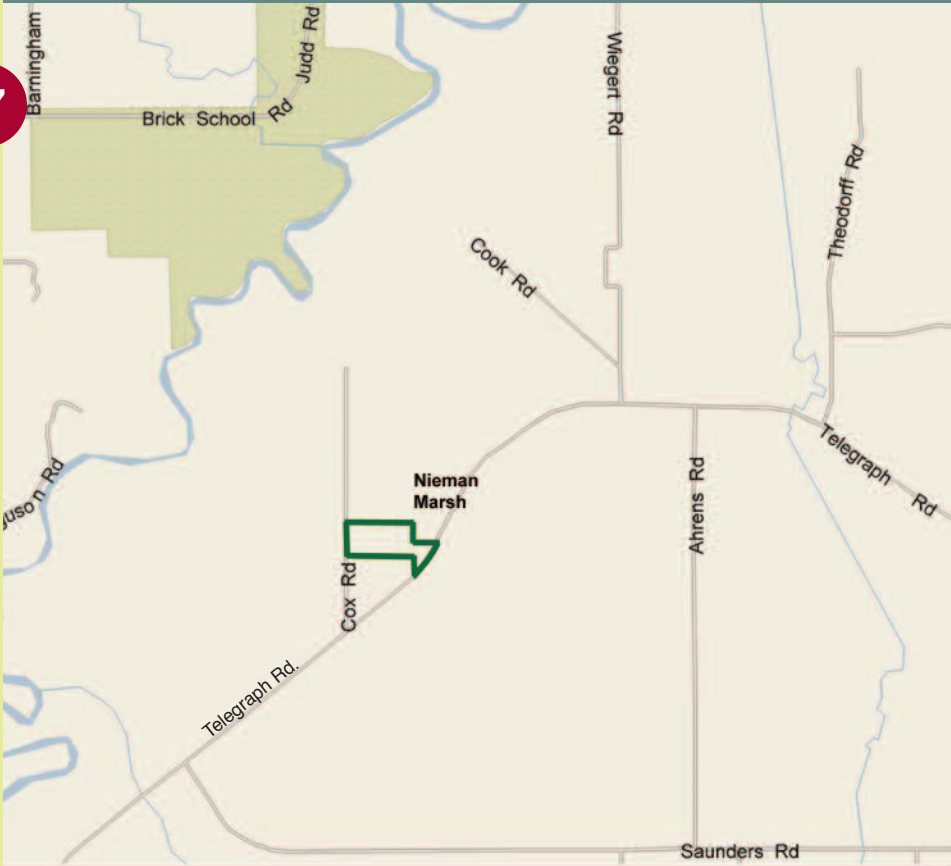
The sheer size of this protected area allows for the presence of animals that need large amounts of space to live, such as the badger and certain grassland birds. There is even hope that one day bison will live here again when enough land is restored.



Gray fox

# Winnebago County

17



*The Natural Land Institute purchased the marsh and wet meadows in 2006 with funds from the Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation and the Anderson Family Foundations. In 2008, we restored four acres of prairie along the northern boundary of the property.*

**Owner: Natural Land Institute**

**Access is limited.**

**For permission to visit, email [nli@aol.com](mailto:nli@aol.com) or call 815.964.6666.**

# Nieman Marsh

**39 acres**

**North of Telegraph Road and east of Cox Road,  
approximately 2 miles east of Pecatonica, Illinois 61063**

**N**ieman Marsh is spring fed with natural communities that include wet prairie, sedge meadow and deep marsh. Local bird experts know the area as one of the “natural gems of our region.”

The shallow and deep wetlands are critical for migrating waterfowl, and they provide habitat for birds such as sandhill crane, American bittern, least bittern and short-eared owl.

The bright yellow flowers of marsh marigolds can be seen here in the spring, and blue flag iris adds color from late spring to midsummer. Native plants such as Culver’s root, arrowhead, sedges, milkweeds and asters provide critical refuge for amphibians, reptiles and other wildlife.

Nieman Marsh is adjacent to other natural areas, increasing the preserve’s significance. Nearby are the Pecatonica River Forest Preserve, the Torstenson Family Hunting Heritage Center and private properties enrolled in conservation programs. Combined, these sites protect an area in excess of 1,300 acres.



*Marsh marigold*



*Sandhill cranes*

# Winnebago County

18



*The Natural Land Institute purchased the Nygren Wetland Preserve in 2000. Carl Nygren's generous gift, left to us in his will, initiated the acquisition and restoration. The preserve is named for him and his wife, Myrna.*

*Conservation partners include the Natural Resource Conservation Service, Illinois Department of Natural Resources, Grand Victoria Foundation, Smith Charitable Foundation, Atwood Foundation, Nora Family, Rockton Township, Sinnissippi Audubon Society, US Fish and Wildlife Service and many generous individuals.*

**Owners:** Natural Land Institute, 703 acres. Rockton Township owns 18 acres at the entrance to the Dianne Nora Nature Trail.

**Public access to the Dianne Nora Nature Trail (open dawn until dusk) is from Rockton Road opposite Hansberry Road through land owned by Rockton Township.**

**For information:** [nli@aol.com](mailto:nli@aol.com) or 815.964.6666



# Nygren Wetland Preserve

**721 acres**

**2810 West Rockton Road  
Rockton, Illinois 61072**

For thousands of years, people have been drawn to the rich land and abundant wildlife along the three streams — Rock River, Pecatonica River and Raccoon Creek — that flow through the Carl and Myrna Nygren Wetland Preserve. When the Natural Land Institute purchased it, very little of the original natural vegetation remained. The land had been dramatically altered in the 1970s, when farmers drained the fields and straightened the creek to plant corn and soybeans.

Hundreds of volunteers have helped the Natural Land Institute restore 100 acres of prairie, 450 acres of wetland and 150 acres of woodland as close as possible to the original by using century-old records left by surveyors and by looking at the soil types. In 2007, Raccoon Creek was returned to its original 2.3-mile channel, completing one of the final stages of the restoration. Stewardship of this large wetland complex is ongoing.

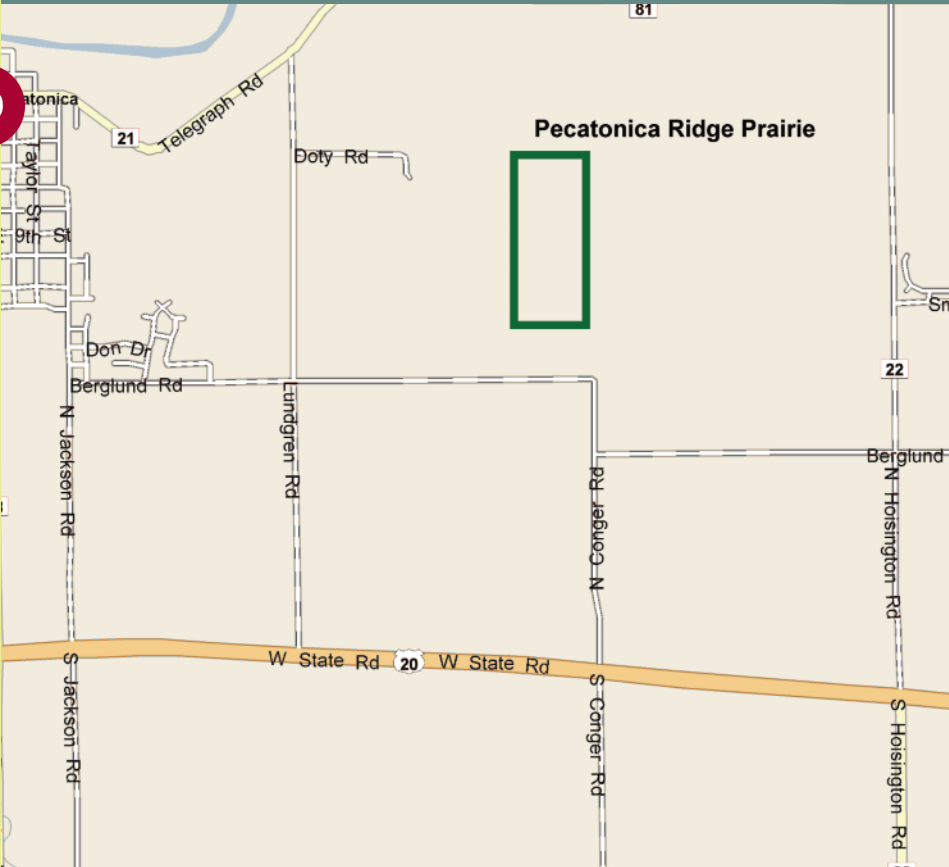


*Painted turtles at Raccoon Creek*

In the summer, blossoms of wild bergamot, sunflowers and black-eyed Susans create a purple and yellow ocean of color, stretching from the scenic bluff in the north to the Pecatonica River in the south. A pair of sandhill cranes raised a chick in 2004, the first in our restored wetlands. They are best observed from the overlook structure at the head of the Dianne Nora Nature Trail. River otters have returned to the Raccoon Creek corridor.

# Winnebago County

19



*The Natural Land Institute purchased this preserve in 2005. With the support of our members, we were able to respond quickly when the farm with the precious prairie was listed for sale at auction. Look for the plaque at the preserve honoring the **Sass Family**, owners of the land from 1877 to 2005.*

**Owner: Natural Land Institute**  
**Access is limited.**

**For permission to visit, email [nli@aol.com](mailto:nli@aol.com) or call 815.964.6666.**

# Pecatonica Ridge Prairie

**80 acres**

**Berglund Road, 2 miles east of Pecatonica,  
1 mile north of U.S. Route 20  
Pecatonica, Illinois 61063**

**T**his is a rare gem of original prairie nestled in the countryside east of Pecatonica. The upland prairie is one of only about 250 fragments scattered throughout Illinois that has survived in good condition.

Pasque flowers and prairie smoke are the earliest of spring-blooming flowers. Pale purple coneflowers and leadplant are in bloom in late June to early July, making this another outstanding time to visit. Porcupine grass, prairie dropseed, little bluestem, rosinweed and New Jersey tea are a few of the native plants you will see on the crest of the hillside.



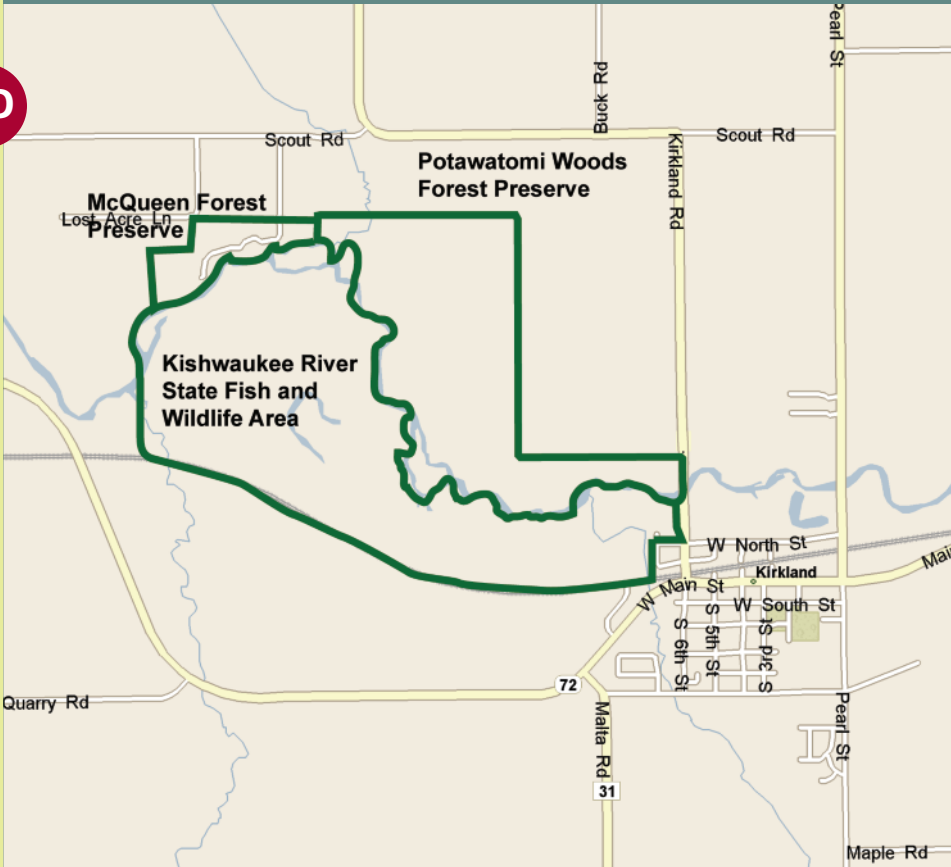
*Pasque flower*

You might catch a glimpse of sandhill cranes and great blue herons as they move to and from their nesting areas along the Pecatonica River to feed in the marshes surrounding the preserve. Listen for the soft, distinctive whistles of field sparrows and other songbirds. The area is also home to red fox, badgers, deer and coyotes.

The Natural Land Institute will complete the restoration of 32 acres of prairie on the north of the hill facing the Pecatonica River Valley in 2009. The restoration area adjoins 35 acres of wetlands with plants such as Joe Pye weed, bluejoint grass, asters, sunflowers and sedges. The wetlands will also be restored with the help of Natural Land Institute volunteers.

# DeKalb County

20



*A grant to the Natural Land Institute from the Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation helped fund the acquisition of Potawatomi Woods Forest Preserve.*

**Owner: DeKalb County Forest Preserve District**

**For information: [www.dekalbcounty.org](http://www.dekalbcounty.org) or 815.895.7191**

# Potawatomi Woods

**DeKalb County, 300 acres**

**32199 Kirkland Road  
Kirkland, IL 60146**

**P**otawatomi Woods Forest Preserve consists of 300 acres of forest and wetlands along the south branch of the Kishwaukee River northwest of the village of Kirkland. Future prairie restorations will be part of this landscape. Potawatomi Woods Forest Preserve, McQueen Forest Preserve and 600 acres of the adjoining Kishwaukee River State Fish and Wildlife area, comprise the largest single segment of protected, undeveloped land in DeKalb County.

Take a walk on the paths in the floodplain forests that provide habitat for red-tailed hawks, barred owls, migrating ospreys, red-headed woodpeckers and kingfishers. Be sure to spend time at the observation deck for more opportunities to see wildlife.

Visit the Potawatomi Woods sedge meadow where prairie Indian plantain, swamp saxifrage and bottle gentian thrive. In midsummer to early fall, you can enjoy cardinal flowers and their brilliant red blossoms — an unusual color in wildflowers. The nectar of these flowers attracts the ruby-throated hummingbird and swallowtail butterflies.

Potawatomi Woods takes its name from the bands of Potawatomi people who lived in this area approximately 150 years ago. Ecosystems along the Kishwaukee River are among the most threatened in America.



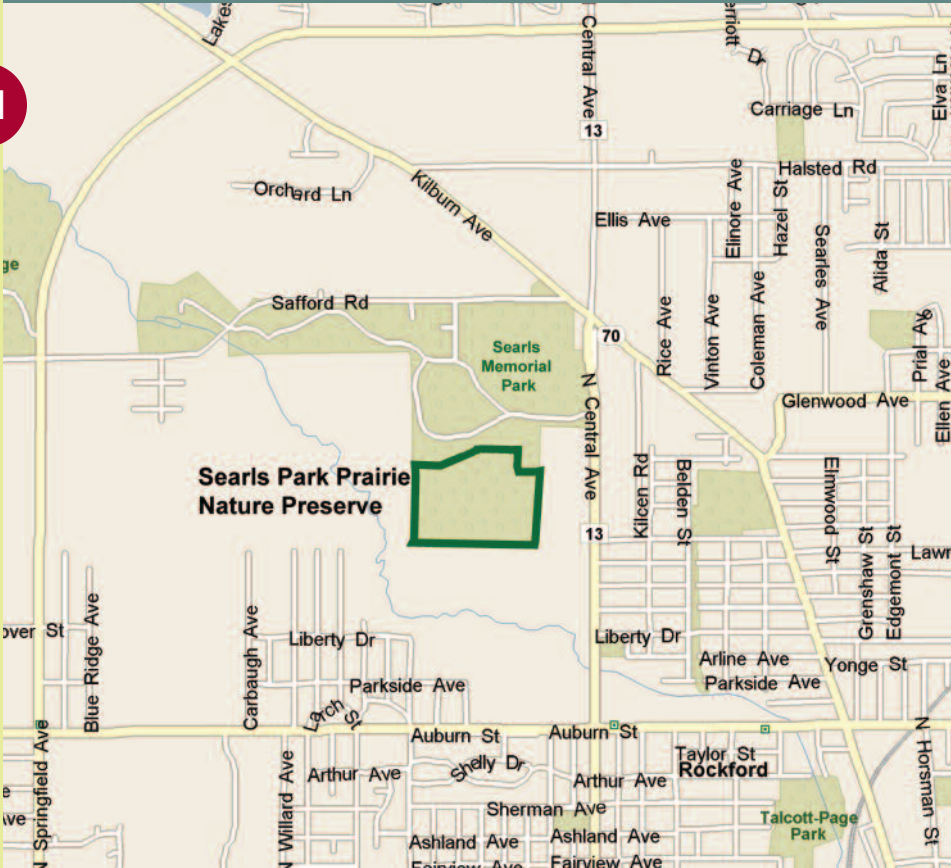
*Kishwaukee River*



*Cardinal flower*

# Winnebago County

21



*Emily J. Searls donated 199 acres to the Rockford Park District in 1943 and 1944 in honor of her husband and other family members. The Natural Land Institute acquired a 12.8-acre tract on the east side of the park as an addition to the prairie in 1974 and conveyed it to the Park District in 1975. The prairie was dedicated as an Illinois Nature Preserve in 1984.*

**Owner: Rockford Park District**  
**For information: 815.987.8800**

# Searls Park Prairie

66 acres

Safford Road & Central Avenue  
Rockford, Illinois

**S**earls Park Prairie Nature Preserve is located within the 211-acre Searls Memorial Park in northwest Rockford. Natural communities are wet and wet-mesic prairie, marsh and pond. Wet prairies have surface water present some times of the year, usually in spring, and the soil is almost always saturated.

As you walk through, you'll pass by Indian grass, little bluestem and big bluestem, native grasses that were common in this region in years past. Splashes of color reveal summer flowers in bloom: the dainty, white flowering spurge, the tall, yellow compass plant with leaves that follow the sun, spikes of purple blazing star, and the prickly, white rattlesnake master. The nature preserve also has a variety of violets, milkweeds and asters that will delight you.



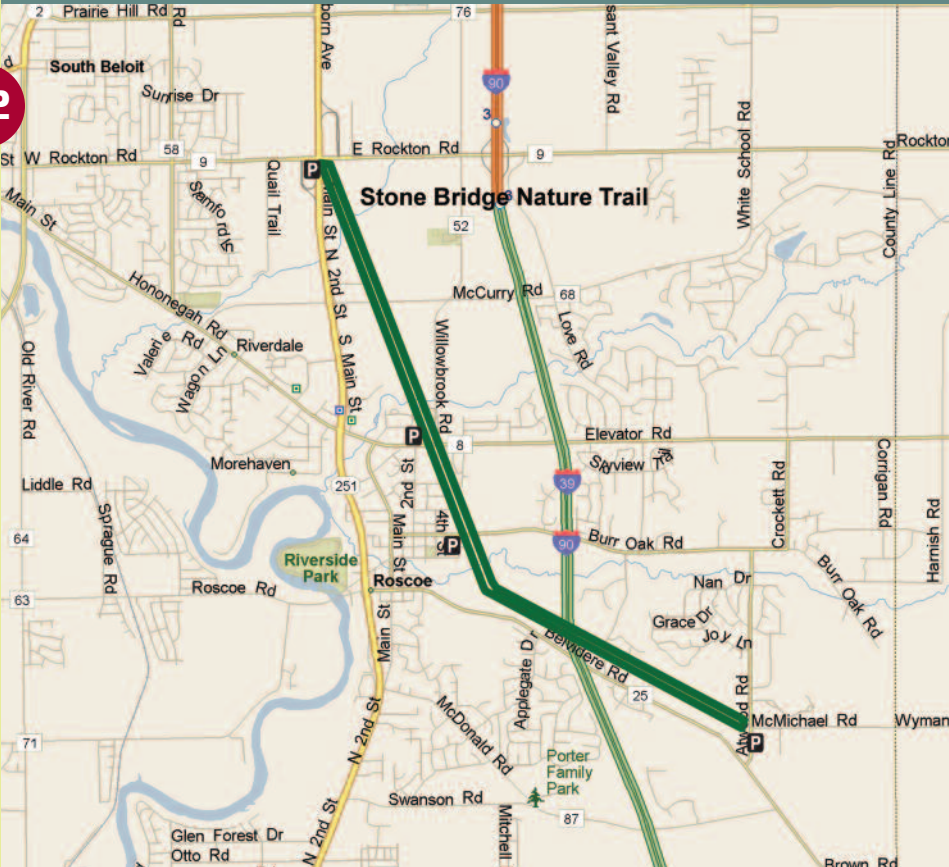
*Monarch on rattlesnake master*

The best times to visit are mid May for prairie phlox, shooting star and puccoon; June for rattlesnake master, white wild indigo and Michigan lily; August for blazing star and goldenrod; September for aster and fringed gentian.

Birds you are likely to see at Searls Prairie Nature Preserve include field sparrows, common yellowthroats and gray catbirds. Species documented at the preserve in recent years include Eastern meadowlarks, green herons, willow flycatchers and sedge wrens.

# Winnebago County

22



*Roscoe Township and the Natural Land Institute have worked together since 1993 to protect and restore land along the trail. Roscoe Township purchased the land in 1994 and protected the prairie with a conservation agreement with the Natural Land Institute. The trail is registered as a Land and Water Reserve by the Illinois Nature Preserves Commission.*

**Owner: Roscoe Township**

**For information: 815.623.7323 or 815.964.6666**



# Stone Bridge Nature Trail

**133 acres**

**5792 Elevator Road  
Roscoe, IL 61073**

**R**ide your bike or take a walk along the five-mile, gravel Stone Bridge Nature Trail east of Roscoe. End points are at East Rockton Road and Atwood Road at the Roland Olson Forest Preserve, where it connects with the Long Prairie Trail.

You will pass by dry gravel prairie and dry mesic prairie fragments. There are more than 140 native species of plants lining the edges of the abandoned railroad bed. Nestled in among the rough blazingstar and bergamot are kittentails, a threatened species in Illinois. From the observation deck, you can admire both the stone bridge and Kinnikinnick Creek.

When you reach South Kinnikinnick Creek near Burr Oak Road, you'll see the only double-arch bridge of its kind in northern Illinois. The limestone bridge constructed in 1882 is unusual in that it was built without mortar, except for joint dressing and inside face sealing. It has an internal drainage system that is still in place and working. The bridge was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1993.

Volunteers, including Scouts and school groups, helped the Natural Land Institute restore prairie and wetland plants on a 21-acre site south of Burr Oak Road in 2003. In 2007, the Natural Land Institute purchased 60 acres between Kinnikinnick Creek and the Stone Bridge Nature Trail. This area has a tiny remnant of original oak savanna that will be expanded and restored.



*Collecting seeds for the restoration*

# Other Dedicated Nature Preserves in Northern Illinois

**For more information, please visit [www.dnr.state.il.us/inpc/](http://www.dnr.state.il.us/inpc/)**

- Ayers Sand Prairie, Carroll County
- Bartlett Woods, Lee County
- Black Hawk Forest,  
Rock Island County
- Brookville Lutheran Cemetery  
Prairie, Carroll County
- Douglas Wade Prairie,  
Ogle County
- Elton J. Falks Bald Eagle Refuge,  
Rock Island County
- Flora Prairie, Boone County
- Foley Sand Prairie, Lee County
- Hartley Memorial,  
Winnebago County
- \* Heeren Prairie, Ogle County
- Hetzler Cemetery Prairie,  
Bureau County
- Greenlee Cemetery Prairie,  
Henry County
- Kinnikinnick Creek, Boone County
- Laona Heights,  
Winnebago County
- Miller-Anderson Woods,  
Bureau and Putnam Counties
- Mineral Marsh, Henry County
- Munson Township Cemetery  
Prairie, Henry County
- \* Myer Woods, Bureau County
- Pecatonica Bottoms,  
Winnebago County
- \* Piros Prairie, Ogle County
- Plum Grove, Winnebago County
- Pine Rock, Ogle County
- Rockton Bog, Winnebago County
- Sentinel (Mississippi Palisades),  
Carroll County
- Severson Dells,  
Winnebago County
- Sugar River Alder,  
Winnebago County
- Temperance Hill Cemetery,  
Lee County
- Thomson-Fulton Sand Prairie,  
Carroll and Whiteside Counties
- Wards Grove, Jo Daviess County
- Wilkinson-Renwick Marsh,  
DeKalb County
- \* Wilson Prairie,  
Winnebago County
- White Pines Forest, Ogle County
- \* Wirth Prairie,  
Stephenson County

*\* Privately-owned; open to the public only with permission.*

*The Natural Land Institute makes arrangements with landowners to lead guided walks. Under those circumstances, our members are very welcome to visit!*

# Contact Information

## **Byron Forest Preserve District**

7993 North River Road  
Byron, IL 61010  
815.234.8535  
[www.byronforestpreserve.com](http://www.byronforestpreserve.com)

## **DeKalb County Forest Preserve District**

110 East Sycamore Street  
Sycamore, IL 60178  
815.895.7191  
[www.dekalbcounty.org/Forest/forest\\_preserve.html](http://www.dekalbcounty.org/Forest/forest_preserve.html)

## **Illinois Department of Natural Resources**

One Natural Resources Way  
Springfield, IL 62702  
217.782.6302  
[www.dnr.state.il.us](http://www.dnr.state.il.us)

## **Illinois Department of Natural Resources**

Region I Office  
2317 E. Lincolnway, Suite A  
Sterling, IL 61081  
815.625.2968

## **Illinois Nature Preserves Commission**

One Natural Resources Way  
Springfield, IL 62702  
217.785.8686  
[dnr.state.il.us/inpc/](http://dnr.state.il.us/inpc/)

## **Jane Addamsland Park Foundation**

% Freeport Park District  
1122 S. Burchard Avenue  
Freeport, IL 61032  
815.235.6114

## **Natural Land Institute**

320 South Third Street  
Rockford, IL 61104  
815.964.6666  
[www.naturalland.org](http://www.naturalland.org)

## **The Nature Conservancy – Nachusa Grasslands**

8772 S. Lowden Rd.  
Franklin Grove, IL 61031  
815.456.2340  
[www.nature.org](http://www.nature.org)

## **Prairie Preservation Society of Ogle County**

9024 W. Grove Rd.  
Forreston, IL 61030  
815.938.3204

## **Rockford Park District**

401 South Main Street  
Rockford, IL 61101  
815.987.8800  
[www.rockfordparkdistrict.org](http://www.rockfordparkdistrict.org)

## **Roscoe Township**

5792 Elevator Road  
Roscoe, IL 61073  
815.623.7323

## **Sterling-Rock Falls Family YMCA**

2505 YMCA Way  
Sterling, IL 61081  
815.535.9622  
[www.sterlingrockfallsymca.org](http://www.sterlingrockfallsymca.org)

## **Winnebago County Forest Preserve District**

5500 Northrock Drive  
Rockford, IL 61103  
815.877.6100  
[www.wcfpd.org](http://www.wcfpd.org)



The Natural Land Institute is creating  
an enduring legacy of natural land  
in northern Illinois for people,  
plants and animals.



NATURAL  
LAND  
INSTITUTE

*Conserving Land  
in Northern Illinois*

320 South Third Street, Rockford, IL 61104  
Phone 815.964.6666 • [www.naturalland.org](http://www.naturalland.org)