

The Southwest Wisconsin Grassland and Stream Conservation Area



A Hiking Tour of the Southwest Wisconsin Grassland and Stream Conservation Area's WDNR Bird Conservation Areas

The Southwest Grassland Stream & Conservation Area (SWGSCA) sits within the South West Wisconsin Driftless Area. It is a 470,000-acre grassland landscape that begins 30 miles southwest of Madison and continues west with its northern border flanked by Mount Horeb, Barneveld, Dodgeville and Montfort. The southern boundary drops to the Platteville area and skirts back east to the Your Prairies just west of New Glarus. A diverse group of partners who are all interested in these grasslands for many different reasons are working together to insure generations to come will inherit this wonderful grassland landscape and the rich culture that it supports. The Department of Natural Resources owns land in several SWGSCA Bird Conservation Areas which you can hike and even fish and hunt if you choose.



Highway G. Watch for the WDNR parking lot sign on the west side of the road.

From Mount Horeb: Take either Highway 92 and turn right (west) or take Highway 78 and turn left (east) on Highway A. The parking lot is in the west side of the section of road where both Highways G and A join.

From the South: US Highway 39, turn north on Highways J & JG. Take Highways A and G north and look for the parking lot to the west.

these birds. These grasslands are the result of the former landowner's enrollment in the Conservation Reserve Program. The ocean of grass you see the cool season and domestic brome grass. There are remnant prairie species and the insects they host of most of the knolls that crest the acres of grass. Management will focus on mowing, with burning and chemical control of weeds used if needed. Please contact Maureen.rowe@wisconsin.gov if you are

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Dickcissel

Stop #1 & #2 SWGSCA Sherven and Gnewuch Properties

DIRECTIONS: From the Madison area: Take US Hwy 18/151 west. Proceed to County Highway G and turn south. Continue Southwest to where Highway A joins

The Sherven and Gnewuch properties are located in Perry and Primrose townships in western Dane County. Here you will find a sea of grass in which the threatened Henslow's sparrow loves to nest in. Look for the regal upland sandpiper. Many grassland dependent species thrive on this property including meadowlarks and bobolinks. These properties have been broken down into management units that are currently bordered by mowed trail to facilitate habitat work. These ephemeral trails offer easy hikes into the grasslands. There is a parking lot off of Highway G where there is a trail head. On the NE corner of the property Look for evidence of where a forestry mower recently removed invasive brush and reclaimed the grassland needed by



Upland Sandpiper



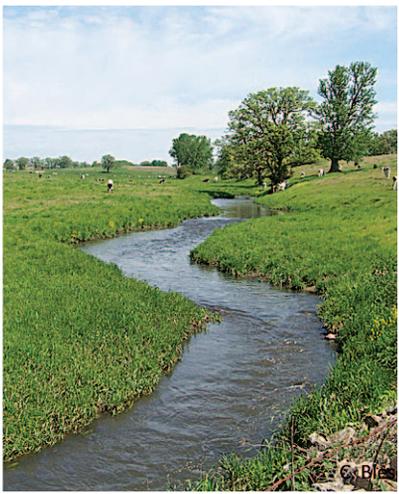


Photo by C. Bleser



Photo by Travis Anderson, Wisconsin DNR

SWGSCA

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interested in helping out in the property through the “Adopt a Wildlife Program”. You can head north from here to enjoy the Norwegian town of Mount Horeb and find good bakery, restaurants and shops – Or, you can continue to our third hiking destination: the SWGSCA Davis Property near Mineral Point.

Stop # 3 SWGSCA Davis Property

DIRECTIONS: From the Sherven and Gnewuch Properties go south on Highways J & JG and take a right (west) on Highway 39.

From the Madison area: Take US Hwy 18/151 west. Proceed to County Highway G and turn south. Continue Southwest to where Highway A joins Highway G. Watch for the WDNR parking lot sign on the west



Regal fritillary butterfly

Photo by Ann Swengel/WI & US Butterfly Specialist©

side of the road.

From Mount Horeb: Take either Highway 92 and turn right (west) or take Highway 78 and turn left (east) on Highway A.

The parking lot is in the west side of the section of road where both Highways G and A join.

From the South: US Highway 39, turn north on Highways J & JG. Take Highways A and G north and look for the parking lot to the west.

The SWGSCA Davis Property north of Mineral Point is currently being managed through the use of cattle which have kept shrubs out. We will gradually be increasing species diversity

through a suite of management techniques. Parking is available on the property off of Bennett Road. Be sure to close the cattle gates behind you and enjoy walking down the graveled access lane which intersects the heart of the property. Steer clear

of the livestock, be sure never to get between a cow and her calf or a bull and his herd and enjoy the valley! Look for evidence of the original homestead and bring your binoculars and perhaps a fishing pole as you walk parallel to the stream. You will feel like you are a visiting the land as it was found a hundred years ago. You are then only a hop, skip and a jump from Mineral Point where you will find many great eats, shops and galleries in this historic mining town.



Photo by D. Sherry

Henslow's Sparrow

Prairie is the most endangered habitat in the Midwest. SW Wisconsin has the highest number of prairie remnants in the Midwest. This area is a hotbed for grassland songbirds. We are managing for grassland dependent species including: Henslow's sparrow, Upland Sandpiper, Grasshopper sparrow, Dickcissel, Meadowlark. Within the oak savannas' we are targeting: Bell's Vireo, Brown Thrasher, Field sparrow, red-headed woodpecker and Willow Flycatcher. Visiting SWGSCA WDNR BCA's offers a beautiful tour by car – and allows you to step out for hike. Visit dnr.wi.gov/topics/Lands/grasslands/swgrassland.html to find an interactive map showing the location of these and partners properties.



Fishing Streams in Wisconsin's Southwest Grasslands

Stream easements allow easy water access in the Driftless Area



The WDNR and landowners have been working together to ensure fishing access to high quality trout and smallmouth bass streams across the state. Many of these are concentrated right here in the Driftless region! Streambank easements generally allow public access on 66 feet to either side of streams.

Look up open lands in your area!
<http://dnr.wi.gov/topic/lands/PAL/>



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Barneveld Prairie flowers



Sandhill cranes



Monarch on goldenrod

Photos by Gerald H. Emmerich, Jr. ©

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Protecting nature. Preserving life.™

A Driving Tour of the Military Ridge Prairie Heritage Area

The Military Ridge Prairie Heritage Area, a 95,000-acre grassland landscape in Dane, Iowa and Green counties, is located about 30 miles southwest of Madison. Prairie is the most endangered habitat in the Midwest, with only 0.1% of remnant prairie habitat remaining.

Stop #1: Thomson Memorial Prairie Preserve

DIRECTIONS: From the Madison area, take US Hwy. 18/151 west. Proceed to the southwestern edge of Blue Mounds. Turn left on County F and continue south for just over one mile. At the intersection with County Highway Z, turn right – this will keep you on County Highway F. The preserve will be on your right after another half mile. Park in the small fenced parking lot or along the side of the road and take a few minutes to read our informational kiosk. You may hike the prairie, however, there are no marked trails here, and poison ivy is found in patches, and one patch grows near the kiosk – so please be careful!

Recreating a larger grassland ecosystem

At our first stop, you'll see great examples of remnant prairie on the rocky hilltops, which we are supplementing with new prairie plantings. Prior to settlement, many hilltops and steep slopes in this part of the state were covered with the dry prairie vegetation you see here. Little remains of Wisconsin's once extensive grasslands, and today, this is one of the few remaining dry

prairies in the state. Those that have managed to survive, like Thomson Memorial Prairie, are small, isolated and fragmented. The Nature Conservancy owns and manages more than 500 acres of land here at Thomson Prairie.

The Nature Conservancy, The Prairie Enthusiasts and other Military Ridge partners are working to recreate a larger grassland ecosystem, which involves carefully managing and expanding places like Thomson Memorial Prairie.

If you look across the road behind you, you'll also see land owned by a farmer who has 300 acres enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). Keeping land in CRP is another way of managing land that complements our goal of protecting and enlarging this grassland landscape.

Stop #2: Schurch-Thomson Prairie

DIRECTIONS: From Thomson Prairie, continue driving south about 3 miles on County Highway F until you reach Reilly Road. On your right, prior to making the turn onto Reilly Road, slow down to view an extensive, privately-owned grassland property that provides a valuable, treeless landscape for grassland birds. This land is used as a research site by university and Department of Natural Resources bird researchers. For the second stop, you will take a right on Reilly Road and follow the road until it dead ends at The Prairie Enthusiasts sign and kiosk. We encourage you to read the kiosk and get out and explore this beautiful prairie preserve.

Butterflies, badgers and bull snakes

The Nature Conservancy is known for

bringing partners together to achieve greater results than if we were to work alone. Our relationships with other non-profit organizations, local landowners, university researchers and government agencies are essential to success in places like Military Ridge.

The Prairie Enthusiasts is one of these key partners and they have been working to restore this site for more than 20 years. Thanks to their efforts, Schurch-Thomson Prairie now contains more than 220 species of native plants and supports many butterflies and other prairie insects, as well as rare grassland birds and animals like the badger and bull snake.

Run mainly by volunteers, The Prairie Enthusiasts is a private, grassroots organization solely dedicated to protecting and managing the last remaining pieces of the once vast, now endangered prairies and savannas of the Upper Midwest.

In addition to The Prairie Enthusiasts, other partners working in the Military Ridge Prairie Heritage Area include the Natural Resources Conservation Service, Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, Pheasants Forever, Southwest Badger Resource Conservation and Development Council, and faculty and students from the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Another way The Nature Conservancy works with partners is by assisting private landowners who want to plant their land to native grasses. Private support, from the Alliant Energy Foundation and other donors, helps us secure the public funding that makes our work with private landowners

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Eastern meadowlark

Photo courtesy The Nature Conservancy©

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possible. You drove by one example of this as you made your way down County Highway F, right after the intersection of County Highways F and Z. A neighboring farmer on the west side of the road has used this additional money to plant new prairie on his land.

Stop #3: Pecatonica Stream Restoration Site

DIRECTIONS: To get to the third stop, head back to County Highway F and take a right. Continue south, then west to Mounds View Road. Once you reach Mounds View Road take a right. This landscape is a mix of working dairy farms and native grasslands. You will also pass several other prairie remnants on the eastern side of the road, as well as another Prairie Enthusiasts kiosk. Continue on Mounds View Road until it intersects with Prairie Grove Road. Take a left on Prairie Grove Road and head west toward the intersection of Prairie Grove and County Highway K. Ahead of you, across County Highway K, you will see grasslands, ridges and an oak savanna restoration in progress. As you cross the bridge over a branch of the Pecatonica River, look to the south (on the left) and you will see our stream restoration project.

Park in the parking area found on the west side of County Highway K just up the road from Prairie Grove Road. There is no informational kiosk at this stop. To best view our work here, walk back down Prairie Grove Road to the stream. We encourage you to spend a few minutes walking along the stream and through the prairie.

Frogs calling once again

In 2006, The Nature Conservancy restored a half mile of habitat along the Pecatonica River. If you stand on the bridge, looking

north you can see what the river looked like before the restoration. Like many streams in southwestern Wisconsin, the banks are high and covered with trees, with steep banks of beautiful dark soil that crumbles easily into the water. Whenever the stream rises, portions of the bank slump down and wash down the river, creating water pollution downstream. The waters of the Pecatonica flow into the Mississippi and all the way down to the Gulf of Mexico. Looking south, you will see the restored section of the river, which now flows shallow and wide and is lined with native prairie.

During the restoration, trees were removed from the stream corridor, sediment in the floodplain was excavated and the land was re-contoured to gradually slope toward the river. The area was seeded with native wet-prairie plant species. More than 50 native plants and five species of frogs and toads have colonized the restored floodplain.

Monitoring of this restoration by the University of Wisconsin-Madison shows that stream banks have withstood severe flooding releasing very little sediment into the river. The Nature Conservancy continues to work with partners to monitor the results of these restoration efforts.

This restoration project is being used as a model for preventing sediment runoff and creating wetland habitat critical for frogs, turtles, dragonflies and migrating birds, as well as helping to mitigate flood damage during heavy rains. Southwest Wisconsin rivers, like the Pecatonica, are a tremendous regional resource. Not only are they an important source of freshwater for people and nature, they also are economically valuable trout streams. The new prairie that is planted in the uplands of the Military Ridge region will help prevent agricultural runoff

and will work to keep streams like the Pecatonica clean and healthy.

Stop #4: Muehlelehner Addition to Barneveld Prairie

DIRECTIONS: For the fourth and final stop, exit the parking lot (if you parked your car) and head north on County Highway K for approximately one mile until it junctions with Langberry Road. Turn left and head west on Langberry Road. You will pass the Botham Vineyards and Winery on your right. At the intersection of Langberry and Lee roads, you can park on the side of the road. There is another information kiosk just a short walk in front of you. When you are finished at this stop, head back on Langberry Road to County Highway K. Take a left on County Highway K and head north to US Hwy. 18/151. Turn right to head east back to Madison.



Restoring the prairie

The Muehlelehner addition to Barneveld Prairie is a great example of how a working agricultural landscape can also support conservation. We are actively planning and restoring prairie on what was once marginal farmland, as well as allowing neighboring landowners to graze certain parcels of the preserve and remove hay from the prairie after the grassland birds have finished nesting.

In 2002, when The Nature Conservancy purchased the property, more than 200 acres of this land was covered in soybeans and corn, and many former pastures were overrun with brush and trees. Since then we have been removing buckthorn, honeysuckle, prickly ash, and other invading trees and shrubs, and collecting the seeds of native wildflowers for use in future prairie plantings to create the diverse prairie landscape you see in front of you today.

Another way we partner with neighboring landowners is by sharing the wood that is cleared off our land during the restoration process. Local landowners help us manage our land by sharing their resources and equipment and, in turn, use the wood that is cleared to heat their farms using outdoor woodburning stoves.

Through our project, we hope to inspire other landowners to turn oak woods, overrun by invading brush and shade tolerant trees, into oak openings that add to the grassland landscape of Military Ridge.



Military Ridge Driving Tour

