

2026 INPS Annual Gathering

Saturday full-day field trips:

1. High-quality remnant prairies (Loda, Prospect, and Pellsville Cemetery Prairies). Easy. Limit 20.

a. Loda Cemetery Prairie Nature Preserve, Iroquois County

Loda Cemetery Prairie is an outstanding example of the original mesic black soil prairie in the Grand Prairie Section of the Grand Prairie Natural Division. For many years the prairie at Loda Cemetery was idle. The grasses were mowed regularly but were never cultivated or pastured. In 1981, the Cemetery Association ran out of burial space and made plans to expand into the prairie. The Natural Land Institute negotiated an alternative plan that would allow for expansion of the cemetery while preserving the prairie. The Institute acquired 5 acres of farmland adjacent to the cemetery to give to the Cemetery Association. In turn, the Association agreed to dedicate the prairie as a nature preserve. This preserve was protected with the help of The Nature Conservancy and Grand Prairie Friends. The prairie contains over 130 species of native plant species. The dominant grasses are Indian grass and big bluestem. Common spring flowers include shooting star, downy phlox and yellow star grass. Rattlesnake master, compass plant and wild quinine are typical during the summer while goldenrods and asters are abundant in the fall. The small size of the preserve limits its value as a wildlife refuge since most birds and mammals require more extensive habitat, but grasshopper sparrow, yellowthroat and meadowlark have nested in the prairie. Also, many uncommon butterflies restricted to prairies may reside here. A 9-acre buffer area adjacent to the original prairie is being restored to prairie vegetation.

<https://dnr.illinois.gov/inpc/area.area3iroquoislodacemeteryprairie.html>

b. Prospect Cemetery Prairie Nature Preserve, Ford County

Prospect Cemetery Prairie is a 5 acre cemetery with a remnant mesic black soil prairie of the Grand Prairie Section of the Grand Prairie Natural Division. Created in 1859, Prospect Cemetery was the first cemetery in the county. Burials continued until 1914 and possibly later. The preserve has a natural appearance in the southern third of the site, where the high quality prairie reflects presettlement conditions. Some 80 species of native herbaceous forbs and grasses have been identified, of which 21 occur nowhere else in the county. A

few of these unusual plants are yellow star-grass, green milkweed, cream wild indigo, prairie gentian and prairie blazingstar. Common occurring species include big bluestem, Indian grass, little bluestem, and prairie dropseed.

<https://dnr.illinois.gov/inpc/area.area6fordprospectcemeteryprairie.html>

c. Pellsville Cemetery Prairie, Vermilion County

Pellsville cemetery, which holds 44 pioneers and contains more than 80 native flowers and grasses, is largely untouched prairie, at its dazzling peak in midsummer. It is considered, by the Illinois Natural Areas Inventory and Illinois Department of Natural Resources, "Grade-A" prairie, or "virgin" prairie. It has never been plowed, grazed or uprooted. It is as close as we get to what Illinois looked like before European pioneers rolled in, around the 1820s.

<https://www.grandprairiefriends.org/post/pellsville-and-loda-cemetery-prairies-featured-in-chicago-tribune-column-and-video>

2. Rocky Branch Nature Preserve, Clark County. Most difficult. Limit 12.

Rocky Branch Nature Preserve is a 151-acre remnant of dry-mesic, mesic upland, floodplain forests permanent stream, and sandstone outcrops representative of the Southern Upland Section of the Wabash Border Natural Division. Dominant trees of upland forests are oaks and hickories with scattered sugar maple while sycamore is more predominant in the floodplain. An unusual sandstone cliff community provides special habitat for several species of mosses, liverworts, and lichens. The wood frog and long-tailed salamander have been observed here. Rocky Branch has been used primarily for outdoor education and scientific study by Eastern Illinois University students and staff. This site recently has been transferred to the Grand Prairie Friends group that will provide ongoing management and monitoring.

<https://dnr.illinois.gov/inpc/area.area6clarkrockybranch.html>

3. Warbler Ridge Conservation Area, Coles County. Intermediate difficulty. Limit 20.

Just at the edge of the Wisconsin glacier's furthest southern reach, lies the rolling ravines of Warbler Ridge. The Warbler Ridge preserves are part of an extensive woodland corridor running along the Embarras River for more than eight miles from Charleston to Fox Ridge State Park. The 42-acre Warbler Bluff, also part of the conservation area, sits a few miles northeast of this corridor and offers tremendous views high above the Embarras River.

This 1,175-acre property consists of woodlands, prairies, wetlands, and river shoreline owned and managed by Grand Prairie Friends since 2011.

This upland deciduous forest boasts a hearty spring wildflower display and a fiery fall foliage show, usually only viewed by the abundant audience of migrating and resident songbirds. The bottoms adjacent to the Embarras River floods in the spring and then reveals three wetlands among blooming prairie.

Warbler Ridge includes five areas protected within the Illinois Nature Preserves Commission system. These include Warbler Woods Nature Preserve, Embarras Ridge Land and Water Reserve, Warbler Woods North Land and Water Reserve, Warbler Bottoms North Land and Water Reserve, and Warbler Landing Land and Water Reserve.

<https://www.grandprairiefriends.org/Preserves/warbler-ridge-conservation-area>

4. Meadowbrook Park/Busey Woods, Champaign County. Easy. Limit 20.

Twenty-eight acres of Meadowbrook Park was first acquired in 1967 and was formerly the McCullough Farm. The rest was acquired when plans for a park/school complex fell through and grant funds initially intended for purchase of Champaign County fairgrounds were redirected towards the Meadowbrook project.

Prairie Restoration efforts at Meadowbrook began in 1977 with additional acreage added in 1984 to bring the total acreage up to 16 acres. With ongoing assistance from Champaign County Audubon Society much more was planted in 1990, '91, '93, '96, and '97 bringing the total acreage up towards 67 acres including the Spomer Prairie and Wandell Sculpture Garden planting. In 2006, an additional 13 acres of prairie and several trees and shrubs were installed in the Walker Grove savanna planting to the south. A grand view of the prairie restoration is provided at the Freyfogle Overlook. This accessible feature includes seating areas and interpretive signage from highest location in the park.

Current park features include a farmstead, 80 acres of recreated tallgrass prairie, McCullough and Douglas creek corridors, paved and unpaved walking trails, the Timpone Ornamental Tree Grove, organic garden plots, a sensory garden, an herb garden, the Freyfogle Overlook, the district's largest play structure PrairiePlay and the Wandell Sculpture Garden.

<https://www.urbanaparks.org/meadowbrook-park-wandell-sculpture-garden>

5. Forest Glen Preserve, Vermilion County. Intermediate to most difficult. Limit 15.

Founded in 1968, Forest Glen Preserve is 1800 acres in size. It is located seven miles east of Westville on County Highway 5. It is rated number three botanically in Illinois

and consists of beech-maple and oak-hickory forest types. There are four registered Illinois Nature Preserves within the park (Duffin Woods, 200 acres; Forest Glen Seep, 11 acres; Howard's Hollow Seep, 30 acres), and Doris L. Westfall Prairie (40 acres). There is also a twenty-two acre savanna restoration area.

<https://vccd.org/forest-glen-preserve/>

Sunday half-day field trips:

1. Loda Cemetery Prairie Nature Preserve, Iroquois County. Easy. Limit 18.

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milkweed, cream wild indigo, prairie gentian and prairie blazingstar. Common occurring species include big bluestem, Indian grass, little bluestem, and prairie dropseed.

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4. Buffalo Trace Prairie Reconstruction, Champaign County. Easy. Limit 20.

Purchased by the Champaign County Forest Preserve District in 1976, this land was officially named Buffalo Trace after the path that was first created by millions of migrating bison. Native Americans, and later European settlers, also followed the trace as they hunted and traversed the Midwest. Interstate 74 now follows that same path.

Tallgrass prairie is characterized by few trees, extreme seasonal temperatures and drought, and some of the richest soil anywhere in the world. When the first settlers arrived in Champaign County around the year 1820, more than 60% of Illinois, over 22 million acres, was prairie! Currently less than 0.01% (just over 2,000 acres) of unplowed prairie remains., often along railroad tracks and in pioneer cemeteries.

Historically, prairies thrived on natural disturbances such as wildfires and bison grazing. This reconstructed prairie is actively managed through strategic mowing, seed collecting and dispersal, planting, invasive species removal, and prescribed burns.

In 1995, the paved pathway was installed and some of the older grass trails were left to return to their natural state. The network of trails is presently more than 7 miles long.

<https://www.champaignforests.org/Portals/0/adam/Content/aMwGdbWwBES5-3wWxGRacg/Link/buffalo-trace-wildflower-sgtb.pdf>

5. The Whiteside Gardens, Coles County, Coles County. Easy Limit 20.

The Whiteside Garden is the former residence of the late Dr. Wesley Whiteside, a botany professor at Eastern Illinois University. Dr. Whiteside taught numerous subjects such as

botany, local flora, plant taxonomy, plant morphology, and mycology. Over the years, Dr. Whiteside transformed five acres of his yard and farmland on the east side of Charleston into the botanical oasis we know it as today. The Whiteside Garden officially opened in 2021 and is open to the public.

The Whiteside Garden is a diverse botanical collection covering approximately five acres of land and containing thousands of species and different cultivars of plants. The garden features an extensive collection of daylilies, magnolias, and hostas, as well as many rare, threatened, or unique plants to this area that are rarely, if ever, found in nature or other Midwest botanical gardens. Dr. Whiteside was also known for his late-blooming daylily cultivars, which are available commercially. The time to view these cultivars is July, August & September, but some bloom through October!

<https://www.dhnature.org/whitesidegarden.html>