

Iowa is proud to host the 26th North American Prairie Conference in the heart of the tallgrass prairie ecosystem. The conference is an excellent opportunity to learn from prairie managers and scientists, to interact with prairie enthusiasts, and to see and touch high-quality prairie remnants. To help you better achieve the third goal, we invite participants to come early or linger after the conference and enjoy the magnificent diversity of Iowa's prairies and savannas. We have organized and identified several pre- and post-conference field trips. There are two options:

- 1. Guided Field Trips** – these field trips are scheduled for Sunday, June 25 only, the day prior to the first day of the conference.
- 2. Self-guided** – these are sites that are located near I-80, I-35, I-29 and Highway 20, the principal routes travelers will take driving to Des Moines. Visit these at your convenience either before or after the conference.

SELF-GUIDED FIELD TRIPS

Accessible from I-29 between Council Bluffs and Sioux City

Murray Hill Scenic Overlook

1634 Easton Trail, Little Sioux, IA 51545

Location: western Iowa, in Harrison County

Google Map: Murray Hill Scenic Overlook

Lat-Long coordinates: 41.83911, -96.00003

Local directions: 4.5 miles northeast of Exit 95 ("Little Sioux") off of I-29

Physical challenges to expect: Moderate to strenuous. Requires hike up steep slope on 900-foot long path.

Murray Hill Scenic Overlook is 3 acres that offers a panoramic view of the Missouri River Valley. Yucca plants and native flowers dominate the Loess Hill prairie landscape. Interpretive signs are located at the overlook that explain the significance and history of the Loess Hills. Make the steep climb on the trail and you will be rewarded with one of the most picturesque locations in the Loess Hills. It is also a trail head for Brent's Trail totaling almost 12 miles. It is located in the Loess Hills Bird Conservation Area designated by the Iowa DNR. Located on the Loess Hills National Scenic Byway on F-20 just northeast of the town of Little Sioux.

Brent S. Olson Visitor Center

Loess Hills State Forest, 206 Polk Street, Pisgah, IA 51564

Google Map: Loess Hills State Forest Visitor Center

Location: western Iowa, in the small town of Pisgah

Level of difficulty: Easy, walk in public building with natural history displays, a 3-dimensional landscape map of the Loess Hills State Forest, and restrooms.

Loess Hills State Forest, near Iowa's western border in Harrison and Monona counties, comprises 11,484 acres across four units. The forest sits in the heart of the Loess Hills, a unique geological ridge formed over time by wind-blown soil, known for its unusual terrain and scenic natural areas. Loess Hills State Forest is Iowa's newest publicly-owned forest, established through land donations and purchases starting in 1985. Today, the main goal of the forest is to implement effective management practices for the benefit of long-term natural resource stewardship, while providing outdoor recreation opportunities. Prairies were common components in the Loess Hills landscape in pre-European settlement. About 2,200 acres of prairie ridges and seedings are being managed with fire on 2-5 year burn rotations. There are over 2,500 acres of prairie, woodlands and savannas burned annually on the forest throughout the four seasons. Additional work is also done to remove and manage red cedar and other woody vegetation from the prairies.

Loess Hills Scenic Overlook

Oak Ave, Moorhead, IA 51558

Lat-Long coordinates: 41.90558, -95.94541

Location: western Iowa, in Monona County

Google Map: Loess Hills Scenic Overlook
10 miles northeast of town of Little Sioux

Level of difficulty: Easy access onto wooden observation platform. Optional moderate hike along prairie ridgetop along dirt pathway.

Scenic vista of Loess Hills landscape from observation platform with option to hike along ridge featuring natural, high-quality dry prairie with big bluestem (*Andropogon gerardii*), little bluestem (*Schizachyrium scoparium*), leadplant (*Amorpha canescens*), side-oats grama (*Bouteloua curtipendula*), pasqueflower (*Pulsatilla patens*), blue-eyed grass (*Sisyrinchium campestre*), heath aster (*Symphotrichum ericoides*), and rigid sunflower (*Helianthus rigidus*).

Vincent Bluff State Forest

Lat-Long coordinates: 41.23990, -95.83421

Location: western Iowa in Council Bluffs

Google Map: (Lat-long coordinates): 41.40437, -93.01051

Local directions: From Exit 5 on I-80, head 300 feet northwest on Madison Avenue, turn left onto Woodbury Avenue, proceed 0.8 mile to Thallus Street, turn right. The preserve is at the end of Thallus Street.

Level of difficulty: Easy to moderate. Established trail winds upward from park lot.

Vincent Bluff Preserve is a unique and surprisingly pristine landscape of 35 acres located in the urban heart of Council Bluffs, within view of the high rises of downtown Omaha. Vincent Bluff not only boasts a largely intact prairie remnant indicative of the Loess Hills landform and a native hardwood forest, but the location, efforts to preserve it, and opportunity for education and scientific research represent an unprecedented and historic accomplishment for preservation efforts in the Loess Hills and the State of Iowa. Originally part of a farm owned by the Vincent Family of Council Bluffs, Vincent Bluff is visible from Interstates 80 and 29 as one enters Council Bluffs. The prairie grasses and hardwood trees glowing in their fall glory can be seen from the western banks of the Missouri River in Omaha. The preserve sustains a viewshed that commuters, riverboat passengers, explorers and Native Americans have enjoyed for centuries.

Hitchcock Nature Center

27792 Ski Hill Loop, Honey Creek, Iowa

Lat-Long coordinates: 41.41662, -95.85334

Location: western Iowa, in Pottawattamie County near Honey Creek

Local directions: From Interstate I-29 take the Crescent exit (#61) and travel east on G37 (Old Mormon Bridge Road) to The Old Lincoln Highway. Hitchcock Nature Center is located 5 miles north of Crescent off of Old Lincoln Highway. Watch for the sign to turn left on to Page Lane. At the intersection with Ski Hill Loop, turn right and go 0.3 mile to park entrance.

Nestled in the heart of Iowa's globally significant Loess Hills, Hitchcock Nature Center offers nearly 1,500 acres of publicly available prairie, savanna, and forest for hiking and exploring. Research completed in 2012 reported the presence of 360 native plant species and 325 insect species.

Sylvan Runkel State Preserve

Lat-Long coordinates: 41.10154, -95.97188

Location: western Iowa, in Monona County

Directions: From Onawa (35 miles south of Sioux City), take Highway 175 east to the intersection with County Road L12. Turn north (left) and go 7 miles to Nutmeg Avenue. Turn east (right), crossing the Little Sioux River, to 178th Street (just across the bridge). Turn south (right) and follow this winding road approximately 2 miles to its intersection with Oak Avenue. Parking lots are available on the south (right) side of 178th Street on both sides of Oak Avenue. A footpath into the preserve is located on the west side of Oak Avenue 80 yards north of the intersection of 178th and Oak.

Sylvan Runkel State Preserve is a 330-acre preserve containing an outstanding example of Iowa's Loess Hills landscape, with extensive native prairie covering steep hills. The preserve supports a variety of prairie, forest, and shrubland vegetation. A total of over 200 plant species can be found. The main feature of the preserve is a prominent ridge with over 100 acres of high-quality native prairie. Extensive communities of dry prairie species occur here. In spring, pasqueflower is the first to be found blooming on the prairie, with prairie violet and bastard toadflax soon following. In May, the tiny prairie moonwort fern appears along with prairie dandelion and blue-eyed grass. Butterfly weed, prairie sandreed, downy painted cup, purple coneflower, purple prairie clover, dotted gayfeather, rough blazing star, and prairie ragwort bloom during the summer. Several species typical of the Great Plains, including yucca, Lambert's locoweed, and cut-leaf iron plant, cannot be found in Iowa outside of the Loess Hills. By fall, pink gerardia, sky-blue aster, aromatic aster, and showy goldenrod can be found blooming. Over 100 species of birds have been observed throughout the area. Yellow-billed and black-billed cuckoos, whip-poor-will, great crested flycatcher, western kingbird, gray catbird, yellow-throated vireo, yellow warbler, scarlet tanager, indigo bunting, and orchard and Baltimore orioles use the woodlands and brushy areas.

Mt. Talbot State Preserve

Lat-Long coordinates: 42.56493, -96.47003

Location: western Iowa, in Woodbury County near Sioux City

Directions: From the intersection of I-29 and Highway 12 (Exit 151) on the west edge of Sioux City, drive north for 5 miles on Highway 12 through the town of Riverside and past Stone State Park to Talbot Road (about 0.75 mile past the entrance to Stone State Park). Turn east (right) and go 0.75 mile to the preserve on the south side of the road (sign: Mount Talbot State Preserve). Park on the roadside and walk uphill into the preserve. **WARNING:** Talbot Road is a Grade B dirt road that is impassibly muddy in wet weather; do not drive here after recent rain!

Level of difficulty: Easy to moderate. A dirt foot trail extends along a gently rolling ridgetop.

NOTE: Additional prairies are easily visited by car in nearby Stone State Park.

Mount Talbot State Preserve is a 90-acre area featuring a rugged Loess Hills landscape with forested slopes and prairie-capped ridges located in the northern part of Stone State Park. The preserve contains about 35 acres of prairie on narrow ridge tops adjoining a large tract of oak woodland in the deep ravines. It supports a rich prairie flora of over seventy-five native plants. The site is very scenic with panoramic views of the Loess Hills landscape. The prairie is characterized by a flora including little bluestem, sideoats grama, big bluestem, Indian grass, leadplant, skeleton-plant, pasqueflower, silky aster, and nine-anthered dalea. A rich butterfly fauna of forty-two species has also been documented in and nearby the preserve. Prairie species include wild indigo duskywing, gorgone skipper, Olympia marble, Leonard's skipper, dusted skipper, Melissa blue, Arogos skipper, Ottoe skipper, Iowa skipper, crossline skipper, tawny emperor, regal fritillary, Pawnee skipper, and Reakirt's blue.

Accessible from I-29 south of Council Bluffs

Waubonsie State Park

2585 Waubonsie Park Road, Hamburg, IA 51640

Lat-Long coordinates: 40.67557, -95.68966

Location: southwest Iowa in Fremont County

Directions: From Exit 10 of I-29, head east on Hwy 2 for 5.3 miles, turn right onto Waubonsie Park Road, follow into the state park to a parking lot near the park office. Walk west to nearby scenic overlook.

Level of difficulty: Short, easy walk to the main scenic overlook. A trail network radiates from this overlook along woodland trails varying from level to steep. Other prairie vistas are available elsewhere in the park, notably on the Sunset Ridge Trail (requiring a mile-long hike through a woodland).

A spectacular vista of the rugged topography of the Loess Hills with prairie openings in a forested landscape.

Accessible from I-80 west of Des Moines

Sheeder Prairie State Preserve

Lat-Long coordinates: 41.68828, -94.58831

Location: western Iowa in Guthrie County

Directions: From Exit 86 on I-80, head north on Hwy 25 for 1.5 miles, turn left to stay on Hwy 25, go 1.8 miles, turn right to stay on Hwy 25 for 11.3 miles to Guthrie Center. Turn left onto Hwy 44, go 3.7 miles to Justice Road. Turn right, go 1 mile, turn left onto 220th Street, go 0.9 mile to Sheeder Prairie State Preserve on right; park on roadside.

Level of difficulty: Moderate

Rolling grassland with brushy bottomland. No established trails.

Sheeder Prairie is a 25-acre tallgrass prairie located five miles west of Guthrie Center in Guthrie County. The property was purchased in 1961 by the Iowa Conservation Commission from Oscar and Clara Sheeder, the son and daughter-in-law of the original homesteader. This preserve lies within the Southern Iowa Drift Plain, a landform region of gently rolling terrain. Over 200 plant species are found in this preserve, including thirty grasses. The prairie hilltops and slopes contain big bluestem, little bluestem, porcupine grass, and prairie dropseed along with leadplant, rosinweed, prairie willow, and redroot. Prairie phlox, golden alexanders, flowering spurge, rattlesnake master, purple coneflower, and gray-headed coneflower are also common. The wooded ravines are dominated by box elder, wild plum, and black willow. A total of sixty-nine species of birds can be found here, with twenty-five nesting on a regular basis. Nearly three-fourths of the nesting species are woodland species. Two grassland species, the bobolink and grasshopper sparrow, nest sporadically. Several preferring the woodland edge habitat found here include gray catbird, eastern kingbird, brown thrasher, rose-breasted grosbeak, red-headed woodpecker, downy woodpecker, black-capped chickadee, Baltimore oriole, northern cardinal, house wren, and American goldfinch.

Dinesen Prairie State Preserve

41.70870, -95.28140

Location: western Iowa in Shelby County

Directions: From Exit 40 of I-80, drive north on Hwy 59 for 11 miles to Harlan. From the intersection of Highway 44 and Highway 59 on the southwest edge of Harlan, take Highway 59 north 1 mile to Cyclone Avenue. Turn east (right) and go 1.3 miles to 5th Street. Turn north (left) onto 5th Street (which becomes Maple Avenue, then County Road M36, which is named Mulberry Road outside of town) and go 3.2 miles to where M36 turns east (and becomes 1400th Street). Follow the paved road east (right) and go 1.2 miles to the preserve access lane on the north side of the road (sign: Dinesen Prairie State Preserve). Follow this narrow lane north to the preserve. A small parking area is available.

Level of difficulty: Easy to moderate.

Gently rolling grassland. No established trails.

Dinesen Prairie is a 20-acre remnant of native tallgrass prairie. The gently rolling native prairie, with its loess-topped ridges typical of the western portion of the Southern Iowa Drift Plain, was formerly hayed every fall. A ridge crosses the preserve from west to east with a gradual drainage eastward to the wide valley of the Nishnabotna River. It is covered with waist-high prairie grasses. Porcupine grass and prairie horsetail are seen here, along with Junegrass, sideoats grama, Indian grass, and Canada wild rye. Forbs are abundant and showy during the growing season, with at least 114 species of plants. In the spring, beautiful swells of prairie phlox, indigo bush, hoary puccoon, blue-eyed grass, lousewort, and bird's-foot violet wave across the prairie, followed by the summer flowers of Canada anemone, rattlesnake master, prairie turnip, prairie coreopsis, leadplant, New Jersey tea, compass plant, and gayfeather. Fall's flora includes several asters, blazing star, Maximillian sunflower, and stiff goldenrod. The prairie is excellent habitat for prairie species of birds such as bobolink, dickcissel, meadowlarks, vesper sparrow, and upland sandpiper.

Vincent Bluff State Preserve

Lat-Long coordinates: 41.23990, -95.83421

Location: western Iowa in Council Bluffs

Directions: From Exit 5 on I-80, head 300 feet northwest on Madison Avenue, turn left onto Woodbury Avenue, proceed 0.8 mile to Thallus Street, turn right. The preserve is at the end of Thallus Street.

Level of difficulty: Easy to moderate.

Established trail winds upward from park lot.

Vincent Bluff Preserve is a unique and surprisingly pristine landscape of 35 acres located in the urban heart of Council Bluffs, within view of the high rises of downtown Omaha. Vincent Bluff not only boasts a largely intact prairie remnant indicative of the Loess Hills landform and a native hardwood forest, but the location, efforts to preserve it, and opportunity for education and scientific research represent an unprecedented and historic accomplishment for preservation efforts in the Loess Hills and the State of Iowa. Originally part of a farm owned by the Vincent Family of Council Bluffs, Vincent Bluff is visible from Interstates 80 and 29 as one enters Council Bluffs. The prairie grasses and hardwood trees glowing in their fall glory can be seen from the western banks of the Missouri River in Omaha. The preserve sustains a viewshed that commuters, riverboat passengers, explorers and Native Americans have enjoyed for centuries.

Accessible from I-80 east of Des Moines

Kish-Ke-Kosh Prairie State Preserve

Lat-Long coordinates: 41.56612, -93.01432

Location: eastern Iowa in Jasper County

Directions: From Exit 164 of I-80, at the southwest edge of Newton, go south on Highway 14 for 7 miles to County Road F62. Turn east (left) and drive 4 miles into the town of Reasnor. Turn south (right) on Main Street (which becomes Ranch Street outside of town) and go 0.25 mile to Robin Avenue. Turn east (left) and follow this winding road 1 mile to the preserve, on the south side of the road (sign: Kish-Ke-Kosh State Preserve). Park along the roadside.

Level of difficulty: Easy to moderate. Gently rolling landscape with tall grasses. No established trails.

Kish-Ke-Kosh Prairie is a 16-acre native tallgrass prairie. The preserve was named after the Fox (Meskwaki) Indian chief, Kish-Ke-Kosh, who was a well-known friend to the European settlers in the area. Upland prairie encompasses a major portion of the preserve, blending into moist drainageways and wet swales. Although this preserve was formerly grazed, the prairie vegetation is recovering. In spring, the prairie hosts hoary and hairy pucoons. Blooming peaks in June and July, as indigo bush and prairie larkspur begin to fade and leadplant, prairie coreopsis, and pale purple coneflower start to appear. Prairie rose, purple prairie clover, sand primrose, and partridge pea emerge among purple rough blazing stars. Red-tailed hawks can often be seen flying in the updrafts along the edges of the hills. Eastern meadowlarks, dickcissels, and horned larks are commonly heard here with an occasional appearance by upland sandpipers or shrikes. Ten species of butterflies have been seen here, including black swallowtail, orange sulphur, pearl crescent, and wood satyr.

Reichelt Unit of Rock Creek State Park

Lat-Long coordinates: 41.70564, -92.86501

Location: eastern Iowa in Jasper County

Directions: From Exit 173 of I-80, go north on Hwy 224 for 1.5 miles, turn right onto Hwy 6. Go 2.1 miles to driveway on right side of road, drive short distance with slight left into gravel parking lot. Walk back west 250 feet along the vehicle lane to intersection with fire lanes bordering the north and east sides of the southwest-facing prairie hillside.

Level of difficulty: Moderate. Walk through tall grass on hillside with no established trails.

The Reichelt Unit harbors one of the best prairie remnants in the area. In 1986, area farmer Sherman Reichelt donated 444 acres to the Iowa Department of Natural Resources with the mandate that it be converted to forest. Along with native tree species, the invasive species autumn olive and Tartarian honeysuckle were planted on previously farmed areas of the property. Twenty acres of native prairie remnant still remain on the western slopes of the Reichelt Unit, and this area is managed infrequently with fire.

Rochester Cemetery

1179 Cemetery Road, Tipton, IA 52772

Location: eastern Iowa in Cedar County near the town of Rochester

Google Map: Rochester Cemetery Iowa, 41.66567, -91.13956

Directions: From Exit 267 of I-80, drive 1.5 miles northwest on Highway 38, left on Cemetery Road for 0.5 mile, park on roadside; walk into cemetery through gate on south side of road.

Level of difficulty: Easy walking on level land.

As one of the few remaining original prairie remnants in the state of Iowa, Rochester Cemetery is a 14-acre site to behold for its historic significance, early graves, and more than 350 native plant species, including a spectacular display of shooting stars (*Dodecatheon meadia*) in spring. The Rochester Township cemetery dates back to the 1830s, and contains the graves of some of the earliest settlers in the area and is cared for today by the small group of Rochester's Township trustees.

Williams State Preserve

2298 Black Hawk Avenue NW, Oxford, IA 52322

Lat-Long coordinates: 41.76738, -91.80261

Location: eastern Iowa in Johnson County northwest of Iowa City

Google Map: “Williams Prairie State Preserve”

Directions: From Exit 230 of I-80, turn north onto Black Hawk Avenue and drive 2.5 miles into the town of Oxford. On the south edge of Oxford, turn right onto Hawkeye Drive/295th Street and follow it 0.5 mile to Augusta Avenue. Turn north and follow Augusta Avenue (which later becomes Highway 109) through town for 1.25 miles to Highway 6. Cross Highway 6 and continue north on W38/Cemetery Road NW 1.5 miles to Grabin Road NW. Turn west on Grabin Road NW and go 1 mile to Black Hawk Avenue NW. Turn to the north and go 0.25 mile to the preserve on the east side of the road. Access to the site at the south west corner of the preserve by the Williams Prairie Preserve sign.

Level of difficulty: Moderate. Williams Prairie is a wet sedge meadow with an upland sand prairie on its southern edge. Many parts of the site contain hummocks that can make walking difficult. Other parts of the prairie remain wet and may require knee boots or waterproof boots. No established trails.

Williams Prairie State Preserve is a 21-acre area featuring a wet prairie. In the early 1900s, John Williams bought the area and used it as a hayfield. Botanists from the University of Iowa discovered the area about 1960 and have used it as an outdoor classroom since that time. It was deeded to The Nature Conservancy in 1973 and was dedicated as a biological state preserve in 1976. Johnson County Conservation managed the site in partnership with The Nature Conservancy for many years, before the property was deeded to the Johnson County Conservation Board in 2013.

Accessible from I-35 north of Des Moines

Doolittle Prairie State Preserve

Lat-Long coordinates: 42.14796, -93.58804

Location: central Iowa in Story County north of Ames

Directions: From Exit 123 of I-35, go west (left) for 0.5 mile to 560th Avenue (sign: Doolittle Prairie). Turn south (left) and go 1.25 miles to the preserve driveway on the west side of the road (sign: Doolittle Prairie). A parking area is available at the end of the lane. Walk north to the native prairie area.

Level of difficulty: Easy to moderate. Level topography with wet potholes. No established trails.

Doolittle Prairie supports a diverse flora and fauna with a total of nearly 220 native plants, forty-five birds, several mammals, and thirty-one butterflies. The preserve is located on a level upland dotted with temporary and seasonal marshes in a pothole complex that is characteristic of much of the Des Moines Lobe landform region. This region was glaciated about 12,000 to 14,000 years ago, making it some of the most recently glaciated terrain in Iowa. The north 15 acres of the preserve was never plowed or grazed, but hay was harvested from this “wild meadow” until the late 1960s. The southern portion of the preserve (south of the former fence row) had a history of grazing. The southwest corner was plowed until 1965, although recently it was replanted with seed harvested from the northern portion.

Hoffman Prairie State Preserve

Lat-Long coordinates: 43.13286, -93.45799

Location: northern Iowa in Cerro Gordo County near Clear Lake

Directions: From Exit 194 of I-35, in Clear Lake, take Highway 18 west for 5 miles to Balsam Avenue, just west of the preserve (sign: Hoffman Prairie). Turn north (right) and park on the roadside. Walk east into the preserve.

Level of difficulty: Easy to moderate. Tall grasses on level ground with wet potholes. No established trails.

Hoffman Prairie is a 36-acre preserve featuring a prairie pothole—a shallow marsh surrounded by native tallgrass prairie. Located in the Des Moines Lobe landform region, it owes its origins to glacial advances into north-central Iowa about 13,000 years ago. The small marshes contained in the depressions on this preserve are surrounded by knobby terrain with numerous glacial erratics, all characteristic of the Bemis and Altamont glacial moraines of this landform region. The vegetation ranges from cattail-dominated wetlands to mesic prairie on uplands dominated by big bluestem.

Accessible from I-35 south of Des Moines

Rolling Thunder Prairie State Preserve

15565 118th Ave, Indianola, IA 50125

Lat-Long coordinates: 41.20024, -93.65445

Location: southern Iowa in Warren County

Direct route from Altoona: Follow Hwy 65/69 south to Indianola. From Indianola, take Highway 69 south for 12 miles to Hwy G76. Turn west (right) and go 3 miles to County Road R57 (80th Avenue). Turn north (right) and go 0.8 mile north to the preserve on the west side of the road (sign: Rolling Thunder Prairie State Preserve).

Directions via I-35: From Exit 43 of I-35, head east on Hwy G76 for 2.6 miles to 15th Avenue. Continue onto West Street in town of New Virginia for 0.3 mile and turn right onto Broadway Street/Hwy G76. Continue to follow Hwy G76 for 4.3 miles, the turn left onto 80th Avenue for the final 0.8 mile to the preserve on the left side of road.

Level of difficulty: Moderate. Rolling terrain with some steep slopes. Uplands are dominated by tall grasses, but incised bottomlands are brushy with trees, shrubs, and brambles. No established trails.

Located in the Southern Iowa Drift Plain landform region, this 123-acre preserve features rolling prairie dissected by wooded ravines. The prairie plant community displays a progressive change of flowering species during the year. In the spring, hoary puccoon, golden alexanders, prairie phlox, bird's-foot violet, violet wood sorrel, blue-eyed grass, indigo bush, yellow stargrass, wild indigo, and false gromwell are among the first to appear. By June, the early bloomers are joined by prairie cinquefoil, leadplant, prairie coreopsis, pale purple coneflower, pale spiked lobelia, spiderwort, purple prairie clover, rattlesnake master, butterfly weed, prairie rose, and wild petunia. Thimbleweed, compass plant, prairie blazing star, ironweed, and wild bergamot appear in July. In the fall, heath aster, New England aster, fall aster, Jerusalem artichoke, showy goldenrod, Canada goldenrod, and downy gentian are scattered around the hills. Song sparrow, bobolink, grasshopper sparrow, western meadowlark, vesper sparrow, and yellow warbler are birds frequently found here, along with an occasional upland sandpiper and northern harrier. Butterflies include the dusted skipper, regal fritillary, coral hairstreak, great spangled fritillary, common wood nymph, wild indigo duskywing, and black dash.

Accessible from Highway 20 westbound (from I-35)

Liska-Stanek State Preserve

Lat-Long coordinates: 42.41269, -94.22368

Location: northern Iowa in Webster County near Fort Dodge

Directions: From the intersection of Highway 169 and Highway 20 southwest of Fort Dodge, take Highway 20 west to Johnson Avenue. Turn south (left) and go 2.5 miles to 260th Street. Turn west (right) and park on the roadside (sign: Liska-Stanek Prairie).

Level of difficulty: Easy to moderate. Tall grass on level topography with wet swales. No established trails.

Liska-Stanek Prairie is a 20-acre tallgrass prairie that was part of the original land claim acquired by the pioneer Stanek family in 1858. This gently rolling prairie features several shallow potholes. This landscape originated 14,000 years ago following the glaciation of north-central Iowa and is typical of the terrain in the Des Moines Lobe landform region. Although this preserve is fairly small, over 130 native plant species have been found, including over twenty grasses. Birds that have been noted from this preserve include bobolink, dickcissel, western meadowlark, red-winged blackbird, swamp sparrow, vesper sparrow, grasshopper sparrow, and blue-winged teal.

Accessible from Highway 20 eastbound (from I-35)

Cedar Hills Sand Prairie State Preserve

Lat-Long coordinates: 42.59479, -92.55447

Location: northeastern Iowa in Black Hawk County near Cedar Falls

Directions: From the interchange of Hwy 20 with Grundy Road, head north on Grundy Road 0.7 miles toward West Ridgeway Avenue, continue onto University Avenue for 2.4 miles, then turn left onto Union Road. Go 6.1 miles, then turn left onto Beaver Valley Road. Go 2.4 miles and turn right onto North Butler Road. Go 1.2 miles to preserve on right side of road. Park along the road and enter at the gate. The preserve is located to the south of this gate; a former old field is located to the north.

Level of difficulty: Easy to moderate. Level, grassy terrain bordered by a deep swale filled with sedges and ferns. No established trails.

Cedar Hills Sand Prairie is a 36-acre preserve containing a sand prairie, sedge meadow, and small fen. Located in the lowland Surface landform region, the preserve sits atop a broad sandy divide between the Cedar River and Beaver Creek, and is one of a series of aeolian (wind-formed) sandy ridges found along the Cedar River valley. Within the preserve, dry sand prairie occupies the upland ridges and sedge meadow occupies a large swale in the northeastern portion of the preserve. A small fen is found on seepy, peaty soil in a portion of the sedge meadow. Small marshes are found in the southwest corner of the preserve. More than 360 native species of grasses and forbs have been identified here. Little bluestem, porcupine grass, big bluestem, Indian grass, and prairie cordgrass are common grasses found along a dry to wet gradient. Over fifty species of birds can be found here, including bobolink, yellow-headed blackbird, upland sandpiper, grasshopper sparrow, and savannah sparrow. Over fifty species of butterflies have been found at the preserve as well, including the regal fritillary, Arogos skipper, Iowa skipper, gorgone checkerspot, two-spotted skipper, black dash, dion skipper, and broad-winged skipper.