

AGASSIZ DUNES SNA

Agassiz Dunes is one of our most beautiful preserves, with old, gnarly bur oaks growing on high sand dunes that are carpeted with grama and bluestem grasses. Visitors can absorb the beauty of the dune area from spring through fall, and of special interest is a grand display of pasque flower in early spring. Hikers should be careful of poison ivy at Agassiz Dunes.

History and Use

The preserve was acquired by The Nature Conservancy in 1965 from four area farmers, thanks to contributions from individuals and the McKnight Foundation. Agassiz Dunes was designated a Scientific and Natural Area in 1981, and all the land now is leased to this program. Faculty and students from nearby universities are regular visitors to the site, including groups from University of Minnesota's Itasca Biological Station which have explored the preserve annually since 1930.

Nearby, the City of Fertile owns 560 acres of sand dunes and is developing the area as an environmental learning center. Between the city land and the preserve is 240 acres of private land that the owner has registered with The Nature Conservancy. The registry agreement has dramatically improved the long-term prospects of this ecosystem.

Ecological Description

According to some recent surveys, the preserve harbors 154 vascular plant species and 31 non-vascular plants. Important plant communities at the preserve are the dry sand savanna and dry sand prairie-plus the unique sand blowouts with bur oak, and creeping juniper, a species of special concern in Minnesota. Other species of special concern here include false heather, Louisiana broomrape, mudwort, blunt sedge, and small-leaved pussytoes. Even rarer is Indian ricegrass, an endangered species.

Agassiz also serves as home to 30 butterfly species; 69 bird species; 14 types of mammals; three species of reptiles; and one amphibian species. A butterfly listed by the State as "special concern", the Powesheik skipper, makes its home on the preserve. Visitors may hear the vesper sparrow or spot the upland sandpiper, or the plains pocket gopher, a species of special concern. The landscape is also a regional stronghold for the greater prairie chicken, a year-round resident.

Things to Look For

- Animals: upland sandpiper, plains pocket gopher, white-tailed jackrabbit
- Birds: Vesper Sparrow, greater prairie chicken
- Plants: Creeping juniper, Louisiana broomrape, and the rare small-leaved pussytoes
- Insects: Powesheik skipper butterfly (protected species), lance-tipped darner, and the variegated meadowhawk (dragonfly)

Visit:

<http://www.nature.org/ourinitiatives/regions/northamerica/unitedstates/minnesota/placesweprotect/agassiz-dunes-scientific-and-natural-area.xml>) for more things to see, directions, and other preserve information.

Text to Nature to 50555

Donate \$10.00 to The Nature Conservancy and help protect places like Agassiz Dunes SNA.
Thank you for your support!