

The Nature
Conservancy



LAND OF THE
SWAMP WHITE OAK
PRESERVE
GUIDE

Mission & Vision



© Lauren Nickell/TNC

Our Mission

To conserve the land and waters on which all life depends.

Our Vision

A world where the diversity of life thrives, and people act to conserve nature for its own sake and its ability to fulfill our needs and enrich our lives.

Cover photo © Dale Maxson/TNC

Who We Are

The Nature Conservancy is a global environmental nonprofit working to create a world where people and nature can thrive.

Founded in the United States in 1951, The Nature Conservancy has grown to become one of the most effective, wide-reaching environmental organizations in the world. Thanks to more than a million members and the dedicated efforts of our diverse staff and over 400 scientists, we advance conservation in more than 70 countries across six continents.

In Iowa

Since 1963, The Nature Conservancy in Iowa has worked to preserve our state's natural landscapes through the advancement of land and water conservation. TNC has staff across the state who know and work within their own communities to protect and conserve private lands and work with agricultural producers and companies on best management practices.



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About the Area

Priority Project Area

Land of the Swamp White Oak project area is a 300,000 acre floodplain landscape at the confluences of the Cedar, Iowa, and Mississippi Rivers in southeast Iowa. Approximately 50,000 acres of both public and private conservation land has been voluntarily protected here, forming a relatively intact corridor of habitat along these large rivers. Nowhere in Iowa is there a greater concentration of permanently protected natural areas. The Nature Conservancy owns and manages around 5,000 acres inside this project area.

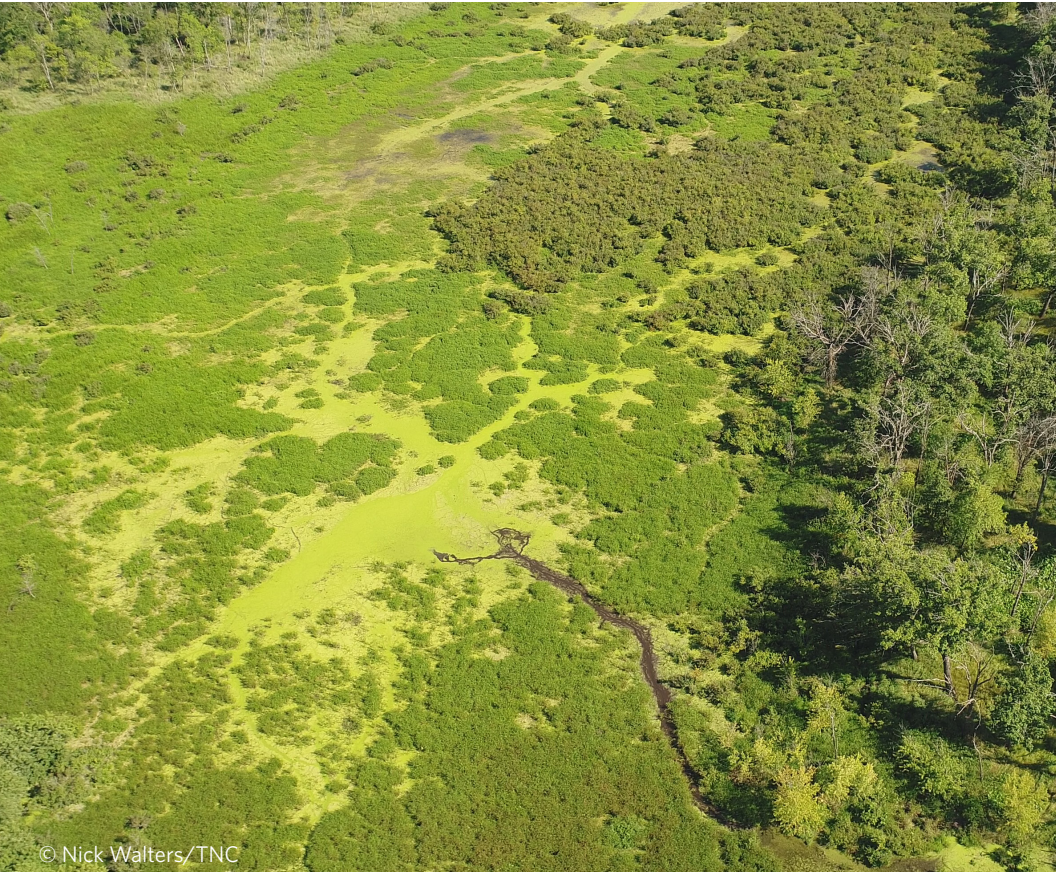
Greatest Biodiversity in the State

Land of the Swamp White Oak project area is home to the greatest biodiversity in Iowa. More than 500 plant species are found throughout the wetlands, prairies and floodplain forests. This region is home to nearly 85% of all amphibian and reptile species native to Iowa. In 2007, it was designated as the very first Amphibian and Reptile Conservation Area in the United States.



© Ryan Rasmussen/TNC

Preserve Ecosystems



© Nick Walters/TNC

Channel Fens

These fens formed when abandoned river channels, also called oxbows, filled with peat or muck soils. Spring flow emanating from the base of the bluff slowed the decomposition of dead vegetation, allowing the muck soils to accumulate over the course of thousands of years, forming a thick floating mat of vegetation over the surface of the oxbow. Many lucky visitors are fortunate to hear the unique call of the sandhill crane nearby.

Preserve Ecosystems



© Dale Maxson/TNC

Floodplain Oak Savanna

Land of the Swamp White Oak Preserve is one of the best remaining examples of the globally rare floodplain oak savanna. Savannas like this have been overgrown due to grazing and lack of fire, or cut down for agricultural purposes. Of those that remain, few are recognized for their importance. The savanna is home to rare wildlife species like the prothonotary warblers.

Explore the Preserve



At Land of the Swamp White Oak, The Nature Conservancy has chosen to keep the preserve wild and undeveloped. In a floodplain, everything is connected. Our preserve is frequently flooded by the Cedar River, which means the landscape is constantly shaped by the river.

Although that means there are no labeled hiking trails or camping sites, we encourage everyone to explore the preserve and see one of the area's best examples of wilderness. Follow the suggested hiking routes on the following pages or create your own path!

***Please note: Land of the Swamp White Oak Preserve is almost entirely located within the floodplain of the Cedar River. For the safety of yourself and others, please stay off the preserve during flood events.**

Visit Us

Main Access

1335 231st Street, Conesville, IA 52739

Suggested Hiking Route:

2 Miles • 50 minutes

Begin your hike by safely crossing over or under the electric fence. Hike north along the wetlands of the preserve. Along your way, you will hike through swamp white oak savanna and after one mile, end up at a large permanent wetland. Head west until you meet a dirt access road. Follow for 0.6 miles to the parking area.

Plants to Observe

In addition to the namesake trees, the herbaceous plant communities range from sand prairie with prairie junegrass, hairy wild petunias, whorled milkweed and leatherleaf flower to wetlands with blue flag iris and swamp milkweed. More than 440 plant species have been documented, with many portions of the preserve yet to be fully surveyed.

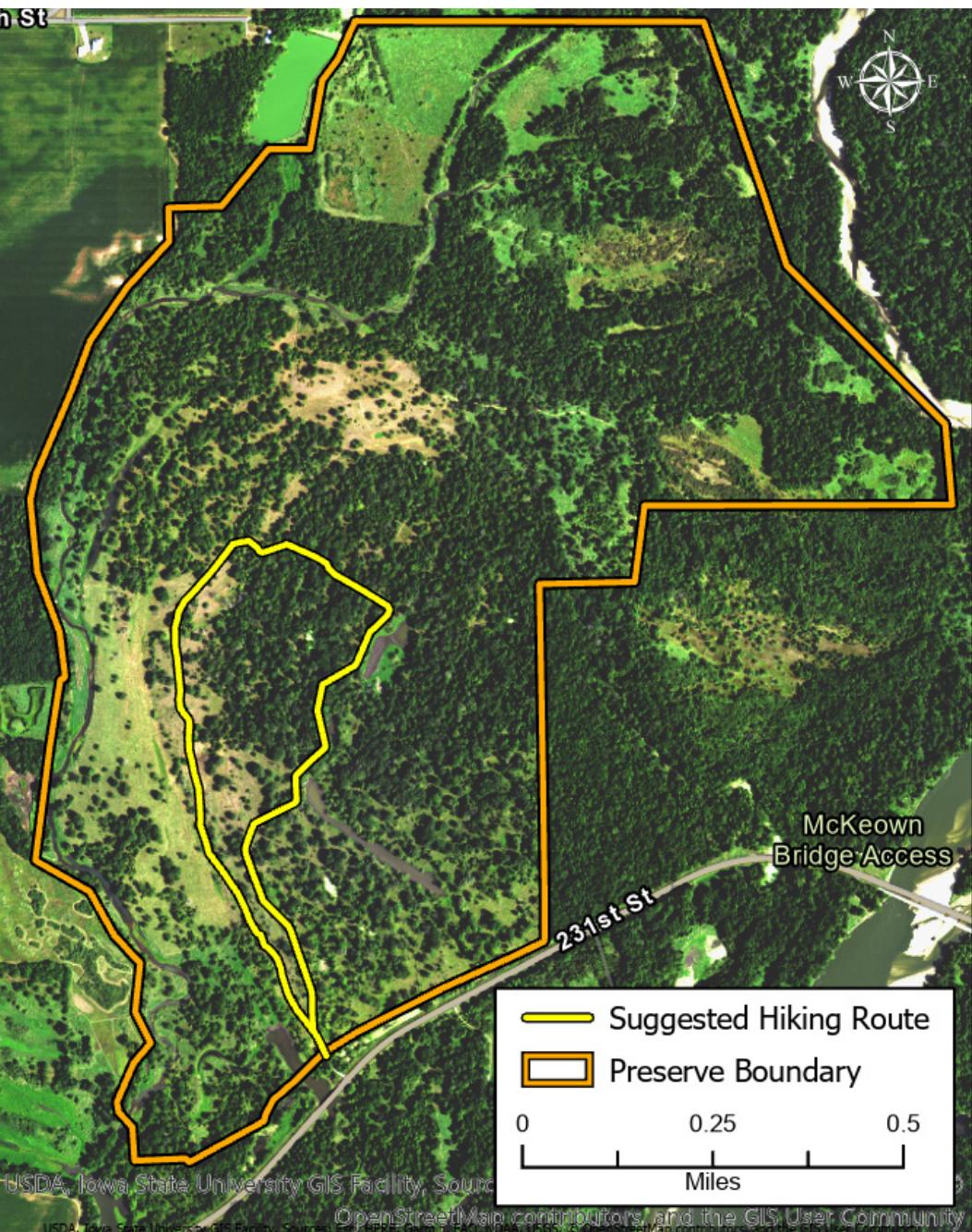
Wildlife Watching

The diverse wetlands, woodlands and open meadows support an array of amphibians and reptiles, including the Blanding's and stinkpot turtles. Birds include pileated woodpeckers, wood ducks, cerulean warblers, and red-shouldered hawks.

Driving Directions

From U.S. 61: Turn west on Hershey Avenue, following as it becomes G28. Go 11.5 miles. Along the way, you will cross two bridges. Before a third bridge, turn right on a gravel access road.

LAND OF THE SWAMP WHITE OAK



*The Nature Conservancy actively grazes the preserve to battle reed canary grass. You will encounter electric cattle fencing on the property. You may cross over or under the fencing. Please be respectful of the cattle if you encounter them.

Preserve Guidelines

Land of the Swamp White Oak Preserve is natural and wild, here are some things to keep in mind when visiting:

- Wear long pants to avoid contact with things like poison ivy and stinging nettles.
- Wear close toed shoes or hiking boots to navigate uneven terrain.
- Don't forget to bring plenty of water!
- Passive recreational opportunities are allowed such as hiking, wildlife watching and photography.
- Off-road vehicles, pets, camping /campfires and metal detectors are not permitted.
- Visitors are expected to respect preserve boundaries and stay off neighboring lands.
- Hunting, fishing, trapping and collecting are by permission ONLY.



Species Identification Guide



Land of the Swamp White Oak is celebrated for its reptile and amphibian populations, but it also has many interesting species of mammals, birds, plants and insects. All of these species make up the **greatest biodiversity found within Iowa**.

On the following pages, you will find many species of plants and animals found on the preserve.

*Use the key below to match the species with its designation.

T Threatened (Iowa)

***Absolutely no collecting or harassment of plants and wildlife is tolerated.**
If you see a state or federally listed species,
please leave it exactly as you found it.

Amphibians

Nearly **85%** of Iowa's native amphibian and reptile species call this preserve home.

Cope's Gray Tree Frog

Hyla chrysoscelis

This species is very similar to eastern gray tree frogs and can only be truly differentiated by their call.



Central Newt T

Notophthalmus viridescens

The population of central newt found on our preserve is one of only ten populations in the state.

Smallmouth Salamander

Ambystoma texanum

These secretive creatures live beneath decayed logs near ephemeral wetlands.



Reptiles



© Dale Maxson/TNC

Ringneck Snake

Diadophis punctatus

These snakes consume earthworms, frogs, salamanders, soft-bodied insects and more.

Common Musk Turtle

T "Stinkpot"

Sternotherus odoratus

Iowa's smallest turtle species can only be found in six Iowa counties.



© Ryan Rasmussen/TNC



© Ryan Rasmussen/TNC

Ribbon Snake

Thamnophis proximus

Ribbon snakes are a type of garter snake but more aquatic and less common than other species.

In 2007, this region in southeast Iowa was designated as the very first **Amphibian and Reptile Conservation Area** in the U.S.

Reptiles

Spiny Softshell Turtle

Apalone spinifera

This highly aquatic turtle's snout is long and thin which functions like a snorkel.



© Dale Maxson/TNC



© Dale Maxson/TNC

Ornate Box Turtle T

Terrapene ornata

The ornate box turtle's preferred habitat is sand prairie, which is increasingly rare in Iowa.

T Blanding's Turtle

Emydoidea blandingii

Blanding's turtles can live to be anywhere from 80 to 100 years old!



© Ryan Rasmussen/TNC

Birds

Due to its proximity to the **Mississippi Flyway**, this site provides the opportunity to observe warblers and waterfowl as they migrate.



Hooded Merganser

Lophodytes cucullatus

Mergansers dive underwater to feed on aquatic insects and small fish.

Sandhill Crane

Antigone canadensis

Their distinct call sounds prehistoric and perhaps the closest thing to a dinosaur you will ever hear.



Belted Kingfisher

Megaceryle alcyon

Kingfishers are master hunters who perch above the water looking for prey, then dive in to catch fish with their long, powerful bills.

Birds

Prothonotary Warbler

Protonotaria citrea

This warbler's nickname is the golden bird of the swamp, referring to its affinity for swampy woodlands.



Red-Headed Woodpecker

Melanerpes erythrocephalus

This species is declining statewide but is abundant at the preserve.

American Woodcock

Scolopax minor

Also known as the timberdoodle, the woodcock can eat up to their own body weight in worms in one day!



Mammals



© Chris Helzer/TNC

Virginia Opossum

Didelphis virginiana

Don't forget to thank the only marsupial in the United States that eats thousands of ticks per season!

North American River Otter

Lontra canadensis

Otters love to eat everything from fish and frogs to mussels, turtles and crawfish.



© Ryan Rasmussen/TNC



© Ryan Rasmussen/TNC

Eastern Red Bat

Lasiurus borealis

Eight of the nine bats native to Iowa are found at Land of the Swamp White Oak Preserve.

Mammals

The **diversity of habitats** found in Land of the Swamp White Oak provides homes for a variety of furry mammal species.

Muskrat

Ondatra zibethicus

Musk rats live together in large families, marking their territory by secreting musk to ward off intruders.



© Ryan Rasmussen/TNC



© Ryan Rasmussen/TNC

Bobcat

Lynx rufus

Becoming more common in southern Iowa, the bobcat is nocturnal and rarely spotted by humans.

American Mink

Neovison vison

Mink will move into abandoned muskrat dens or burrow systems.



© Ryan Rasmussen/TNC

Listen to the sound of thousands of insects around you. Together, they **perform a symphony**, perfected for those who wish to listen.

LAND OF THE SWAMP WHITE OAK

Insects



Monarch

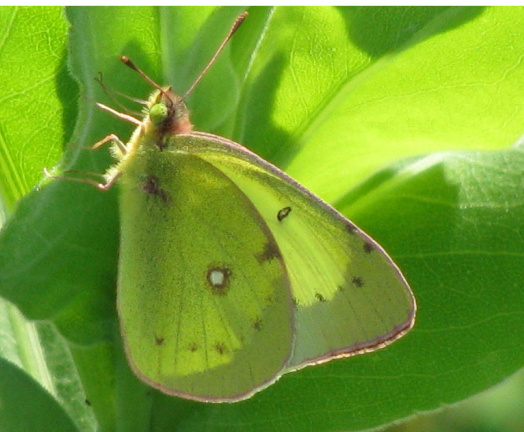
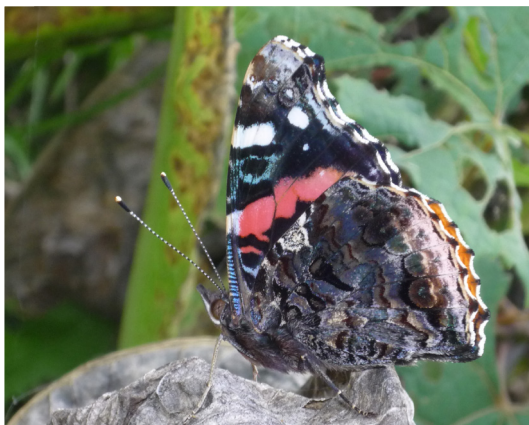
Danaus plexippus

A monarch caterpillar can eat a whole milkweed leaf in less than five minutes.

Red Admiral

Vanessa atalanta

Red admirals love feasting on rotten fruit.



Clouded Sulphur

Colias philodice

Sulphurs like to cluster around mud puddles and animal scat for moisture and nutrients.

Insects

Eastern Forktail

Ischnura verticalis

Eastern forktails can begin mating as soon as four days after emergence and females can lay eggs hours after mating.



Halloween Pennant

Celithemis eponina

Both nymphs and adults feed on mosquitoes, something we can be thankful for.

Ebony Jewelwing

Calopteryx maculata

Males are very territorial and will circle invaders to protect their territory.



Flora



© Lauren Nickell/TNC

Swamp White Oak

Quercus bicolor

Large swamp white oaks, 200 years or older, grow on the preserve.

Dotted Horsemint "Spotted Beebalm"

Monarda punctata

This species' leaf-like bracts can range from white to pink, while its smaller yellow flowers are covered in tiny purple dots.



© Ryan Rasmussen/TNC



© Dale Maxson/TNC

Cardinal Flower

Lobelia cardinalis

Hummingbirds can often be seen on the preserve in fall, nectaring on cardinal flower before they begin their fall migration.

More than **440 plant species** have been documented at Land of the Swamp White Oak Preserve

Flora

Prickly Pear Cactus

Opuntia humifusa

Ornate box turtles love to feed on ripe cacti fruit.



© Dale Maxson/TNC



© Dale Maxson/TNC

Blue Flag Iris

Iris versicolor

This native iris is a popular nectar source for native bees that are small enough to fly right inside the blooms.

Halberd-Leaved Rosemallow "Wild Hibiscus"

Hibiscus laevis

These large, showy flowers can be seen along the Cedar River and Pike Creek in late summer.



© Dale Maxson/TNC

Flora



© Ryan Rasmussen/TNC

Meadow Beauty T

Rhexia virginica

A rare plant of sandy marshes, meadow beauty requires buzz pollination by bees to release its hard-to-acquire pollen.

Leatherleaf Flower

Clematis pitcheri

This long-lasting flower is heat, drought and flood tolerant.



© Dale Maxson/TNC



© Ryan Rasmussen/TNC

Hairy Wild Petunia

Ruellia humilis

The dark purple lines on the petals guide bees to the flowers' sweet nectar.

Flora

Due to the **topography** of this site, you can find sandy soil plants growing in close proximity to wetland plants.

Great Blue Lobelia

Lobelia siphilitica

While popular with pollinators, this plant has toxic leaves preventing herbivores from grazing on it.



© Dale Maxson/TNC



© Dale Maxson/TNC

Downy Hawthorn

Crataegus mollis

This small understory tree produces abundant flowers in early spring and fruit that songbirds devour.

Whorled Milkweed

Asclepias verticillata

One of 17 native milkweeds in Iowa, the whorled milkweed prefers sandy soils.



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Land of the Swamp White Oak Field Office

2249 Camp Ave
Nichols, IA 52766

(319) 726-3041