

## Scientific and Natural Areas Along the Minnesota St. Croix Scenic Byway



### **Lost Valley Prairie Scientific and Natural Area:** Near Hastings, MN.

This bluff prairie contains a series of limestone ridges and dry swales, or lowlands, where a rich collection of native prairie grasses thrives on the ridge crests and upper slopes. The dominant native grass is little bluestem, followed by prairie drop-seed, side-oats grama, hairy grama, Indian grass, and big bluestem. Lost Valley Prairie is one of the few sites in the state where rock sandwort is found. This small plant is circumpolar in range and generally found much further north. Hill's thistle also occurs here in the dry, sandy soil; because it grows only in a few small, remote locations, its declining range is cause for concern. Restoration activities include planting former agricultural fields to prairie vegetation from seeds collected on site and removing invading trees and shrubs by cutting. Regular use of prescribed fire is also used to enhance the prairie community. Enjoy of the many prairie wildflowers, including prairie smoke, puccoon, bird's foot violets, yellow star grass, blue-eyed grass, and beard-tongue. The Trust for Public Land assisted in the protection of this site.

<http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/snas/detail.html?id=sna01041>

### **The St. Croix Savanna Scientific and Natural Area:** near Stillwater, MN.

The St. Croix Savanna occurs along the top and side of a south-facing bluff, with views of the St. Croix River. Its slopes of loamy sand have eroded extensively, their soils now supporting an alluvial forest along the bottom. Scattered bur oak and pin oak on the open gravel prairie become increasingly dense toward the northeast and northwest, forming first an oak woodland and then an oak forest. Prescribed burning and removal of the exotic black locust has greatly enhanced the savanna. The dry savanna exhibits a significant diversity of grasses: hairy and side oats grama, needle and thread, prairie dropseed, and many others. Several species of goldenrod, sunflower, aster, and blazing star join the pasque flower, prairie gentian, coreopsis, flowering spurge, potentilla, fleabane, coneflowers, and hoary vervain in an ever-changing palette of prairie color. Rare kitten tails grow in the partial shade of bur oaks; other rare species found here include James' polanisia, Illinois tick-trefoil, and a species of pinweed. The St. Croix Savanna is the best hill prairie and oak savanna along the Lower St. Croix National Scenic Riverway. A portion of this site was a gift from Anne McManus and the estate of Hattie Miller.

<http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/snas/detail.html?id=sna01061>

### **Falls Creek Scientific and Natural Area:** near Scandia and Franconia Township, MN.

Falls Creek is one of the most diverse natural areas remaining in Washington County. Folded and faulted rocks at this site show the largest displacement of any known Paleozoic rocks in Minnesota, revealing Decorah, Platteville, Glenwood, and St. Peter formations. Steep ravines line the intermittently active stream beds. Slopes face north or south primarily, with ground flora varied accordingly. Pine canopy openings on south slopes permit growth of many species native to bluff prairies. Oak forest occupies the drier ridge tops. The old fields on the site are undergoing reforestation with seedlings grown from acorns and seeds collected on the site. A deer enclosure protects the

seedlings on one old field. The site is unique for its stand of virgin hardwood and white pine forest, which is rare along the St. Croix. Rare Louisiana water thrush and kitten-tails occur on this site. Woodland wildflowers, such as trilliums, rue anemone, and bellwort, bloom in the spring.

<http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/snas/detail.html?id=sna01057>

**Franconia Bluffs Scientific and Natural Area:** near Franconia Township, MN.

Located on the high scenic bluffs along the St. Croix River, Franconia Bluffs SNA protects upland bluffs and forested plant communities while the National Park Service lands adjacent to the south protects floodplain marshes and forests. The forested bluffs, dissected by deep rocky ravines, contain oak forest and oak-maple woodland native plant communities. Five rare bird species have been documented breeding in this area: red-shouldered hawk, Cerulean warbler, Acadian flycatcher, Louisiana waterthrush, and bald eagle. The state-threatened wood turtle utilizes the floodplain and upland habitats. The Trust for Public Land assisted in the protection of this site.

<http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/snas/detail.html?id=sna02045>

**Kettle River Scientific and Natural Area:** near Hinckley, MN.

An impressive array of landforms and plant communities can be found at Kettle River SNA. Of geological interest is the several hundred million year-old Douglas fault, which runs northeast through the site. A small creek conceals the fault, but the two rock formations are exposed on opposite banks of the creek. The fault has placed the 1.1 billion-year-old Chengwatana basalt on a level with the 700 million-year-old Hinckley sandstone. This site also contains such biologically diverse communities as fen, forested bog, floodplain forest, upland hardwood forest, and pine forest. A 1980 survey of this site documented 313 vascular plant, 8 butterfly, 5 amphibian, 82 bird and 18 mammal species. Rare species of interest include one of the largest known populations of bog bluegrass in the state, and a nesting population of Louisiana waterthrush. The best time to visit is in late spring to see spring beauties, Dutchman's breeches, and trilliums in bloom. This site was a gift from Dr. R.M. and Betty Christianson.

<http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/snas/detail.html?id=sna00950>