



No. Dane Prairies
Dane & Columbia Cos.
600 Acres

The Glaciated Southeastern Wisconsin landscape is the most disturbed, fragmented and highly developed part of the state. The glacial features limited complete conversion to development and provides the basis for retaining natural features and habitats.

Glaciated Southeastern Wisconsin Important Natural Features—Rare Natura Communities, including—Fen, Prairies, oak savannas, and bog relicts; kettle Moraine Forests and Savannas; and Emergent Marshes.

Ecology & Significance

Wisconsin Responsibility – Moderate
 Irreplaceable Features – Moderate
 Diversity of Natural Features – Mod High
 Rare Species – Several
 Conservation Concern Species – Mod High
 Vulnerability to a Warming Climate – Moderate
 Conservation Status – Some

This site has narrow conservation opportunities.

Empire Prairies contains several dry to mesic prairie remnants and small oak openings that were once part of the extensive Empire Prairie stretching across southern Columbia and northern Dane counties. Oriented on a northeast to southwest-oriented glacially sculpted ridges are small, but diverse prairies containing more than 150 native plant species. Small areas of oak opening, with open-grown bur oaks, occupy various points on the ridges. Although the outcrops and drumlin wear a thin mantle of glacial till, as evidenced by rounded boulders scattered about, limestone bedrock fragments and small outcrops at the summits attest to the

Flora and Fauna

Several showy plant species are present including pasque flower, cream wild indigo, rough blazing-star, yellow coneflower, shooting-star, bird's-foot violet, compass plant, rosinweed, goldenrods, and asters. Dominant grasses are big and little blue-stem, Indian grass, side oats grama, needle grass, and prairie dropseed. Populations of the federally-threatened prairie bush-clover, the rare rough rattlesnake-root, and the rare prairie false dandelion are present.



Photo courtesy USDA Forest Service

The red-tailed prairie leafhopper, a state-endangered insect that feeds exclusively on prairie dropseed, is also found here. Several species of grassland birds nest on the more open sites. In spring, the sites feature an outstanding displays of shooting stars. The different units are mostly surrounded by agricultural land. The hills are dolomite bedrock with glacial till near its base. While most are typical dry-mesic species, wet-mesic species and prairie potholes are included in the unit boundaries. The combined diversity of all the units, if protected and managed would preserve a vast majority of the state's prairie diversity.



Photo courtesy The Prairie Enthusiasts



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