

The Illinois River and Mississippi River Sand Areas Natural Division

Characteristics

The Illinois River and Mississippi River Sand Areas Natural Division are several discrete patches of sand areas. The Illinois River Section is characterized by flat to gently rolling sand plains and sand dunes along the eastern side of the Illinois River. Oak-hickory forest, sand prairie, and marshes were the predominant vegetation groups prior to European settlement. The Mississippi Section encompasses sand areas and dunes in the bottomlands of the Mississippi River and the "perched dunes" atop the bluffs near Hanover. Scrub oak forest and dry sand prairie are the natural vegetation of this division. Several relict western amphibians and reptiles, such as western hognose snake, Illinois mud turtle, and Illinois chorus frog, are known only from these sand areas. Many plant species, including yucca and prickly pear cactus, are more typical of the shortgrass prairies to the west of Illinois.

Major Habitats & Challenges

Forests - exurban development, lack of species diversity, white-tailed deer over-abundance

Open Woodland/Savanna - exurban development, lack of prescribed management (primarily fire), white-tailed deer over-abundance

Grasslands - exurban development, lack of prescribed management (primarily fire), white-tailed deer over-abundance

Wetlands - scarcity, sedimentation, low and decreasing vegetation diversity

Lakes and ponds - scarcity, sedimentation, low and decreasing vegetation diversity

Streams - sedimentation, channelization

Opportunities

The natural division has a high proportion of its land in forest and grassland cover. Much of the natural division is in public ownership, and state and federal farm programs (e.g. Conservation Reserve Program, Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program) can help achieve many of the habitat goals on private lands.

Management Guidelines

Landscapes:

Grasslands: Native and restored prairie (including CP-25 type establishment of rare and declining habitats in the Conservation Reserve Program) are to be protected from additional losses and managed to maintain and enhance floristic and structural quality. Management of

grasslands with prescribed fire, soil disturbances, over-seeding, light grazing and other tools will enhance vegetation and structural diversity, and therefore wildlife value. A net increase of about 21,000 acres is needed to meet wildlife objectives.

Forest: Existing forest acreage must be protected by drawing attention to the extent and effects of increasing exurban development; attention to and consideration of zoning ordinances may be necessary to remedy the problems associated with loss of forest habitat and increased human-wildlife conflicts. Quality of forests will be managed and enhanced with timber stand improvement practices, the purposeful provision of varying stages of succession and an increase in tree species diversity where appropriate. A net increase of about 3,600 acres of forest and 7,500 acres of open woodland/savanna are needed to meet wildlife objectives.

Wetlands, Lakes and Ponds: By restoring upland, riparian and wetland habitats, sedimentation to wetlands, streams, lakes and ponds will be reduced. Wetland acreage on privately-owned properties can be increased through state and federal cost-share programs. A net increase of about 1,000 acres is needed to meet wildlife objectives.

Streams: Restore channelized segments (>5 miles) for the conservation of Species in Greatest Need of Conservation.

Natural Communities

Sand prairie, sand hill prairie, sand savanna, sand forest, ephemeral wetlands

Critical Species

cobweb skipper, Arogos skipper, Ottoe skipper, regal fritillary, Illinois chorus frog, Illinois mud turtle, ornate box turtle, western hog-nosed snake, upland sandpiper, loggerhead shrike, common nighthawk, red-headed woodpecker, American badger

Emphasis Game Species

migratory waterfowl, wood duck (nesting), northern bobwhite, wild turkey, ring-necked pheasant, American woodcock, mourning dove, American crow, white-tailed deer, fox squirrel, gray squirrel, eastern cottontail, raccoon, Virginia opossum, striped skunk, coyote, red fox, grey fox, beaver, muskrat

Non-game Indicator Species

Forest - eastern screech-owl, great horned owl, common nighthawk, chuck-will's-widow, downy woodpecker, eastern wood-pewee, black-capped chickadee, red-eyed vireo, Tennessee warbler, red crossbill, southern flying squirrel, white-footed mouse

Open Woodland/Savanna - bullsnake, red-tailed hawk, American kestrel, red-headed woodpecker, tufted titmouse, gray catbird, northern mockingbird, brown thrasher, yellow-breasted chat, orchard oriole, northern cardinal, big brown bat

Grassland - ornate box turtle, bullsnake, lark sparrow, dickcissel, American kestrel, killdeer, American tree sparrow (winter), western meadowlark, American goldfinch, plains pocket gopher

Wetland - Illinois chorus frog, spring peeper, great blue heron

Lakes & Ponds, Streams - great blue heron

Recreational Opportunities

Hunting, fishing, trapping, wildlife viewing, shed antler hunting, mushrooming, dog training, horseback riding, snowmobiling, camping and picnicking

Educational/ Interpretive

Chautauqua National Wildlife Refuge, Dickson Mounds Museum, Emiquon National Wildlife Refuge, Jake Wolf Memorial Fish Hatchery, Lincoln's New Salem Historic Site, Meredosia National Wildlife Refuge, Jim Edgar Panther Creek State Fish and Wildlife Area, Sanganois State Fish and Wildlife Area and Spring Lake State Fish and Wildlife Area.

Natural Resource Commodities

Forest products, hunting opportunities

Conservation Opportunity Areas

Mason County Sand Areas

Protected lands - 4,000 acres among Henry Allan Gleason State Natural Area, Sparks Pond State Natural Area, Rollo Prairie State Natural Area, Sand Prairie Scrub Oak State Natural Area, Long Branch Sand Prairie State Natural Area, Revis Springs Hill Prairie State Natural Area, Matanzas Prairie State Natural Area, Barton Summer Timbers State Natural Area, and Clear Lake's open water

Priority Resources - sand prairie, sand savanna, ephemeral wetlands, sand-restricted wildlife, grassland and savanna species in Greatest Need of Conservation

Lost Mound - Hanover Bluff - Mississippi Palisades

Protected Lands: Upper Mississippi River National Fish & Wildlife Refuge - Lost Mound unit, Hanover Bluff Nature Preserve, Falling Down Prairie Nature Preserve, Mississippi Palisades State Park

Conservation Philosophy: Restoration of the continuum of riverine (Mississippi River bottomlands), prairie (Lost Mound), and upland forest (Hanover Bluff, Mississippi Palisades) as an ecosystem landscape. At Lost Mound (within the Sands natural division), the objective is restoration of a sand prairie/sand savanna ecosystem capable

of maintaining viable populations of grassland species, including both permanent residents and migratory species, with emphasis on declining grassland bird species and threatened and endangered species while allowing compatible recreational activities.

Partners: U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, Illinois Department of Natural Resources, The Friends of the Depot, The Prairie Enthusiasts, The Nature Conservancy, Jo Daviess Natural Areas Guardians, Driftless Area Partnership, Natural Land Institute, Jo Daviess Conservation Foundation, Blufflands Alliance, Wild Turkey Federation

* See also Upper Mississippi River and Illinois River Bottomlands and Wisconsin Driftless natural divisions

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