Kiosk and Signage for Lake Sara Flatwoods Natural Heritage Landmark

Introduction

Lake Sara Flatwoods is a 50 acre site located about 5 miles North West of Effingham, Illinois. The site has been enrolled in the Natural Heritage Landmark Program since October of 1995. The Flatwoods contains nearly 200 species of plants including a number of conservative prairie species such as false toad flax (Commandra umbellate), cream wild indigo (Baptisia leucophaea), stiff tickseed (Coreopsis palmate), culvers's root (Veronicastrum virginicum), American feverfew (Parthenium integr and Samson's snakeroot (Psoraleapsoraloides). Taft et al. (1995) reported that "Lake Sara, with its recent fire history, may represent the presettlement condition as close as any flatwoods remnant in Illinois". The flatwoods also provides habitat for several species of birds and is visited by several ornithological and other groups through out the year. A trail system with interpretive signs is in place.

Materials and Methods/Results

The Effingham Water Authority used the funding for the construction of a "kiosk", purchase of custom signs outlining the ecological significance of the area and the importance of fire in natural communities. Brochures were also created to increase visitor awareness of the natural features of the site.

Summary

We feel this project was a complete success, as you can see in the attached digital pictures. Individuals and groups that come to the area have a better understanding of the biological significance of the area.

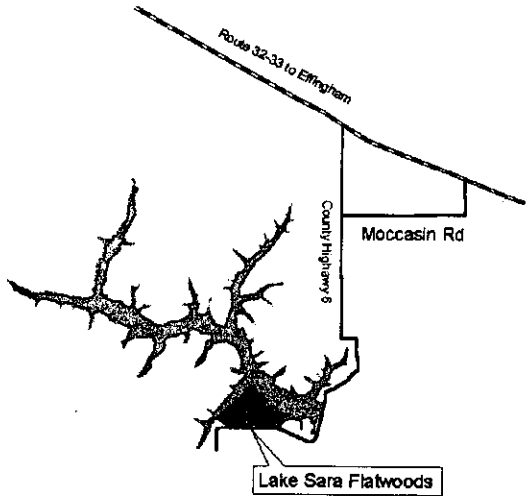
Literature Cited

Taft, J.B., M.W. Schwartz, and L.R. Phillippe. 1995. Vegetation of flatwoods on the Tllinoian Plain. Journal of vegetation science 6:747-666.

Lake Sara Flatwoods has an unpaved pedestrian trail with strategically placed interpretive signs to familiarize visitors with the plants, animals and processes involved in maintaining the natural community. Plenty of parking is available. Visitors are welcome, but are encouraged to contact the Effingham Water Authority prior to their visit.

Getting to Lake Sara Flatwoods

Lake Sara Flatwoods is conveniently located about 6.5 miles west of Effingham.



From Route 32 and 33 turn south onto County Highway 6 (1000E) and proceed south 1.75 miles to County Road 1500N. Proceed east on County road 1500N 1/8 miles to Park Lane. Follow Park Lane to Lake Sara Flatwoods

This brochure was produced in part by funding provided by the Illinois Wildlife Preservation.

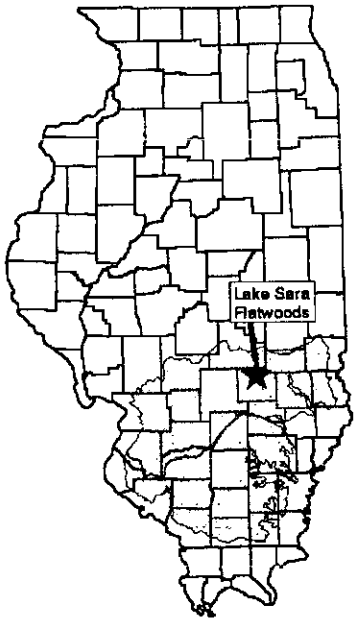
WELCOME TO LAKE SARA POST OAK FLATWOODS

POST OAK
QUERCUS STELLATA

EFFINGHAM WATER AUTHORITY
9352 EAST PARK LANE
EFFINGHAM, IL 62401
217 868-2787

Post Oak Flatwoods are open forests that occur on poorly drained claypan soils that are seasonally wet and dry. In Illinois, flatwoods often occurred at or near transition zones between forests and prairies. Fires often burned through the prairies and into the flatwoods. The combination of soil conditions and fire gave flatwoods an open structure and a park-like appearance. Many species of plants and animals thrived in this type of habitat.

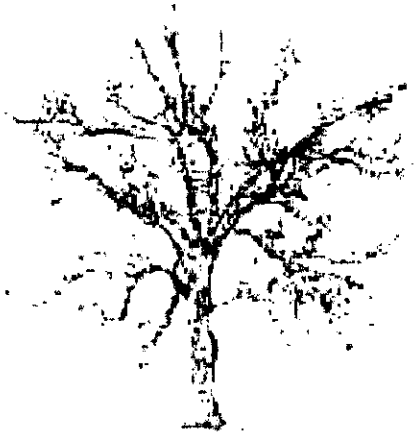
These post oak forests once covered about 5 million acres in the southern one-third of Illinois. Today, only about 500 acres of relatively undisturbed post oak flatwoods, including Lake Sara, remain in Illinois.



Primary distribution of post oak in Illinois.

A Naturalist's Dream

Over 200 species of plants and dozens of species of birds may be observed at Lake Sara Post Oak Flatwoods. Post oaks thrive under the conditions previously mentioned and are the most abundant tree. They often exhibit an open growth form similar to that pictured below.



Other common trees in the Lake Sara flatwoods are white oak, black oak, black jack oak, and several species of hickory.

The understory at Lake Sara Flatwoods is rich with herbaceous species including many that are more typically found in prairies. Among these are American feverfew, blazing stars, cream wild indigo, Culver's root, purple coneflower, slender mountain mint, toadflax, and woodland sunflower.

Birding opportunities are plentiful at Lake Sara. Many warblers can be seen during migration periods and the shoreline of Lake Sara offers the opportunity to view aquatic and shorebirds. Birds that prefer open woodlands abound during the summer.

Red-headed woodpecker

Great crested flycatcher

Management

When compared with other flatwoods in Illinois, Lake Sara Flatwoods has the highest plant species diversity and more closely approximates the conditions observed by the first European settlers than any other flatwoods. The unique character of Lake Sara has been preserved through prescribed burning that has been conducted for nearly 30 years. Without fire, the open structure of the forest would have given way to the shrub and sapling thickets that are prevalent in many unburned flatwoods. Periodic burning also provides the habitat that is preferred by birds such as the redheaded woodpecker and great crested flycatcher.

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This area is a registered
ILLINOIS
NATURAL HERITAGE
LANDMARK
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Bluebird
The flash of bright blue and the
musical call, thirdly, help identify this
bird. The bluebird is usually found in
open woodlands or farmlands where it
feeds on insects, berries and fruits.
Competition from house sparrows and
starlings for nesting places hurt the
bluebird population, but it has adapted
well to special nesting boxes.
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