

Welcome to the Oakland Preserve

Green Earth acquired the Oakland Nature Preserve in two stages. The first parcel (located south of the railroad tracks) of 9.3 acres was acquired in 1979. Green Earth volunteers worked diligently to establish a prairie community on the west end of this parcel. The 1.0 acre prairie you see from the parking area is the result of three decades of continuous dedication to maintaining this once widespread habitat.

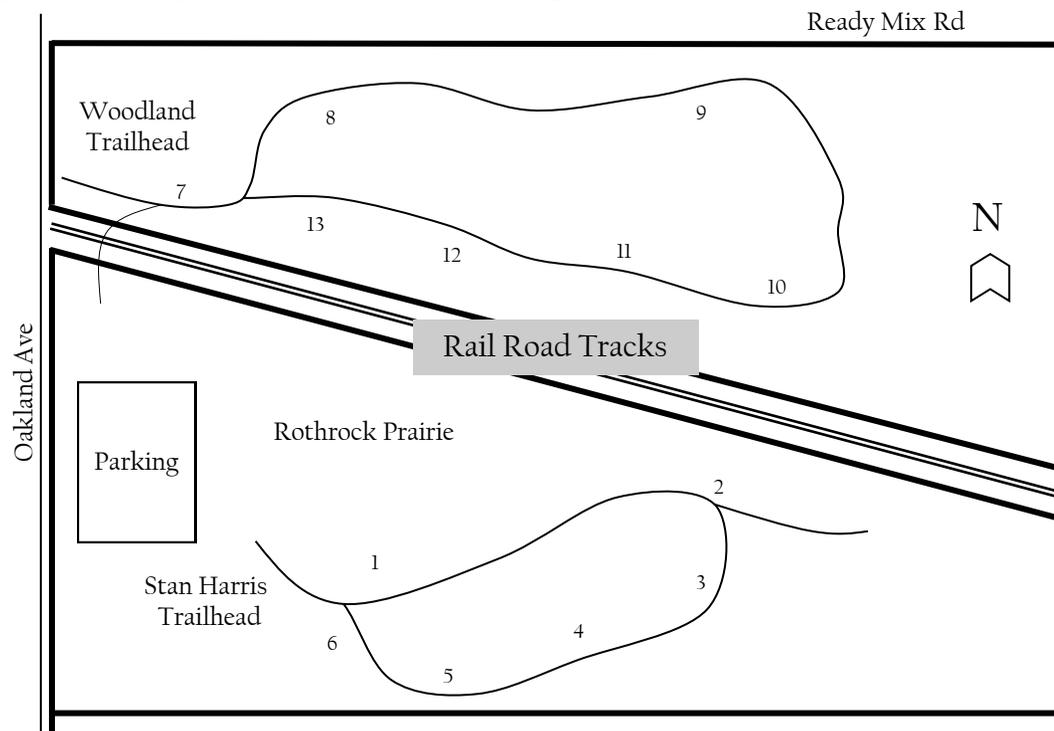
The second parcel (located north of the railroad tracks) was acquired in the summer of 2006, in large part by a grant from the Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation, along with contributions received from the local community. Much of the 11.6 acres of woodland was at one time a bottomland hardwood forest. Drainage channels were cut when the railroad came through and the surrounding properties were being developed. The result is a dryer, more typical woodlot that you see today.

The Areas of Oakland Preserve

The Stan Harris Trail - This 0.5 mile trail starts at the parking area and runs along the edge of the prairie before turning south into the woodland and looping back to the trailhead and parking area.

The Rothrock Prairie - This tall grass prairie was named after Robert and Rhonda Rothrock to honor their work in maintaining the prairie habitat by fighting back the encroaching woodland and re-seeding the prairie.

The Woodland Trail - This 0.5 mile trail begins just north of the railroad tracks, along Oakland Avenue. The trailhead is located within an "edge community" and continues on into the woodland, heading east until looping back west to its beginning point.



All flora images used in the field guide are from the USDA-NRCS Plants Database <http://plants.usda.gov>

Green Earth, Inc.

Green Earth, Inc. is a not for profit corporation that was established in 1974 to acquire, preserve, and provide public access to natural areas in Carbondale. Scientific research, outdoor education, nature photography, bird watching, wildflower identification, hiking and any other non-destructive and non-consumptive activities are permitted and encouraged on Green Earth properties. In order to preserve these areas for future generations, no guns, hatchets, alcohol, horses, vehicles, or fires of any kind are allowed. Dumping, camping, or removal of any plants or animals is strictly prohibited.

Green Earth Depends On Your Support!

Green Earth depends almost entirely on donation from the local community to exist. If easily accessible natural areas are important to you, please help by making a monetary contribution today.

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Oakland Nature Preserve

Trail Guide



Green Earth
*Preserving Natural Areas
for Future Generations*

The Stan Harris Trail

1. Prairie Grasses At one time, prairie grasses covered approximately two-thirds of the state of Illinois, spanning over 22 million acres. Periodic fires set by lightning and the Native Americans kept the land covered with grasses, rather than allowing trees and shrubs to take over. Once thought to be low in agricultural productivity, the early settlers soon learned the value of the rich prairie soils. This, in effect, hastened the demise of the majority of the prairie grasses, except for some remaining along railroad right-of-ways.

Big Bluestem (*Andropogon gerardii*) This warm season perennial can attain heights up to 8ft. The flower cluster is three branched. This species is a major dominant in the tall grass prairie.



Big Bluestem

Indian Grass (*Sorghastrum nutans*) Another warm season perennial which is important to prairie restoration. It also grows up to 8 ft., and produces yellow flowers, borne in pairs. Indian Grass, or “wood grass,” attracts a diversity of wildlife.



Switchgrass

Switchgrass (*Panicum virgatum*) Also called “Tall Panic Grass,” this warm season perennial reaches heights up to 6 ft. The seeds of this grass attract various song birds, rabbits, waterfowl, and deer.



Sideoat Grama

Little Bluestem (*Schizachyrium scoparium*) A bunch grass achieving heights of about 4 ft. In the fall, both this and big bluestem color the prairie with a reddish hue. It is very adaptable because of its expansive fibrous root system. Abundant wildlife is attracted by this grass.

Sideoat Grama (*Bouteloua curtipendula*) “Mesquite Grass,” as some people refer to it, is classified as a mid-grass, reaching about 3 ft. in it’s flowering stage. Look for it below the other grasses. “Sideoats” refers to the visual arrangement of spikelets or

flower clusters along the axis of the plant. The leaves are distinguished by dead curly tips.

Many other prairie plants may be found within this plant community. Some of the more recognizable flowering plants include: Black-eyed Susan, Purple Cone Flower, Partridge Pea, Tick Trefoil, Prairie Dock, and Rattlesnake Master.

2. Flowers and Wood Trails The trail spur continuing straight goes to an area where many beautiful wildflowers have been transplanted. If you follow the trail loop to the right, upon entering the woodland, notice the change in temperature and plants. What is not as easily noticed is the change in animal life from prairie to woods.

3. Floods This low-lying wooded area is frequently flooded during heavy rains. If you look closely, you may find objects that have washed into the area from somewhere else. Can you tell the direction the water flows when this area is flooded?

4. Japanese Honeysuckle (*Lonicera japonica*) As you enter the more densely vegetated area, notice the abundance of honeysuckle that has invaded this site. This exotic invader may grow as much as 30 ft. in a single year! Unlike the native grape vine and poison ivy vine, the honeysuckle vine can cause trees and plants to become stunted and disfigured because of the twining nature of this plant. Many plants die from the competition for food, water, and light. This plant will pose a continuous problem wherever it is found. It is so well naturalized, it is nearly impossible to eradicate.

5. Natural Selection The oak and hickory trees found here are part of a young woodland community, but this woodland didn’t always look like it does today. Many different types of plant communities have come and gone; thriving for a while, but eventually being replaced by different plant communities through a continuous, never-ending process called “succession.” For example, what was once open grassland over time becomes invaded by sun-loving shrubs. These shrubs grow taller than the grasses, eventually shading them out. These shrubs in turn become invaded by taller, sun-loving trees, which in time shade out the shrubs. These trees grow and mature until they die from age, disease, fire, etc. When they fall, the canopy opens, letting in sun for grasses to thrive yet again.

6. Ecotone Do you feel the change in temperature as you approach the outer fringes of the forest? An edge community, or ecotone, is where more than one ecosystem overlaps. This forest and grassland edge can be very beneficial to wildlife and plants that may prefer to live in both places. An ecotone is generally a very diverse and rich area within the environment.

The Woodland Trail

7. Natural Colonization The mowed area along the beginning of The Woodland Trail was never planted with the prairie plants used in the restoration work you see across the rail road tracks, however, some of the native grasses have begun growing here. The Indian Grass and Switch Grass you see here are examples of colonization by native species. This means the soil type, moisture, and sunlight found here are suitable to support these species.

8. Pawpaw (*Asimina triloba*) This small, under story tree is found throughout the eastern U.S. Native Americans cultivated the pawpaw for both the edible fruit and the seed. The seeds contain an insecticidal property and once dried and powdered, were applied to the head to control lice; specialized shampoos now use compounds from pawpaw for the same purpose. In recent years the pawpaw has attracted renewed interest as a fruit bearing tree that has few pests, but also as an ornamental tree that naturalizes easily, grows well in the shade, and is low maintenance.

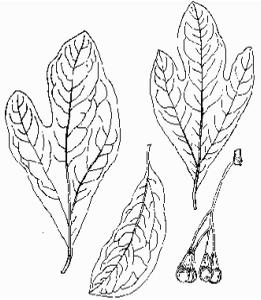


9. Indian Woodoats (*Chasmanthium latifolium*) This part of the forest floor is swathed in a lush ground cover of a native grass called Indian Woodoats, also called Sea Oats. If you are walking this trail during the late summer to early fall, you will see a very unique seed head that resembles flattened oats. This grass grows well in wet soils and in the shady forest floor. Those characteristics make it an unusual grass, but its long fibrous root structure makes it a very desirable grass for soil stabilization projects.



10. Poison Ivy (*Toxicodendron radicans*) If you are visiting here in the late spring, summer, or fall, you will see this trail cuts through a large patch of poison ivy. If you are here in the winter, you will only see bare stems; but no matter the season, this plant can cause trouble. The leaves and stems of the poison ivy exude urushiol oil, for most people a highly irritating substance. Those who do not yet react to urushiol oil, eventually will as exposure over time cause humans to develop a sensitivity. The best defense is to avoid touching the plant, but if you do come into contact, wash your skin off with cold water and soap as soon as possible, and launder your clothes and shoes in hot water.

11. Sassafras (*Sassafras albidum*) Native to the eastern US, this tree can stay a small shrub or grow as tall as 120 ft. The leaves have one to three lobes; the two-lobed leaves having a distinct mitten-shape. The fruit, twigs, and foliage are readily eaten by wildlife. All parts of the sassafras plant are spicy and aromatic. At one time it was used extensively for a wide variety of medical uses. Today the plants are used for tea, oil, soap, as well as a spice and thickening agent for soups and gumbo.



12. Drainage Channel This small drainage channel was cut when the railroad and the adjacent properties were developed. This seemingly minor drainage had a huge impact on the plant community that once existed here. The entire central portion of this woodland used to contain trees and vegetation that could tolerate very wet conditions for extended periods of time: a bottomland community. Once the water was allowed to drain, this type of vegetation could no longer thrive and the makeup of the woodland changed dramatically.

13. Invasive Species Much of this shrubby under story is made up of introduced species. If the introduced species can out-compete a native species that would occupy the same habitat, they are considered “invasive.” Examples of invasive species seen here include Autumn Olive, Bush Honeysuckle, Japanese Honeysuckle and Multiflora Rose.