Glacial Park Conservation Area

Kames are large hills made primarily of gravel deposited by the glaciers over 10,000 years ago. Visitors can view four different kames at Glacial Park including the "Camelback Kames", which have two humps shaped like a camel's back.

Sedge Meadows are areas where the soil remains saturated, though standing water is uncommon most of the time. Popular plants are Michigan Lily and Spotted Joe-pye Weed.

Bogs are wetland areas whose predominant vegetation is sphagnum moss. Known for their highly acidic soils, low oxygen levels and poor drainage, bogs are spongy, floating mats of vegetation where not much else can survive.

A Kettle Marsh is a round depression formed on the landscape when chunks of ice broke away from a retreating glacier. The depression created a low-lying wetland where plants like cattails and bulrushes grow with their roots in the muck and their stems rising over four feet high.

Tallgrass Prairies support a mixture of grasses and flowers, some which can grow 10 feet tall. These areas of Glacial Park are still transforming from agricultural practices back to prairie. Compass Plant, Goldenrod and Prairie Dock can be seen as well as grasses like Big Bluestem and Prairie Dropseed.

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Savannas are open wooded areas where trees are widely scattered. Glacial Park savannas provide a beautiful backdrop of oak and hickory trees interlaced with seasonal wildflowers. They are transitional communities between woodlands and grasslands which provide an array of food and shelter for numerous species of wildlife.

Nippersink Canoe Trail

Keystone Road Landing/Nippersink Canoe Base/Pioneer Road Landing — These sites provide put-in/take-out points for canoes or kayaks coming down Nippersink Creek or continuing on to the Fox River or the Chain of Lakes. Paddlers can meander from two to six hours along the creek.

Lyle C. Thomas Memorial Park & Landing, Spring Grove (13 acres) Owned by the Village of Spring Grove, this site is managed by the Conservation District and serves as an excellent put-in/take-out location for trips along Nippersink Creek.

Tailgrass Prairies support a mixture of grasses and flowers, some which can grow 10 feet tall. These areas of Glacial Park are still transforming from agricultural practices back to prairie. Compass Plant, Goldenrod and Prairie Dock can be seen as well as grasses like Big Bluestem and Prairie Dropseed.
The effects of land restoration on the wildlife and plant communities are evident at Glacial Park. Four hundred acres of state-designated nature preserve exist within its central core, providing a habitat for 82 species of state-endangered and threatened plants and animals, like Northern Harriers, Blanding’s turtles and Fosser’s tern. In 1993, 13 wild turkeys were reintroduced to restore its natural path, preventing erosion, and improving the wetland habitat.

Savannas provide a beautiful backdrop of oaks and hickory trees interlaced with seasonal wildflowers like shooting star, columbine, may apples and prairie smoke. The wide open space at Glacial Park provides a sanctuary for numerous plants and animal communities.

Glacial Park — At 3,410 acres in size, Glacial Park features a diverse array of prairie, wetlands, savannas and delta kames. With the gradual addition of parcels over the years, land restoration has been vital to making Glacial Park a cohesive natural community.

District staff and volunteers have restored hundreds of acres of native communities by removing invasive plant species, conducting prescription burns, and re-creating wetlands. In 2000, the Nippersink Creek was remeandered to restore its natural path, preventing erosion, and improving the wetland habitat.

The focus of the collections is on the history and preservation education of the natural history within Glacial Park. The Research Field Station is a teaching tool that provides education on the natural history of Glacial Park and the Midwest.

Education

Preservation

Wiederich Barn

Peter Wiederich purchased roughly 560 acres from Samuel Walker in 1875 in what today is known as Glacial Park. He was the father of seven children and grandfather to the Wiederich sisters Ethel, Laura, and Manar. Peter's son, Frank, built the barn in 1902. He and his wife gathered stones for the foundation from the fields and bought the lumber from a friend in McHenry. Electric wasn’t installed on the farm until 1953. Each day the family would hand milk up to 20 cows. They grew four acres of oats, corn, hay and wheat. The farm was also home to 15 helters, four horses, hogs, chickens, guineas, ducks, geese and turkeys. In 1975, the Wiederich sisters sold the 120 acres that remained of the family farm to the Conservation District.

Lost Valley Visitor Center

The original building was a home built by Frank Howard as part of the Hickory Creek Farms operation in the late 1930's. From the late 1960's until 1988 the property was a private residence. In 1986, the parcel, along with 1,100 acres north of Glacial Park was purchased by Comdisco Corporation and opened as Tamarack Hunt Club and Lodge. During this period, the grounds and structures were renovated and expanded by Comdisco. They operated it as a company retreat center, which included 20 bedrooms, a kitchen, dining area, meeting rooms, lounge, sauna, and swimming pool. In 2003, the corporation added a large conference room to the east end with additional bedrooms on the second floor.

During an economic downturn in the early 2000's the hunt club and the lodge were sold to a development corporation. In 2006, the Conservation District acquired the former lodge and retreat center from the developer. Its location as a 34-acre holding within Glacial Park, as well as the interconnection of hydrologic systems and oak savannas, made it a long sought after acquisition.
Facilities

Canoeing/Kayaking
Spend a day paddling the clear, tranquil waters of Nippersink Creek, a high-quality stream characterized by the numerous species of plant life, fish, frogs, and other aquatic creatures that live within its waters. Canoers and kayakers can enjoy the meandering water trail and scenic views by putting in at Keystone Road Landing or Pioneer Road Landing.

Fishing
Nippersink Creek is home to bass, bluegill, channel catfish, walleyes, carp, bullhead, green sunfish and many others. Anglers can fish at Keystone Road Landing or Harts Road Shelter. The Kettle Parking Lot is available for special events and programs throughout the year. By participating in the People and Nature Certificate Program, a series of more than 30 educational programs offered throughout the year. The visitor center also hosts field trips for local school children, summer day camps, and weekend workshops for adults on a variety of environmentally-significant topics as part of the District's exploration packs.

Green Technologies
Another significant feature of the Lost Valley Visitor Center is its green technologies. When renovating the building, the District did its best to reduce the use of traditional energy sources, to preserve and protect the area's clean water supply, and to reduce the use of the earth's resources. From energy efficient lighting and geothermal heating and cooling to daylight harvesting and the installation of rain gardens, the District took many steps to achieve LEED Gold certification. Throughout the building, interpretive signs point out these features as well as provide ideas on how they might be incorporated in the home.

Research Library
The focus of the collections is on the geology, soils, flora, and fauna of the area, as well as the history, practice, and use of the land. The collections include historical maps, a database of ecological surveys conducted in McHenry County, periodicals, books, and soil and wetland maps. The intended audience includes college students and land management professionals. Scanning of documents is permissible; however, there is no scanner or copier available for visitor use.

Education
The Research Field Station Station hosts a large college intern program each summer, in which interns get experience in ecological restoration land management, educational exhibit construction, wildlife surveys, plant surveys, and research. In addition, the Research Field Station conducts studies related to restoration and issues permits to coordinate research by scientists who work in collaboration with regional institutions.

Self-Guided Family Exploration Packs
Create your own adventure with the Conservation District’s exploration packs. These are backpacks your family or small group can borrow for use on the trail at Glacial Park. The packs contain seasonal activities in which your entire group can participate. Adult supervision is required. A driver’s license is required as a deposit and must be left during use. For groups over 16, an educational permit is needed. For information call Prairieview Education Center at (815) 479-5779.

Recreation

Trails
Glacial Park has over eight miles of trails designated for hiking, horseback riding, snowmobiling and cross-country skiing. The 26-mile Prairie Trail also runs north/south along the park's eastern boundary. Trail users can park at the Harts Road parking lot and bicycle from one end of the county to the other, as well as ride the seven mile westbound Hebron Trail link.

Interpretive Nature Trail
A two-mile interpretive trail follows the Deepth Path Trail loop. Guide books, located at the trail head in front of the Lost Valley Visitor Center, interpret four different topics: “Plant Communities,” “Wildlife,” “History of the Land,” and “Geology.”

Picnic Areas and Shelters
Visitors can enjoy a picnic lunch at the Kettle parking lot, Keystone Landing or Harts Road Shelter. The Kettle Parking Lot and Harts Road Shelter can also be reserved for large group gatherings by calling (815) 338-6223.

Education

The Lost Valley Visitor Center
To enhance the existing natural attractions at Glacial Park, the Conservation District opened the doors to the Lost Valley Visitor Center in the summer of 2010 to immerse guests in an even greater experience while on site. Nestled in the geographic center of the park, the visitor center is the gateway to a day’s adventure where guests can connect, learn, and discover the importance of preserving nature.

The Lost Valley Visitor Center includes classrooms for environmental education programs and workshops, a large conference room, exhibit area, and library with wireless internet access. Visitors can enjoy self-guided visits through the exhibits, or sign up for a variety of staff-led educational programs, including group field trips, bird hikes, guided evening nature walks, and guided canoe/kayak tours.

Research Field Station
The Research Field Station conducts studies related to restoration and issues permits to coordinate research by scientists who work in collaboration with regional institutions. The Research Field Station also coordinates the People and Nature Certificate Program, a series of more than 30 educational programs offered throughout the year. The visitor center also hosts field trips for local school children, summer day camps, and weekend workshops for adults on a variety of environmentally-significant topics as part of the People and Nature Certificate Program.

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Powers-Walker House
The Powers-Walker House is a rich educational and historical resource that is open for special events and programs throughout the year. By participating in these events, visitors gain insight to the early settlers’ connection to the land. Annual events include the Ice Cream Social of 1838, Archeological Awareness and the Harvest Gathering of 1858.

Powers-Walker Family
The Powers family first built their frame house, a Greek-Revival style home, in 1854. After the Powers family moved out, Samuel Walker, a prominent local citizen, purchased the farm. In the late 1990’s, the District and McHenry County Historic Preservation Commission determined that the house still contained a significant portion of architectural integrity, unaltered over 140 years of use. An active volunteer group is working to restore and refurbish the home's interior and exterior historic appearance.