

BUNKER HILL PRAIRIE

Bunker Hill Prairie consists of a large open area amidst a mosaic of oak savanna, oak woodland, mixed hardwood forest and flatwoods (Edgebrook Flatwoods Forest Preserve, p. 53). The Forest Preserve District plans to manage Bunker Hill Prairie as a savanna community. The complex of high quality natural areas within the overall preserve and its place in a long, wide greenway of protected land along the North Branch of the Chicago River makes this a rewarding natural area to visit.

Bunker Hill Prairie is a rare opportunity to see not a prairie recreated from nothing, but a real, 10,000-year old ecosystem within the city limits. The plants range from the sun-loving varieties (approximately 55 percent) to the semi-shade loving (20 percent) to those tolerant of shade (25 percent.) A group of volunteers called the North Branch Restoration Project discovered the prairie opening and first recognized its significance in the late 1970s. Since then, the group has been helping the Forest Preserve District of Cook County manage the area through controlled burns, brush cutting and other means.

In spring evenings, woodcocks take flight for mating rituals in the open spaces of Bunker Hill Prairie. Hepatica and bloodroot bloom in the surrounding oak groves. A state-endangered species, the mountain blue-eyed grass blooms a few weeks later in the savanna.

The site has been modified over time through land usage—clearing, campsites, being mowed for a playfield, and more recently through the introduction of species during restoration—and through fluctuations of the Chicago River.

In mid-summer, northern dropseed grass and thousands of plants of mountain mint bring their distinctive scents to the air along the trails of the open prairie portion. Purple maniac wasps and golden digger wasps are among the unusual insects to be found. (Jane Balaban, *Chicago Wilderness Magazine*, Spring 2001.)



Bunker Hill Prairie



ADDRESS 6800 Caldwell Ave
OWNER Forest Preserve District of Cook County
ACREAGE 6.56

HABITATS
1 Prairie / Grassland

DIRECTIONS Exit I-94 onto Caldwell Avenue and go north-west for about one mile. Turn left at the red Cook County Forest Preserve District sign that says "Billy Caldwell." Park on the left side of the parking lot, and walk straight onto the bike trail. Prairie is along the left-hand side.

