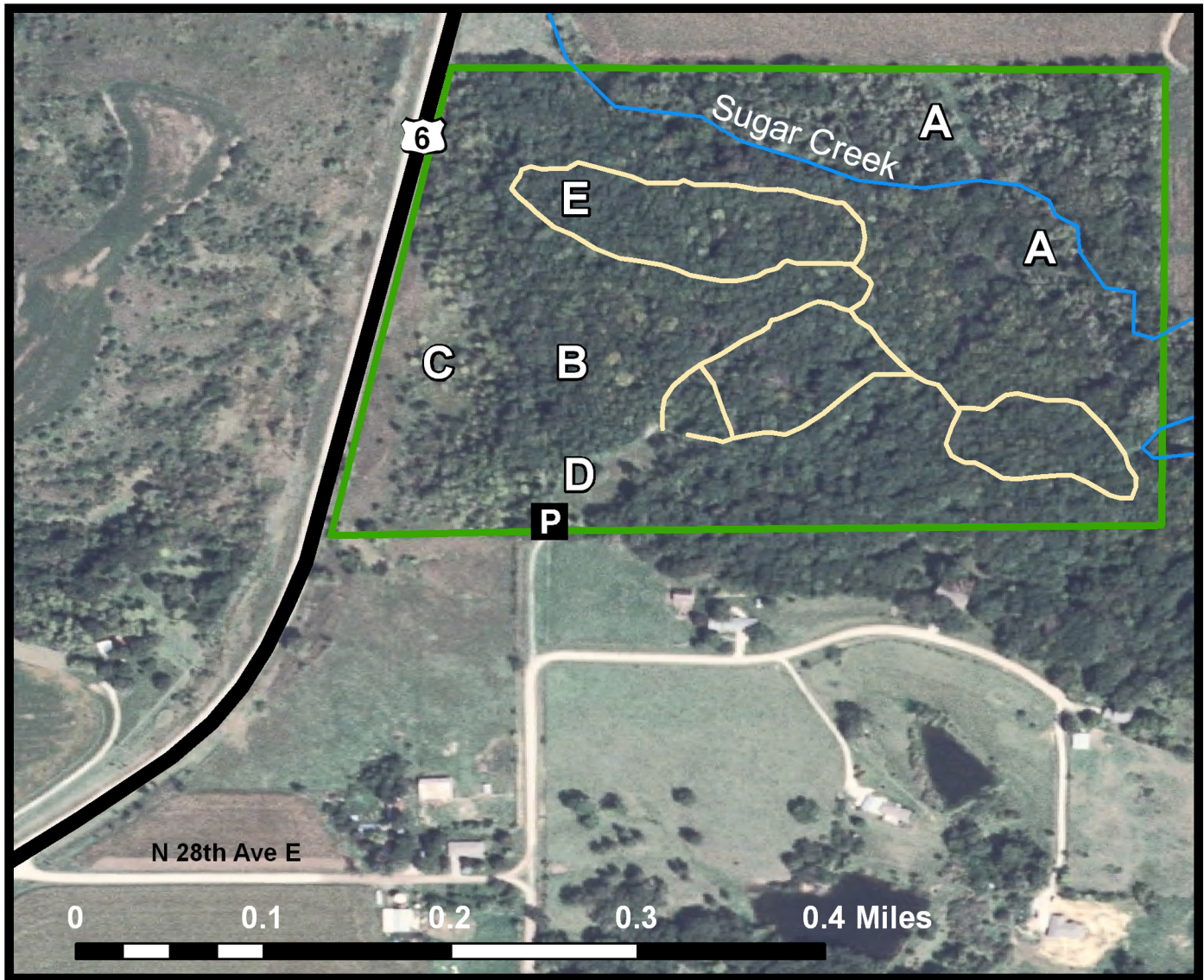


Sugar Creek Audubon Nature Sanctuary



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Sugar Creek Audubon Nature Sanctuary is a 49-acre preserve five miles west of Grinnell just off U.S. Highway 6. It is owned and managed by the Tallgrass Prairie Audubon Society, the local chapter of the National Audubon Society.

To get to the sanctuary from the east, go west out of Grinnell on Highway 6 about five miles, continuing past the junction of Highway T-38 (on the right) and up the hill as Highway 6 angles southwest. Near the top of the hill, a highway sign indicates a side road to the left. It is North 28th Avenue East and it is marked with a “Dead End” sign. Turn down this road. To get to this road from the west, go east on Highway 6 past Oakland Acres about a mile and a half. On the right is a farm fence with white wooden posts.

To get to this point from Interstate 80, take exit 179. It is the Lynnville-Oakland Acres exit and also county blacktop Highway T-38. Take Highway T-38 north to Highway 6, approximately two miles. Turn right on Highway 6. Go about

three quarters of a mile to the first gravel road to the right. It is North 28th Avenue East.

Then (whether coming from either direction) go east down North 28th Avenue East for a quarter mile. At the “T” intersection, turn left (north) and go about 150 yards. Where the

Legend

- A Letters Referenced in Text
- P Parking
- ~ Sugar Creek
- Hiking Trails
- Preserve Boundary

N



new dorm at Sugar Creek in 1955

road turns east again, continue north on the driveway that goes to the sanctuary parking lot, about 50 yards.

The preserve is primarily wooded. A set of short loop trails, totaling about a mile in length, leads through oak-hickory forest. There are small prairie remnants on the west side and planted prairie in the open area directly north of the parking lot. A small building at the north end of this entrance compound serves as a nature center (open occasionally) with a bird feeding area adjacent. There are no toilets or drinking water. No hunting, pets, or bikes are permitted.

History

The central 40 acres was claimed by Elijah Garton on June 15, 1850. During the 19th and early 20th centuries, it changed hands several times. In 1926, the road that is now U.S. Highway 6 was routed across the neighboring parcel to the west, leaving a triangular piece on the east. In 1932, this wedge of about nine acres was sold to the owners of the central 40 acres. They in turn sold the entire property to the Grinnell Girls Camp Association, and from 1932 to 1997 it was used by the local Campfire Girls as Camp Hawikuh.

In 1997, the property was sold to the Tallgrass Prairie Audubon Society on the condition that it be maintained in its natural state.

Historic and recent aerial photographs are included at the end of the description for this preserve. The aerials serve as a visual confirmation of the changes in the vegetation over time that are referred to in the text.

Woodland

Sugar Creek runs unchannelized east-southeast across the north part of the property. The triangular piece of land north of the creek (about six acres) and a piece south of the creek (about eight acres) (▲ on the map) are flat bottomland. Trees here include black walnut, bur oak, box elder, American elm, silver maple, black willow, hackberry, eastern cottonwood, and mulberry. A healthy population of the relatively rare plant green dragon is also present here. It is in the same genus (*Arisaema*) as Jack-in-the-pulpit, though it grows taller, up to three feet. Its bloom time usually is in early June.

The land rises from this floodplain, creating north-facing slopes across the entire property from northwest to southeast, with several steep ravines on the southeast side. These hillsides, which constitute more than two-thirds of the property, support a forest of (predominantly) oak (white, black, red, bur), hickory (shagbark and bitternut), black cherry, black walnut, basswood, and hackberry. In the spring, these slopes are covered with wildflowers, beginning with snow trillium in late March or early April and including, among others, bloodroot, spring beauty, Dutchman's breeches, dogtooth violet, Jack-in-the-pulpit, and wild geranium. The loop walking trails go through this area of fine flora.

Most of the woodland is currently unmanaged other than removing alien species, primarily multiflora rose, buckthorn, and Tartarian honeysuckle. A portion of the forested area on the



green dragon



wild geranium



Jack-in-the-pulpit

west side (**B**) is being actively managed with thinning, brush removal, and regular ground fire.

Prairie

The west part of the property, the triangular piece between Highway 6 and an old north-south roadbed, was native prairie until about 50 years ago. Aerial photos from 1940 and 1955 show it treeless except for a fringe along the old wagon road. But a 1967 aerial photo shows it starting to become thickly overgrown with hawthorns and other woody species. When Audubon took over in 1997, tiny remnants of the prairie were still surviving in small gaps in the canopy. These openings (**C**) have been expanded by removing the hawthorns and brush, and the prairie is being rehabilitated through regular burning and interseeding with local ecotype seeds. Some of the walnut and black oak that have grown in are being retained.

In the former camp compound area (**D**), what in 1997 was an expanse of lawn has largely been planted to prairie. The grasses are primarily little bluestem and side-oats grama, with some Indiangrass, big bluestem, and Canada wild rye. The forbs, the seeds of which were gathered from local remnants, include gray-headed coneflower, creamy gentian, tall prairie coreopsis, great blue lobelia, black-eyed Susan, and New England aster, among others.

Savanna

In the northwest section of the preserve (**E**), some large bur oaks with shade-pruned lower limbs indicate that this was once a much more open area. The aerial photo from 1940

confirms this. To recreate a more savanna-like setting, Audubon members have thinned many of the younger trees and have reintroduced regular ground fire.

Contact Information

For information about Sugar Creek Audubon Nature Sanctuary, to arrange a tour, or to inquire about volunteering, contact Russell Tabbert, vice-president of the Audubon chapter, at 641-236-7309 or rtabbert@iowatelecom.net.



black-eyed Susan



great blue lobelia

Aerial Photographs of Sugar Creek Audubon Nature Sanctuary

Please note that the preserve boundaries indicated on these aerial photographs are approximate. When visiting this preserve, please note signage and respect preserve and private property lines.



1940



1955

Aerial Photographs of Sugar Creek Audubon Nature Sanctuary



1967



1994

Aerial Photographs of Sugar Creek Audubon Nature Sanctuary



2007

