

The Grace Teninga Discovery Trail

Along this moderately strenuous 2-mile loop trail to the dune top and back, you will find many points of interest about the sand prairie ecosystem. Here are 12 to discover. Enjoy your walk and happy exploring!

The trail begins at the boot brush station and heads to the northwest. Before hiking the trail, please be sure to use the boot brush station to remove any weed seeds which might be on the bottom of your soles.

1. Rattlesnake master (*Eryngium yuccifolium*) Looking a bit like a yucca plant but actually in the carrot family, this beautiful yet prickly plant can be found in prairies and open woodlands throughout the eastern US. The brilliant white flowers bloom in late summer, and are a favorite nectaring plant of butterflies. This plant can grow up to 6’ tall!



2. Pricklypear cactus (*Opuntia humifusa*) This native species of cactus is found in open sand and dry areas in Indiana, including Kankakee Sands and the coastal dunes of Lake Michigan. In July, it produces a brilliant yellow bloom. Look, but don’t touch. The fine, almost invisible spines of this cactus are barbed and do hurt.



3. Controlling Invasive Species The southeast portion of this unit is currently in agricultural production. From 2002 to 2013 this area was part of the prairie restoration, but was being overrun by bird’s foot trefoil (*Lotus corniculatus*), one of the most aggressive and difficult to control invasive, non-native plant species in our area. Bird’s foot trefoil is a legume that has clover-like leaves and clusters of bright yellow flowers. It quickly forms vegetative mats which shade out other plants and prevent anything else from growing. This is referred to as a “monoculture” and is harmful to the diverse wildlife of the prairie. Despite multiple years of intensive herbicide treatment, the plants continued to grow and set seed. When no other means of control are effective, a drastic measure like till-farming can be utilized for several years to eradicate live plants and any remaining seeds, and to

ensure the invasive plant does not spread.

4. New Jersey Tea (*Ceanothus americanus*) This shrubby perennial can grow to 3’ tall and is found throughout the eastern and midwestern US. It blooms in bunches of small white flowers (it’s also known as “wild snowball”) and is a favorite of many insects. In the fall, the seeds cure, and a capsule forms and pops open when ready.



5. Beach wormwood (*Artemisia caudata*) Occurring in dry sandy soils, beach wormwood and other sages were used both medicinally and ceremonially by Native Americans. This particular variety grows to 3’ tall and is found throughout the US and Canada. Beach wormwood is used by many animals for food, and its thin frosty leaves are reminiscent of an evergreen.



6. Wetland If you look to the northeast corner of the area, you will notice a difference in the types of plants growing there. This small area stays relatively wet all year long, providing habitat for wetland plants. This area is a great example of the diversity of restoration plantings that we are undertaking at the Efroymsen Restoration—everything from dry upland prairies to low wetlands.

7. Oak Sapling (*Quercus veluntina*) In this area, the black oak is the predominant savanna tree. A savanna could be described as a prairie with a few scattered trees. One day, this little oak sapling will grow up and oversee its very own acre of open prairie.



8. Roundheaded bush clover (*Lespedeza capitata*) This plant is in the bean family and flowers in late summer. It prefers drier soils, and has a taproot up to 7’ long, making it extremely drought-resistant. Historically used for a variety of medicinal purposes, bush clover has undergone pharmaceutical testing in modern times.

9. Little bluestem (*Schizachyrium scoparium*) This short stature prairie grass is one of the most widely distributed native grasses in North America. Little bluestem boasts beautiful blue-green leaves in summer and a deep, rusty color with fluffy white seed-heads in fall. It typically grows to 3’ tall and prefers medium to dry soil.



10. Sand Blow Sand blows occur where there is deep sand and thin plant cover. High winds, common in the prairie, routinely expose these areas, leaving open dune-like expanses that attract specialized plants and animals. All the sand at Kankakee Sands was deposited more than 12,000 years ago, when glacial melt-water rushed down the Kankakee River valley, depositing its sediment in the area now known as the Kankakee River Basin. Please stay on the trail, as exposed areas like these are very fragile.

11. Plains pocket gopher (*Geomys pinetis*) This burrowing rodent (aptly named as its cheeks are actually big furry pockets) creates tunnels through the soil, which helps to aerate plant roots. It digs and pushes the soil ahead of it, and when too much soil accumulates, the pocket gopher pushes the soil up out of the ground forming the tell-tale sandy mounds. This type of soil disturbance creates an opportunity for more plants to grow and provides homes for other species.



12. Wild quinine (*Parthenium integrifolium*) This prairie plant blooms throughout the summer in clusters of bright, white button-looking flowers. It can reach four feet tall, and was used medicinally by Native Americans and early settlers to treat burns and aches. It occurs throughout the eastern US, but only as far west as Wisconsin and Arkansas.



The Nature Conservancy



The mission of The Nature Conservancy is to conserve the lands and waters on which all life depends. To learn more, visit [nature.org/indiana](https://www.nature.org/indiana).

Grace Teninga Discovery Trail

Kankakee Sands



The Nature Conservancy

Protecting nature. Preserving life.

Welcome to the Grace Teninga Discovery Trail

Welcome to the Grace Teninga Discovery Trail at the Efroymsen Prairie at Kankakee Sands, owned and managed by The Nature Conservancy (TNC). The 7,800-acre Efroymsen Prairie strategically connects four established nature preserves. Kankakee Sands is a prairie-savanna complex in northwest Indiana and northeast Illinois. Nearly 25,000 acres of remnant and restored lands across state borders are protected by TNC and partner organizations.

What to look for along the Discovery Trail

The plant and animal species along this trail are abundant and diverse. Some of the commonly seen or heard species are listed below. Let us know if you find something of interest! Leave your comments at the visitor information area under the silo shelter across the parking area from the trailhead.

Birds: Field sparrow, grasshopper sparrow, lark sparrow, meadowlark, red-winged blackbird, red tail hawk, rough-legged hawk, turkey vulture, wild turkey

Reptiles and Amphibians: Chorus frog,

Eastern box turtle, legless lizard, leopard frog, milk snake

Plants: Lance-leaved coreopsis (*Coreopsis lanceolata*), showy tick trefoil (*Desmodium canadense*), rattlesnake master (*Eryngium yuccifolium*), sweet everlasting (*Gnaphalium obtusifolium*), western sunflower (*Helianthus occidentalis*), round-headed bushclover (*Lespedeza capitata*), wild bergamot (*Monarda fistulosa*), prickly pear cactus (*Opuntia humifusa*), foxglove beardtongue (*Penstemon digitalis*), obedient plant (*Physostegia virginiana*), yellow coneflower (*Ratibida pinnata*), little bluestem (*Schizachyrium scoparium*), Indian grass (*Sorghastrum nutans*)

Insects: Ruby meadowhawk dragonfly, regal fritillary butterfly (pictured)



Trail Rules and Safety Tips

Pack out your litter, and leave the plants and wildflowers for others to enjoy.

No ATVs, dirt bikes, camping or horseback riding. Pets must be leashed and under control at all times. Please remove all pet wastes.

Be mindful of hunting seasons and notices of prescribed burning when visiting the Kankakee Sands area.



Protecting nature. Preserving life.

Enjoy your visit to Grace Teninga Discovery Trail! Be a part of the future of Kankakee Sands by volunteering and/or making a donation.

Learn more at nature.org/kankakeesands. The Nature Conservancy depends on the support of people like you who enjoy Indiana's natural places.

