

# Map & Guide

**1** You are looking at a 30-acre restored prairie purchased by the Belwin Conservancy in 1990 from John Sauers. At that time, a century of farming had taken its toll on this landscape. The plants and animals that depend on the prairie had vanished, small wetlands on the landscape were filled in and trees grew up around the edges.

Active restoration of this prairie began in 1994. What you see today is the product of years of careful management including prescribed burns, seed plantings and ongoing invasive species control.

**2** When the Sauers property was under active agricultural production, runoff from rain-water created large gullies. Years of erosion and soil loss from the field above filled in this small wetland. Look for the gullies leading towards this small wetland as you walk through this low area.

**3** Please stop and enjoy the sights and sounds that nature has to offer.

*“On the prairie, what you are left with is the bare truth, the land pared down to the bone, the basic dirt and grass and sky that shape the lives that play out upon it.”*  
—Tom Groneberg, *The Secret Life of Cowboys*

**4** This large 34-acre prairie was purchased by the Belwin Conservancy in 1995 and restored in 1997. A healthy prairie is balanced between grasses and flowers. This prairie is dominated by grasses but the flowers are moving in naturally. The makeup of all prairies changes from year to year, particularly following prescribed burns.

**5** Stop and enjoy the view from this high vantage point. Look at the three thermometers here. They are placed 0, 3, and 18 inches below ground.

Soil temperatures change as the ground is warmed by the sun. Whereas deeper soil tempera-

tures fluctuate monthly or seasonally, surface temperatures change throughout the day. This spot receives direct sunlight all day long, yet note how the temperatures differ.

Soil temperature is critical to the health and productivity of prairie. It affects plant growth, bud burst or leaf fall, rates of decomposition and chemical, physical and biological processes in the soil.

**6** On the Sauers farm, efforts were made to mitigate massive soil losses by establishing plantations of Red and White Pine. Today, these trees grow tall and provide a cool and open environment that we enjoy. Sadly, these species of trees are not native in this part of Minnesota. They provide almost no food or habitat for the plants and animals that live here.

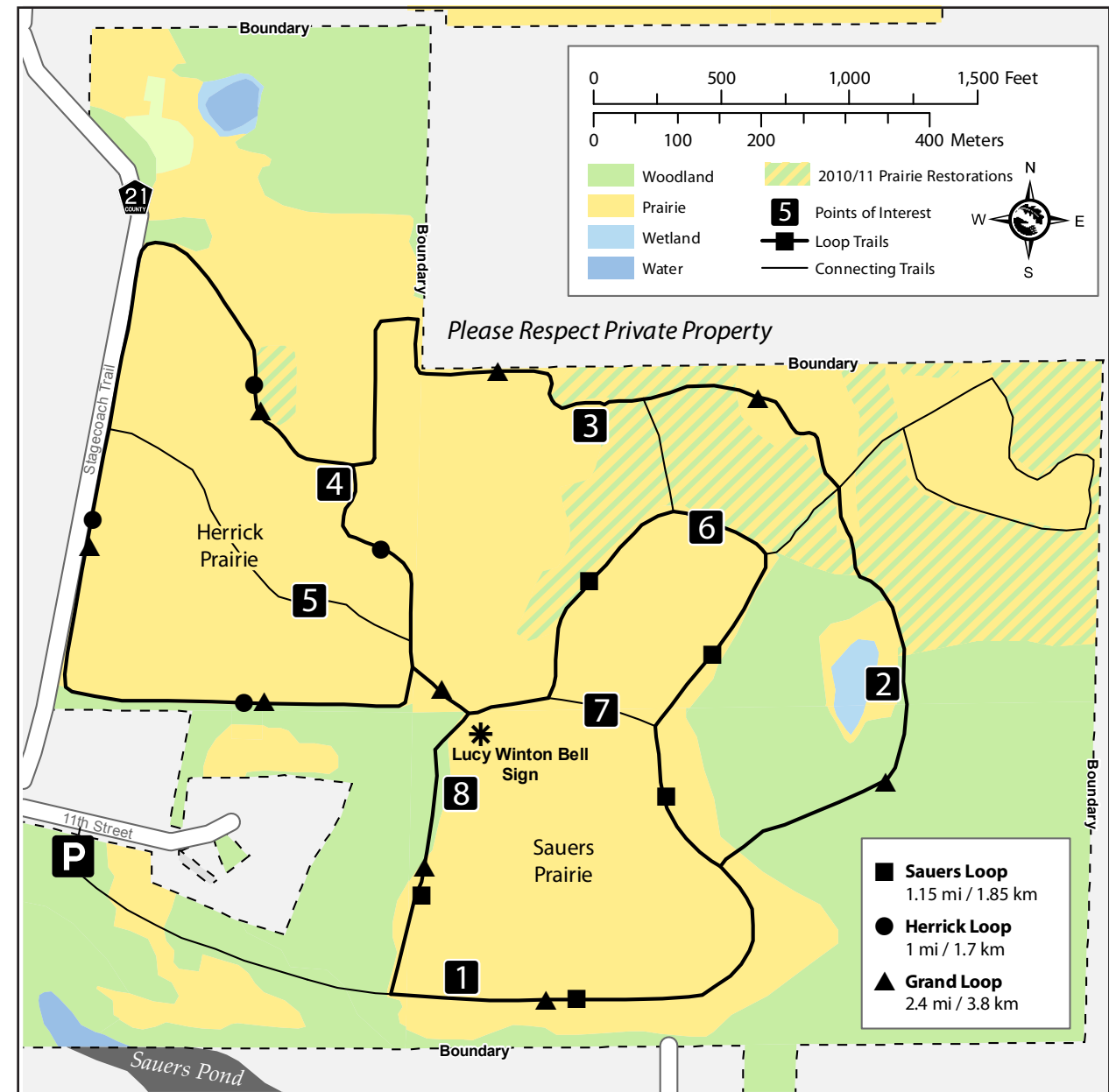
The Belwin Conservancy is working to replace these stands of non-native trees with restored prairie that does provide food and habitat for the plants and animals that live in this area. In 2010, the trees in this section of the Stagecoach Prairies Natural Area were removed and native prairie is being re-established

**7** At this spot in the midst of the prairie, stop, look and listen for grassland birds. These small, secretive birds are voracious eaters of insects and seeds. Through their droppings they are also important dispersers of seed.

As their prairie habitat has been lost, so too have many species of grassland birds become threatened. Many of these birds are ground nesters and ground feeders, thus they are vulnerable to a wide variety of threats.

The prairies at the Belwin Conservancy provide a critical home for these birds. Look for them perching on the grass, calling, flying and diving around you. You may see Clay-Colored Sparrows, Bluebirds, Field Sparrows, Swallows, Song Sparrows and more.

**8** The open prairie does not offer the protection of trees or shrubs. Many animals retreat underground to escape predators and weather. These animals do a great service to the prairie as



they burrow. Seeds are dispersed and the soil is mixed and enriched. As you walk, look for signs of these and other creatures:

**Plains Pocket Gophers** create dirt mounds and tunnels under the roots of the prairie plants.

**13-lined ground squirrels** maintain paths through the grass to their small tunnel entrances.

**Ants** are indispensable to the prairie. Their tunnels allow easy infiltration of water and oxygen. Through their food supplies they transport a lot of seeds and nutrients underground.

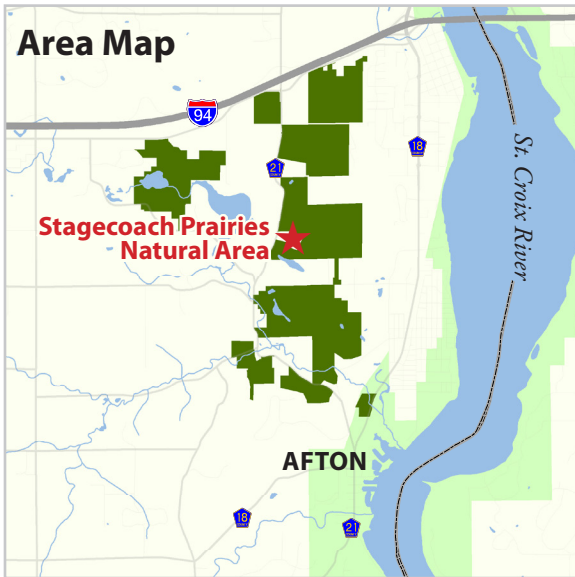
**Dung Beetles** gather scat for their larvae to feed on as they grow. Look down and you may see this small dark beetle rolling dung to its burrow.

**THE BELWIN CONSERVANCY** is working to protect the St. Croix Valley through land conservation, ecological restoration and by inspiring our connection to the natural world.

Our 1,364 acre preserve includes oak savannas and woodlands, tallgrass prairie, wetlands and fens. It is home to numerous rare and threatened plants and animals.

The Belwin Conservancy is a nonprofit organization and urgently needs your support. You can join the Belwin Conservancy any time on our website – [www.belwin.org](http://www.belwin.org).

Membership dollars directly support our work on the Stagecoach Prairies Natural Area and elsewhere on our preserve. Join today and help us protect what you love about where you live.



**BELWIN  
CONSERVANCY**

*Inspiring through Nature*

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# Stagecoach Prairies Natural Area Walking Trails



**BELWIN CONSERVANCY**

8/7/2011

## Welcome

Welcome to the Belwin Conservancy's Stagecoach Prairies Natural Area. This 280-acre property has over four and a half miles of trails ready for you to explore any time of the year on foot or on skis.

This is just one part of the Belwin Conservancy's preserve, currently over 1,300 acres in size.

Whether you're taking a walk in the summer or cross-country skiing in the winter, enjoy your time here. This is a unique place. It is a place for you to reconnect with nature and enjoy the peace and quiet that comes with it.

## Rules

The Stagecoach Prairies Natural Area is irreplaceable and is protected and managed principally for the plants and animals that call this place home. The Belwin Conservancy puts considerable effort into preserving and restoring the woodlands, wetlands and prairies found here. We therefore ask that you observe these rules and help us protect what makes this place special.

Unless otherwise posted, the Stagecoach Prairies Natural Area is **open during daylight hours every day of the year**. The only permitted entrance is from the parking area located on 11th Street. Please only park in the designated parking area.

For the enjoyment of everyone, the following are never allowed: **Littering, Fires, Camping, Hunting, Biking, Horses, Motorized Vehicles, Picnicking, Weapons, Removal of Vegetation or Picking of Flowers.**

**Dogs are permitted so long as they are leashed at all times.** Dogs are very disruptive to the ground-nesting birds that live in the prairie—many of which are threatened. **Pick up all dog waste and dispose of it off-site.** There are no facilities here.

If you have any questions, or would like to let us know about a problem, please contact us.

***"Take only Pictures, Leave only Footprints"***

## Something for Every Season Winter

During the winter months, watch for signs of animal life. Tracks in the snow, scat and browse can all be found if you look carefully.

When the ground is frozen solid, sometimes we will use the opportunity to do restoration projects that would otherwise tear up or compact the ground in summer.

## Spring

As the snow retreats, life returns to the Stagecoach Prairies Natural Area. The calls of frogs and migratory birds herald the return of spring.

During the springtime, the Belwin Conservancy routinely conducts prescribed burns around our preserve. Look for newly burned prairies and watch as they regenerate.

## Summer

This is wildflower season. Enjoy the riot of colors as different species of plants come into bloom throughout the summer.

Stop and visit the bison herd at our observation platform on Division Street (1.5 miles north on Stagecoach Trail). Take note of how much more variety there is on that prairie compared to here. That is the influence of the bison.

During the summer, we are typically active hand pulling and using mechanical means to control invasive species.

## Fall

The colors of fall are well represented here. Look not only at the trees, but enjoy the changing colors of the prairie grasses.

You may encounter us this time of year on our combine. We use it to harvest prairie seed which we plant elsewhere on the preserve. This is part of our comprehensive restoration effort.