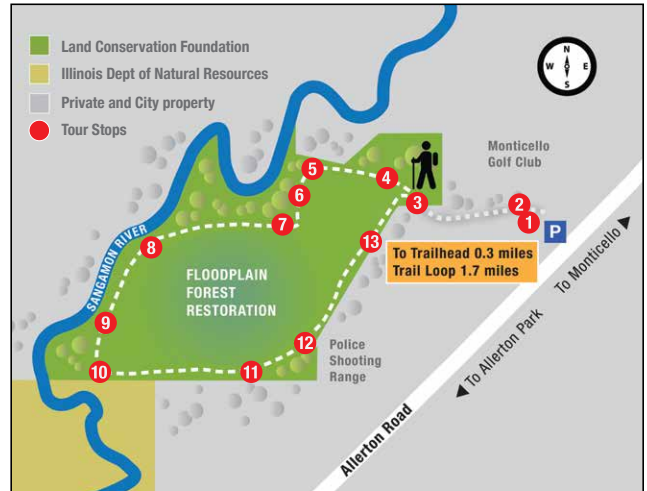


# Bruce Hannon Levee Trail Tour

The Prairie State Hike App offers an interactive version of this tour. Before your visit, download the app and tour at a location with a strong internet connection.

**STOP 1 Welcome!** Follow the edge of the golf course 0.3 miles, then turn right into the woods for the 1.7-mile trail loop. Most of the trail is fairly level. The final quarter mile of the loop is on a slope with more difficult footing. You may explore the river near the trail, but please respect private property.



## STOP 2 Insects

Insects are essential to the web of life here:

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They pollinate flowers, break down dead plants, and provide lunch for birds and animals. You may spot dragonflies, moths, beetles, and other insects as you walk.

Colorful butterflies such as monarchs, sulfurs, and buckeyes (pictured) enjoy sunny meadows and prairie flowers. In early spring, you may see a red admiral butterfly on a tree. Keep an eye out for bees as well. Nearby Champaign County has about 300 kinds of bees!

Arthropods such as crayfish, centipedes, and spiders are also related to insects.

**FUN FACT:** Insects rule! For every human on earth, there are at least a million insects.

To reach the trailhead, follow the tree line along the golf course.

## STOP 3 (TRAILHEAD) Tune in to Nature

As you hike, stop and look down...look up...and listen for frog calls and birds. At any moment, something new could surprise you. You may see turkey vultures overhead, or a nuthatch hopping down a tree trunk headfirst!

Under your feet, watch for clues about nearby trees, such as the black walnut hulls here at the trailhead. In the spring, look for wildflowers like spring beauty, trout lily, and toothwort. Poison ivy and stinging nettles are also important to watch out for!

You may see signs of animals, like beaver tooth marks on trees or animal tracks in mud. A hole in the ground may be an animal's home. Can you find the groundhog (woodchuck) burrow near this stop?

*Descend to the right to start the Levee Trail loop.*

## STOP 4 Trees, Flowers & Fungi

The floodplain is always changing as the water rises and falls. The high-water mark is often visible on floodplain trees, which can survive for a time with "wet feet."

Along the trail, you'll find a mix of American sycamore, hackberry, silver maple, cottonwood, and oak trees. Summer and fall wildflowers may include goldenrod, jewelweed, and sneezeweed.

It's easiest to spot mushrooms and fungus when the leaves are off the trees. Many have names that describe how they look. Can you guess which ones are pheasant back, sulfur shelf, and false turkey tail?

**FUN FACT:** Dead trees are good! Called snags, they offer wildlife shelter and food. And as they decay, they enrich the soil for new young trees.

*As you walk on, watch on your left for fire damage on several trees near the trail, possibly from a lightning strike.*

## STOP 5 Birds

Why is this a good place for spotting birds? They like bigger trees, and this area is also usually wet. Wetlands, floodplains, and grasslands are rich sources of food and habitat for wildlife.

Look and listen! Signs of birds are all around—bird calls, woodpecker holes, heron nests, and tree-tapping by nuthatches and woodpeckers.

In the grassland, you might spot red-winged blackbirds or hear meadowlarks. Hawks may soar overhead.

In the woods, listen for nuthatches, flickers, pileated woodpeckers, and barred owls. Watch for a flash of wings or movement on the trees or water. You might see creepers, goldfinches, wood ducks, bluebirds, or great blue herons. In late March to early April, look for the herons' rugged stick nests against the white bark of sycamore trees.

**FUN FACT:** Great blue herons hunt for food both day and night! A large number of rod-type photoreceptors in their eyes gives them good night vision.

*As you go on, watch on your right, close to the river, for trees gnawed by beavers.*

## STOP 6 Moving Water

In the 1800s, European settlers saw the land in Illinois as "a garden four hundred miles long, and one hundred and fifty miles wide." But much of the land was swampy. Before it could be farmed, it had to be drained.

So a richly diverse ecosystem of prairie, wetland, and woodland gave way to farmland. Levees like the one here were built to keep floodplains dry. Miles of field tiles (clay cylinders) were laid underground to carry water to drainage ditches. In her 1883 *History of Piatt County*, Emma C. Piatt said, "It will not be long before every foot of soil in this county will be under cultivation."

On this site, we are turning back time. Culverts in the levee let the area flood naturally again. A forest of native trees adapted to flooding will flourish here.

**FUN FACT:** The east side of the river, where you stand, was a lifesaver for Native Americans who lived here in the 1700s. Why? When prairie fires spread with a wind from the west, the river would stop the flames, keeping the people on the far side safe.

*The next two stops are farther apart (about 0.1 mile).*

## STOP 7 Animals

Many of the inhabitants of this reserve may be hard to spot. Some are small. Some move under cover or in the treetops. Some live underground or in the water. Some may be camouflaged to match their background.

Many only come out at dawn or dusk, or can only be seen as they migrate through the area. Animals who live here include white-tailed deer, fox squirrels, painted turtles, Fowler's toad, coyotes, and raccoons.

Even if you don't see them, you may find signs of their presence.



ELIZABETH OTTO

See how many of these you can note: bird and frog calls; paw prints in the snow or mud; scat (feces) on the trail; woodpecker and insect holes in trees; bird nests and groundhog burrows; trails through vegetation; clumps of deer hair in the brush; feathers on the ground; caches of nuts in a tree; and beaver tooth marks on trees. Pictured here are the unusually large holes made by pileated woodpeckers.

*The trail narrows ahead. The next stop is approximately 0.25 miles away.*

## STOP 8

### Creating a Wildlife Corridor

Like a hallway, a wildlife corridor is a long, narrow area of preserved land. Corridors often connect larger parks or nature preserves.

In Illinois, many natural areas are isolated patches where it's hard for wildlife to thrive. When we create corridors, animals have more room to feed and find new mates, for healthy, diverse populations. Corridors help animals move safely, avoiding roads, farm equipment, and humans.

Corridors also give humans more space to hike, canoe, and be in tune with nature.

This reserve is the keystone in LCF's vision for a continuous corridor of protected land along the Sangamon River, through Monticello. This site connects 2,300 acres of state-owned land to the south (including Allerton Park) and land owned by the City of Monticello to the east and north.

LCF is working to obtain additional land to complete this corridor. You can help by becoming a member of LCF. See our website for details.

**FUN FACT:** In the American West and other places, bridges or underpasses are being built just for animals, helping them cross highways safely.

## STOP 9

### Aquifer & Wetlands

Look straight down. There's "fossil water" under you!

If you could dig down far enough, you'd hit a huge layer of wet sand. That's the Mahomet Aquifer—an ancient lake bed that was covered by a layer of soil as glaciers retreated 13,000 years ago. It's a critical source of water for 850,000 people—and some of the cleanest water in the world!

To preserve the aquifer, we must keep it pollution-free and replace the water we use. The restored forest here can help. After heavy rains, this forested wetland holds floodwater like a sponge, trapping soil, pollutants, and fertilizer runoff. Without the wetland, pollutants would go straight into the river—and pollute rivers downstream, too.

Instead, the floodplain acts like a giant filter. Microorganisms break down chemicals. Plants absorb excess fertilizer. The filtered water soaks in slowly, helping to refill (recharge) the aquifer. Wetlands also provide wonderful wildlife habitat!

**FUN FACT:** Rain that falls today will take about 3,000 years to seep down to the aquifer. The water we drink from it today is up to 10,000 years old!

## STOP 10

### Riches of the River

The Sangamon is a tributary of the Illinois River. Its name comes from a Pottawatomie word meaning "where there is plenty to eat." Parts of the Sangamon are on the Illinois Natural Areas Inventory as a stream with a high diversity of aquatic species, especially freshwater mussels. Mussels have been used historically for food, tools, buttons, and producing cultured pearls. They're also called the "livers of the river" for their amazing ability to filter water.



MELISSA RECORDS

Seventeen species of mussels have been found in this reserve.

Just imagine what they look like, with these picturesque names: Creeper, Deertoe, Fawnsfoot, Fragile papershell, Mapleleaf, Pimpleback, Pink heelsplitter, Pistol-grip, Rock pocketbook, Threehorn wartyback, and Wabash pigtoe.

**FUN FACT:** Freshwater mussel larvae (glochidia) hitchhike on the gills or fins of fish while they are developing into juvenile mussels. When they are old enough, they let go of the fish and fall into the streambed to mature. Some mussels even have special adaptations to lure fish to them!

## STOP 11

### Frogs, Toads & Mudpuppies

This stop is at a lower elevation. Because it tends to be wetter here, you may hear frog calls in the spring. Look up! You may spot or hear a gray treefrog on a tree. Fowler's toads may also be spotted at this reserve.

Mudpuppies are foot-long salamanders (that's right, 12 inches long!) found all along the



Sangamon River. They have feathery red gills and never leave the water. They are important because they are the only host for the larvae of the salamander mussel.

You may also see reptiles such as painted turtles and black ratsnakes here.

**FUN FACT:** Mudpuppies can live up to 20 years. They are also known as Waterdogs, because of the barking sound they make.

*Just before Tour Stop 12, you'll come to an access clearing. Look to your left for the sign for Stop 12 (don't take the road to the right).*

## STOP 12

### Preservation People

The Land Conservation Foundation was founded in 2003 by people who recognized a need to focus on river corridors to enhance wildlife habitat and protect a clean water supply.

The land here was purchased in 2012 with support from individual donors and a grant from the Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation. Volunteers have planted more than 25,000 trees. Monticello High School FFA members and others have helped to prepare and maintain the trail.

Now it's your turn! Volunteering brings you closer to the land and lets you gain expertise from volunteer leaders. Check our website or contact us for details.

**FUN FACT:** In the 1960s, Bruce Hannon and other local scientists and citizens worked for 7 years to stop a proposed dam that would have flooded much of Allerton Park under a 24-mile-long reservoir. Future generations will benefit from what we preserve today!

*The trail is more rugged now, as it passes over an old landfill. Just before Tour Stop 13, you'll come to an access clearing. Look across the road for the sign for Stop 13. Don't take the road to the right or left; the trail continues through the woods.*

## STOP 13

### About the Land Conservation Foundation

This is the final tour stop. We're glad you're using this trail. Helping people enjoy and appreciate nature—especially in their own back yards—is an essential part of our mission.

LCF is a nonprofit focused on land threatened by development, particularly along creeks and river bottoms. We emphasize connecting corridors so wildlife can thrive. Most of our efforts are in Champaign and Piatt counties.

The Levee Trail is LCF's most significant restoration so far. Our other properties are Mettler Woods Nature Preserve, an upland forest remnant west of Clinton that is accessible by a level trail, and the Brady Property, 20 acres just east of Sangamon River Park in Piatt County.

To help people better understand our natural world, we encourage research and educational activities on our land. Check our online calendar for details about nature walks and other events.

*Continue on the trail until you get to the trailhead (Stop 3). Walk along the edge of the meadow, with the treeline to your left, to return to the parking area. \**