



Trumpeter Trail Nature Interpretive Guide

This guide will help you understand and appreciate how the forces of nature and man affect wildlife and their habitat (food, water, shelter and space) in central Wisconsin. The Trumpeter Trail auto tour is 14 miles long and takes approximately two hours to complete. A short-cut can be taken for those who have less time to view Sandhill. Follow the Trumpeter Trail and stop at each numbered post distinguished by the symbol that appears at the top right corner of the cover. The number on the post corresponds with the numbered stop in this handout. To help us reduce costs, please slip this handout into the drop-off box at the exit gate when you leave the property. Drive slowly and carefully. Enjoy, and please remember our DONATION BOX at the Trail entrance. Donations are used for trail maintenance and supplies, such as this handout.

Stop 1: Welcome To Sandhill - Sandhill Wildlife Area's gentle undulating land belies a violent past. This occurred when titanic forces settled mountains into seas, raised ocean bottoms, and sent meltwaters released from great continental glaciers that once lay 35 miles to the northeast to flood its plains, creating shallow lakes and numerous marshes. Today the DNR manages Sandhill as a wildlife oasis in a bustling world dominated by humans. From this office, we manage Sandhill, Wood County, and Meadow Valley Wildlife Areas and the Cranberry Creek Natural Area in neighboring Juneau and Monroe counties. Combined, the eight wildlife staff members at Sandhill manage 90,000 acres.

Stop 2: Watchable Wildlife Observation Tips - Wildlife are wild! Since they shy away from people, you may find the following tips useful:

- Look at the right time of day! Twilight- deer, coyotes, otter, beaver, waterfowl, cranes, raccoon -Mid Day- squirrels, songbirds, some waterfowl, hawks
- Look at the right time of year! Spring- migratory waterfowl, beaver, muskrat, frog choruses, drumming grouse, moths, wildflowers - Summer- fawns, bats, songbirds, reptiles -Fall- migratory waterfowl, cranes, eagles, deer, grouse -Winter- deer, grouse, coyote, rabbits, woodpeckers, owls

Stop 3: Wetlands - A Valuable Wildlife Commodity - Water . . . a necessity of life. All plants and animals need this fluid to stay alive. Sandhill receives about 32 inches of water in the form of rain and snow each year. Excess water runs off the land and collects in shallow basins throughout Sandhill. Marshes filter impurities from the runoff before it mingles with ground water below. Marshes also provide shelter for wildlife to protect them from bouts of "bad" weather and areas to hide from predators.

Wetland Wildlife Search...

- scan the marsh to your left. In early morning hours mallards, blue-wing teal and Canada geese frequent stretches of open water, or feed amongst the marsh grasses at the water's edge.
- search for the tell-tale flash of white amongst the distant willow scrub to your right and you may catch a glimpse of a fleeing white-tailed deer. Deer use the area between the oak island and the forest rim as a travel way and an escape route.

Stop 4: Swamp Buck Hiking Trail - Nestled on an oak upland between two marsh complexes is the trail head of Sandhill's Swamp Buck Trail. This trail takes the adventuresome off the "beaten path" through area forests, and over myriad marshes that look much the same as they did following the glacier's retreat 10,000 years ago. The trail ends at North Bluff, 3.5 miles from the trail head. The walk out and back takes 2 hours.

Stop 5: Pott's Field - The oak forest you just drove through originated in 1937. It was one of the few stands of timber left relatively unscathed by wildfires that repeatedly swept through the region in the early decades of the 1900s. Today, prairie grasses such as Little Bluestem, Big Bluestem, Indian grass and various forbs such as Spotted Mint and Bergamot have reclaimed the old field. Seed from this field is collected each fall with the help of students from area schools and is used to establish prairies elsewhere.

Stop 6: Bison and Butterflies - Listen! Hear the thunder? In the heat of a summer afternoon, as temperatures and humidity soar, thunderstorms develop. The thunder once heard in Midwestern prairies was often made by the stampeding of vast herds of bison. This 260 acre enclosure is home to a small herd of bison, a gift from Sandhill's previous owners, Wallace and Hazel Grange. We maintain the herd at 12 to 20 head to avoid overgrazing the grasses and forbs that grow in this large opening. The federally endangered Karner Blue butterfly and the Dusky Elfyn butterfly are both dependent on the wild lupine that blooms here in late May through June. Through a vigorous management program of burning and mowing of woody growth, the staff at Sandhill are able to maintain the semi-shade to full sunlight conditions that wild lupine prefer.

Stop 7: Oak Barrens Restoration Project - Animals and plants found in Wisconsin's oak barrens are among the rarest in the state. We are taking steps here to improve Sandhill's barrens community. The Bison Prairie is a part of the oak barrens community, and while it looks expansive at 260 acres, it is really quite small. Beginning in 1996, steps were taken to double the size of the barrens. Most of this expansion took place to the north of the existing area, and consisted of cutting and removing the timber, burning slash piles, and planting prairie grass and forb seeds.

Stop 8: Porcupine Den - Follow the foot trail a short distance and view a porcupine's den. The quills of this large rodent are modified hairs, and are used as a flawless defense against would-be predators. Solitary by nature, these spiny creatures returned to the Central Forest region in the early 1970s when the second-growth forest trees became old and large enough to provide not only the food they seek (bark in winter, berries and twigs in summer), but hollows used as shelters during the cold winter months. Dens are normally occupied November through April. They venture out 2 or 3 times daily to feed in nearby trees. Porkies are not among nature's cleanest creatures: note the pile of dung spilling out over the entrance to the den.

Stop 9: Wetland Paradise - Rainwater flows off the surrounding landscape and collects in Sandhill's shallow basins. These marshlands are covered by grasses, sedges, bulrushes, and cat-tails while willow and alder brush rim their edges. Sandhill's wetlands attract a wide variety of animal life. Waterfowl, herons, bitterns, black terns, red-wing blackbirds, and marsh wrens are common. Secretive mammals, active primarily at dawn and dusk are also home on our marshes. Watch for the wavering "V" on the water's surface which may reveal a beaver, muskrat, mink, or otter.

Stop 10: Lands that Support Forest Growth - Sandhill's soils were created by the washout from the great continental glaciers that stalled 10,500 years ago. Lake Wisconsin formed from its melt waters and finely sorted sands were deposited on the lakebed. As the lake drained, it left an expanse of flat, swampy land covering parts of central Wisconsin. These sandy soils are "nutrient poor", and trees have a hard time achieving optimal growth here at Sandhill. Sun-loving tree species like aspen, oak, and pine favor Sandhill's dry, sandy uplands. In years of drought, ground water drops beneath the reach of tree roots. Searing heat robs branches and leaves of moisture and some of the trees become weakened and die.

Stop 11: Rock of Ages Past - North Bluff, a lone sentinel in an expanse of flat land, rises 200 feet above the surrounding land. Its weather-beaten brow has withstood an assault of 1 billion years of geologic and weathering processes. Its volcanic rhyolitic rock was forged by the same forces that formed the Baraboo Hills to the south and Rib Mountain to the north. Its bulk gradually sank under hundreds of feet of sea water that flooded Wisconsin's landscape for 300 million years. Sandy sea sediments slowly piled up, burying North Bluff. Finally, the Earth's crust heaved giving rise to a land smoothed by ocean sediments. Wind, water and glaciers attacked, liberating North Bluff from its sandstone tomb, grain by grain. North Bluff stands triumphant today surrounded by a landscape teeming with life. It serves as a beacon, guiding birds in their yearly migrations. From the tower atop its peak, visitors may gaze at the sandstone escarpment to the south and west, and scattered outliers remnants of a sea floor that once imprisoned the old Bluff.

Stop 12: Grange's Sandhill Game Farm - Wallace and Hazel Grange purchased this property in the 1930s and developed the Sandhill Game Farm. Wallace's interest in wildlife started as a boy. To attend high school, Grange boarded at Ladysmith, 10 miles from the family farm. On weekends he would hike home, taking notes of wildlife along the way. He was the first Superintendent of Game Management for the Wisconsin Conservation Department (now DNR) from 1928 to 1930. Locals became acquainted with Grange, who searched for sandhill cranes and other vanishing forms of wildlife. During the years the Granges operated the Game Farm, they sold surplus deer, waterfowl and grouse to restock populations in many eastern and southern states, and to adorn the menus of fancy New York and Chicago restaurants. The Grange's spent 25 years at Sandhill and sold this living legacy to the State of Wisconsin in 1962 upon retiring. Wallace died in 1987 and was inducted into Wisconsin's Conservation Hall of Fame in 1993. Hazel died in 1997.

Stop 13: Marshland Wonderland - Around 1900, agricultural agents believed the black peat soils of area marshlands were very fertile. Special Drainage Districts were created and hundreds of miles of drainage ditches like this one were dug by steam dredges throughout central Wisconsin. Today the DNR manages these marshes to provide food and shelter for waterfowl that use them as "rest areas" on their spring and fall migrations.

Stop 14: Ghosts from the Past - Hundreds of families from Illinois, Indiana and Iowa flocked here in the 1880s and 1890s lured by accounts of cheap land. On these sterile, sandy soils they raised corn, rye, wheat, chickens, cattle, and hogs. Droughts, floods, insects, summer frosts, diseases, and fires were the constant companion of these hardy people. Many sold wild blueberries or cut wiregrass to make throw rugs from area marshes. Some who focused on cranberries secured fortunes. Most abandoned their farms when the Great Depression struck. They returned to the support of family and friends in surrounding states. This homestead was originally settled by the Gallagher family. They were unable to afford the taxes, so this farm reverted to the county around 1930. The house was later moved to a Babcock townsite. Rare cliffbreak ferns now cling to the inner surface of the foundation, demonstrating the hardiness of Mother Nature in reclaiming the wild. Salamanders and other creatures seeking cool, dank environments utilize these old foundations to hibernate. This foundation remains as a stark reminder of failed dreams and the realization that not every corner of the world is suited to farming. Those wishing to view the expansive Gallagher Marsh can park here and take the short hike to the Marsh Observation Tower.

Stop 15: Control that Water! - Man-made flowages dot the landscape at Sandhill. They are beneficial to waterfowl, herons, cranes, loons, cormorants, and other wildlife. Specially constructed culverts pass beneath the earthen dike that forms this road. Water is held back by the dike and by "stop logs" stacked up in the vertical pipe called a "riser." This system relies on gravity to move the water. Remove logs from the riser and the water level drops. Add logs and water levels rise. In spring and summer, the water is drawn down to grow foods important to migratory birds and other wildlife.

Stop 16: Winter Deer Lessons - Wintertime is the season of the "Grim Reaper" for animals that neither migrate nor hibernate. Food is hard to come by. Cold weather saps warmth and energy from wildlife that remain active. To remain healthy, white-tailed deer must eat 5 to 6 pounds of browse each day, or 600 pounds of buds, twigs, and bark each winter. They are fond of white pine seedlings. Several hundred pines were planted on both sides of the Trail in 1962, but the fence (right) prevents access to the plantings. Notice the difference between the two! Deer affect forest growth. In the absence of large predators like wolves or cougars, deer populations can explode, outstripping the forest of its growth, thereby changing the character of the forest. Managed deer hunts help keep deer numbers from increasing and damaging forest vegetation they and other forest inhabitants depend on for survival. Gun deer seasons are held nearly every year in November. Since 1990, Sandhill has been the site of the DNR's Learn to Hunt Deer program where youth receive training on hunting deer. About 200 youth and beginner adults complete Hunter Safety training and attend a special workshop through the Sandhill Outdoor Skills Center. From 50 to 60 deer are harvested annually by these novice hunters.

Stop 17: Sandhill Deer Research and the Fence - Sandhill is enclosed by 17 miles of this 9-foot tall, deer-proof fence. The fence makes it easier to tally the number of deer living on Sandhill because it eliminates movements onto or off of the property. Ninety percent of the deer born on Sandhill are eventually accounted for by hunters. Ten percent fall prey to predators or die from mishaps. Researchers "reconstruct" the herd by analyzing the sex and age of deer that have died. It generally takes 8 to 10 years to account for all the deer born in any one year. However, the oldest deer recovered in Sandhill lived to be 15 years.

Exit Gate - As you can surmise, land, water, and weather will continue to shape Sandhill, but it is people such as yourself that will control its destiny. We who practice wildlife management hope that your tour of Sandhill was enjoyable and educational. Trash and recycling receptacles are conveniently located at the exit gate for your use. Use them, and help keep our trail and area highways clean.

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