

# WELCOME TO THE LAKE DISTRICT PRESERVE

## BACKGROUND

The primary goal of the Lake Ripley Management District is to maintain the health and quality of Lake Ripley. We strive to achieve this goal by, in part, protecting and restoring wetlands around the lake. Wetlands absorb flood waters, filter and cleanse polluted runoff, and provide valuable fish and wildlife habitat. Unfortunately, decades of land clearing, farming and development have destroyed two-thirds (over 1,000 acres) of the wetlands that were once common throughout the Lake Ripley watershed. Today, our remaining wetlands are under siege, mainly due to a combination of continued development pressure and irresponsible land-use practices.

## ACQUIRING THE PRESERVE

In 1997, the Lake District purchased 100 acres of farmed and degraded wetlands adjoining the inlet tributary to Lake Ripley. The purchase was made using a \$120,000 DNR Lake Protection Grant and \$47,000 in private donations. Major donors included the Cambridge Foundation, Ducks Unlimited, Jefferson County Pheasants Forever, Fort Atkinson Wisconsin Conservation Club, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Superior Services of Fort Atkinson, Oakland Conservation Club, and John Probst and Sons.

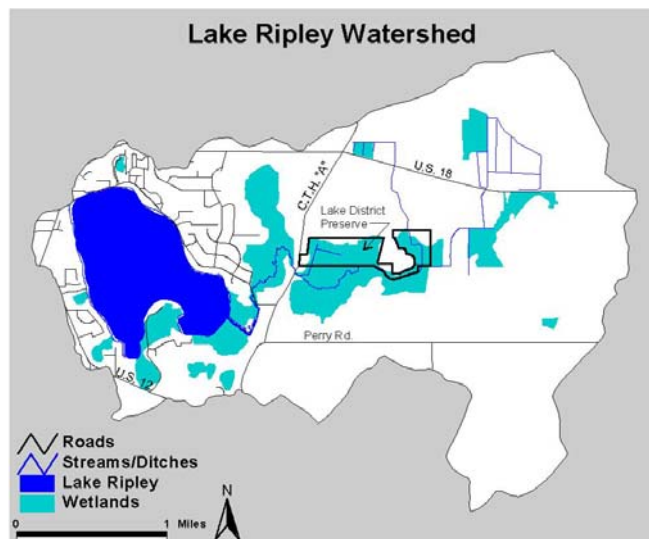
At the time of purchase, the wetlands were severely degraded and had lost much of their functional value. Years of plowing, ditching and draining had taken their toll. Extensive drainage systems had been carved through the property, allowing farm runoff to bypass the natural wetland cleansing process. Instead, the ditches served as direct conduits for contaminated runoff flowing to the lake.

## RESTORATION

The next step was to develop and implement a restoration plan for the property. Objectives were to protect water quality and wildlife habitat, while offering opportunities for public access, environmental education and outdoor recreation. To date, major restoration efforts have involved “plugging” extensive drainage systems that connected to the lake’s only inlet. By closing nearly 9,000 feet (1.7 miles) of farm ditches, channelized runoff was re-diverted into thirsty wetland areas that were long deprived of this vital source of water. Other activities included creating three wetland “scrapes” (or shallow wildlife ponds) that now serve as sanctuaries for frogs, turtles, sandhill cranes, wood ducks, great blue herons and other wildlife. In addition, upland portions of the property were returned to a native tall-grass prairie. A colorful diversity of deep-rooting prairie grasses and wildflowers provide important habitat, and help the soil absorb rainfall while protecting it from erosion.

## EDUCATION AND RECREATION

In addition to its conservation and lake-protection benefits, the Preserve provides a host of educational and recreational opportunities for the public.



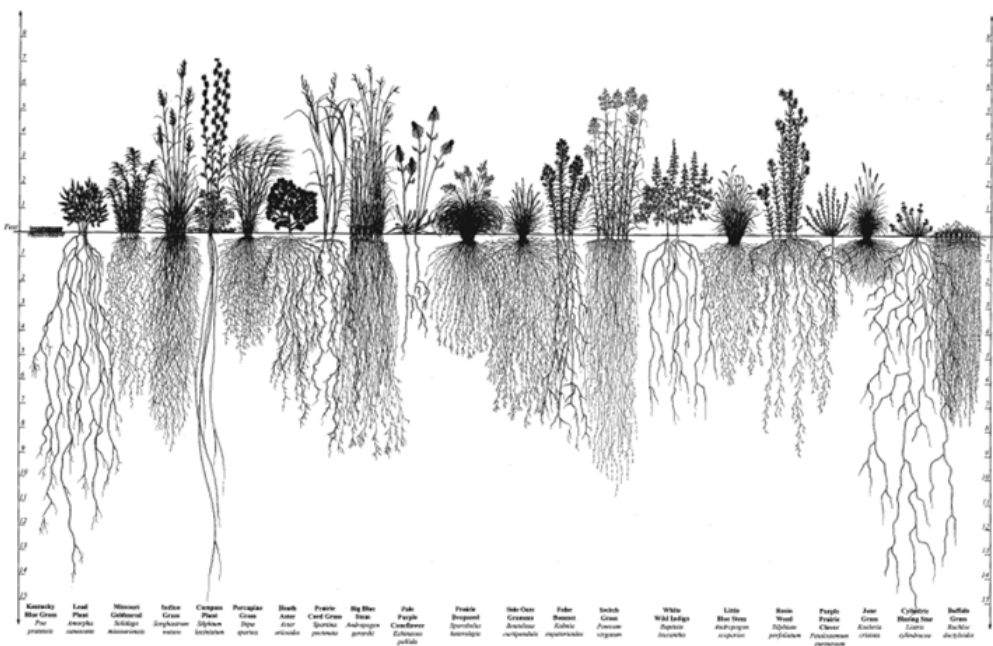


Visitors can explore the property using a 3/4-mile interpretive trail. The nature trail is linked to a wooden bridge that spans a small wetland scrape, as well as a hilltop observation deck featuring panoramic views of the marsh. Interpretive signs inform visitors of the unique flora and fauna that inhabit the area, and the many benefits of prairie and wetland ecosystems. Hunters, birdwatchers, hikers, school groups, nature enthusiasts and others can now experience this beautifully restored, 100-acre nature sanctuary that also serves to protect the health and quality of Lake Ripley.

Welcome and enjoy!

### WETLAND TRIVIA

- Inland wetlands include marshes and wet meadows dominated by herbaceous plants, and swamps dominated by shrubs or trees. Even wetlands that appear dry for significant parts of the year often provide critical habitat for wildlife adapted to breeding exclusively in these areas.
- Wetlands are the most biologically productive ecosystems in the world. 75% of Wisconsin wildlife and 43% of all endangered and threatened species rely on wetlands for part of their life cycles.
- Up to 92% of phosphorus, 95% of nitrogen, 90% of bacteria and 70% of sediment in storm runoff can be removed by a wetland.
- Wetlands reduce flooding by absorbing water like giant sponges. A 1-acre wetland can absorb up to 5 feet of water.
- One-quarter of the state (10 million acres) was once covered by wetlands. Half of these wetlands have since been destroyed.



### PRAIRIE TRIVIA

- Prairies once covered about 40% of the United States. Today, only 1% of the North American prairies still exist.
- Over 100 native plant species can occur in a prairie less than 5 acres in size.
- Prairie grasses average 6-8 feet in height, and can reach 10 feet tall.
- Some prairie plants have roots that extend 12 feet below the soil surface. These vast root systems help aerate the soil and allow it to soak up rain water. Fertile organic matter is added to the soil as roots decompose.