

# Ohio Natural Areas and Preserves

SPRING 2012  
Special Edition

## DAUGHMER PRAIRIE SAVANNAH – Ohio's Newest State Nature Preserve

If you like large, open-grown, majestic trees, you are going to love Daughmer Prairie Savannah, Ohio's newest state nature preserve. The huge bur oaks here are estimated at 150 to more than 250 years old.

Once common, prairie savannahs have become one of the rarest ecosystems in the Midwest. At 34 acres, Daughmer Prairie Savannah is thought to be the best and most intact of its kind remaining in the region. Historically, this plot was part of the Sandusky Plains, a 300 square mile area dominated by native tallgrass prairie and savannah at the time of earliest settlement. Encompassing parts of Marion, Wyandot and Crawford counties, the former Sandusky Plains is now highly productive farmland with only small remnants of prairie remaining including Daughmer Prairie Savannah, Killdeer Plains Wildlife Area, Claridon Railroad Prairie, and several other scattered roadside and railroad remnants.

The existence of tallgrass prairie in Ohio can be traced back to a time after the Wisconsin glacier, when a prolonged period of warmer and dryer weather created favorable conditions for establishment of grasslands rather than woodlands. After several thousand years, the climate once again became cooler with more rainfall that enabled trees to recolonize grasslands. Only where ideal conditions prevailed did tallgrass prairies continue to persist. The savannah represents the transition between prairie and forest along the margin of the prairie.

As the Ohio frontier was settled, large prairie grazers such as bison and elk disappeared, and prairie fires routinely set by American Indians were extinguished. Many former prairies became cropland, and prairie savannahs not cut down or grazed by domestic livestock reverted to woodlands.



Daughmer Prairie Savannah has never been plowed but was used for pasturing for as long as anyone can recall; initially by cattle and later by sheep. Although grazing has eliminated some characteristic prairie wildflowers and resulted in non-native plants getting a foothold in this otherwise pristine prairie, it seems to have played an essential role in preserving the open savannah.

Perhaps the most knowledgeable expert today on Daughmer Prairie Savannah is John J. Mack who in 2002 completed his master thesis about prairie remnants in the Sandusky Plains. What is especially significant about Daughmer is that it represents, with the exception of open oak-hickory woodlands, a miniature version of the entire Sandusky plains. In his thesis, Mack identifies five basic plant community types within Daughmer Prairie Savannah State Nature Preserve.

The oak savannah features the massive, ancient bur oaks. The mesic prairie community, occupying the better drained soils, is dominated primarily by big bluestem (*Andropogon gerardii*), Indian grass (*Sorghastrum nutans*), little bluestem (*Schizachyrium scoparium*), and panic grass (*Panicum virgatum*). Growing alongside these tall grasses are forbs, rushes and sedges including state listed species, Bicknell's sedge (*Carex bicknellii*) and Flatstemmed spike-rush (*Eleocharis compressa*).

On the more poorly drained soils are two distinctive types of wet prairie; one dominated by prairie cordgrass (*Spartina pectinata*), and the other featuring bluejoint-muhly grass (*Calamagrostis Canadensis* – *Muhlenbergia mexicana*). The wet prairie then grades into sedge meadow where water stands on the surface in spring. The dominant plants in the sedge meadow are lake sedge (*Carex lacustris*) and the state listed wheat sedge (*Carex atheroides*). Several very small but significant prairie pothole marshes are also present.



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Daughmer Prairie Savannah State Nature Preserve is a very special place, and it will take a great deal of work to keep it that way. Controlled burns will be needed every 2 to 4 years to perpetuate the prairie community. Invasive species including teasel, multiflora rose, Canada thistle, burdock and tree seedlings from non-savannah species will have to be removed by hand. Volunteers are needed to assist with these efforts. If you are interested, contact us to sign up as a DNAP volunteer to help maintain this and other state nature preserves. It is important and very rewarding work: an investment for this as well as future generations to come.

## How We Got Here

The **Ohio Natural Areas Act**, which passed in 1970, authorized the Department of Natural Resources to administer a system of State Nature Preserves and to acquire, dedicate, and accept the dedication of public and privately owned lands as preserves. It authorized ODNR to manage and protect them for educational and scientific use and for visitation by establishing rules and regulations governing their use. In 1975, the Division of Natural Areas and Preserves was established to provide the specialized management of these unique and often fragile natural areas.

The 135 nature preserves in the present system have been acquired in a variety of ways. Some have been purchased with capital improvement funds or tax check-off funds, others received by gift or gift/sales, and lastly, others by dedication where the landowner retains ownership of the land but agrees to manage their land according to the Articles of Dedication and the management plan developed for the preserve. The Division of Natural Areas and Preserves has the important responsibility to preserve and protect these areas from degradation so that they can be passed on to future generations unimpaired. This is especially true for those lands which were given as gifts or dedicated by private landowners since they gave the land or dedicated the areas to be preserved in perpetuity.

Preserves are areas primarily used for scientific research and education, unlike parks which allow picnicking, camping, boating, etc. Public uses of these areas are primarily for passive recreational pursuits such as bird watching, wildflower photography, and hiking the trails and boardwalks that are provided to protect the unique features of the preserves. The preserves must be properly managed and the dedicated preserves must be cared for to honor our commitment to the land donors and our obligation to taxpayers.

## Where We Are Now

With the difficult economic climate of the past several years, downsizing has been the trend for many agencies and businesses. The same has been true for DNAP. To keep important functions afloat, the Scenic Rivers Program was transferred to the ODNR Division of Watercraft in 2009, and the Natural Heritage Program was shifted to the ODNR Division of Wildlife in 2010. Preserve managers and daily operations have come under the umbrella of the ODNR Division of Parks and Recreation.

With financial support from watercraft licensing fees and canoe registrations, the Scenic Rivers Program has added staff and, with the help of volunteers, continues to provide stream quality monitoring and assessment. The Natural Heritage Database has been renamed

the Ohio Biodiversity Database and includes listings of rare, endangered and threatened species, along with significant natural features. The inventory staff have taken advantage of GPS technology to streamline the process, although keeping up with field work and reporting is a perpetual challenge. The Natural Heritage Database remains an invaluable tool for environmental assessments, and is made available to government entities and other land managers, researchers and environmental consultants. Requests for data as well as reports of new information on species occurrences can be made on-

line through the Wildlife or Nature Preserves portals at [ohiodnr.com](http://ohiodnr.com).

The state managed nature preserves have been incorporated into eight management districts with neighboring state parks. Preserve managers and park managers are combining efforts over large geographic ranges to provide for the daily operations of the parks and preserves. Even with assistance from seasonal staff, this can be a daunting task. Several retired DNAP administrators and field managers have joined the ranks of volunteers to lend a hand in keeping the Division of Natural Areas and Preserves in existence, and to ensure that the nature preserves are well managed.



## Want to Get Involved? Here's How!

### Visit & Report

If you notice a problem at a preserve you are visiting, such as trees down across a trail, vandalism, or broken boards on bridges or boardwalks, please let us know. Contact the district manager at the phone numbers listed.



Northwest District: 419-734-4424

Southwest District: 513-523-4938

East Central District: 740-403-1792

North Central District: 419-994-5125

West Central District: 937-605-4351

Southeast District: 740-385-6842

Northeast District: 330-877-6652

Central District: 740-548-4631



### DAUGHMER PRAIRIE ...

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Efforts to permanently protect Daughmer Prairie Savannah started in the early 1960s. The farm on which the prairie savannah is located had reportedly been in the possession of Hazel (White) Daughmer's family ever since first settlement for at least five generations. Subsequent inheritors of the property provided informal protection, and when the 1,000-acre family farm was put up for auction in 2010, the prairie savannah portion was purchased from the new owner using Division

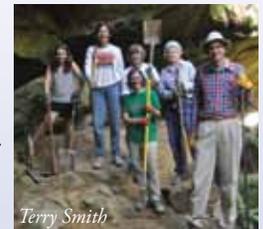


of Natural Areas and Preserves (DNAP) donated income tax check-off funds. The Crawford County Park District has been an important partner in efforts to preserve Daughmer Prairie Savannah, and will help provide for its ongoing management.

Daughmer Prairie Savannah located in Crawford County about 8 miles southwest of Bucyrus at the junction of Marion-Melmore and Scioto Chapel Roads with a small parking lot on the preserve.

### Volunteer

Volunteers have always played an active role in caring for our state nature preserves, and today their help is needed more than ever. Please consider helping in one of the following ways that suits your interests, availability and skills.



- Work trips to preserves: Help with habitat management by removing invasive plants, constructing boardwalks, and other outdoor projects. Sign up yourself for a scheduled work trip, or contact us to arrange a work weekend with your organized group.
- Preserve monitors: Adopt a preserve and visit regularly. Let us know of any problems or concerns. Monitors are asked to attend a training session and become familiar with the site management plan.

### General support and promotion:

- Join a Friends Group to help your favorite preserve(s).
- Ask your employer or organizations you are a member of to endorse the Natural Areas income tax check-off through newsletters, etc.
- Make your own contribution from your own income tax refund through the check-off program.
- Buy a nature preserves license plate for your vehicle.
- Contact us for ideas on how you can apply your skills to our many needs.

For more information or to request a volunteer form, write to:

**Division of Natural Areas and Preserves**  
2045 Morse Road, Bldg. C-4,  
Columbus, OH 43229

or e-mail:

**dick.moseley@dnr.state.oh.us**  
**jill.kasai@dnr.state.oh.us**



*Natural Areas' volunteer worker removing invasive teasel plants from the prairie.*



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## A Legacy of Giving

Since 1983, Ohio taxpayers have been offered the option to help protect Ohio's special places through the nature preserves check-off on the Ohio personal income tax form. Over the years, Ohioans have checked the box more than two million times to donate all or part of their tax refund, providing almost \$16 million for natural area protection. Clearly, Ohioans believe that these natural assets are worth saving, and their generous gifts have enabled the state of Ohio to build and maintain the legacy of preserves for today, and for future generations.

From the beginning, the check-off program has included funds for the ODNR Division of Wildlife's nongame and endangered wildlife program, as well as the Division of Natural Areas and Preserves program, giving Ohioans a choice in determining where to direct their donations. Historically, about 60% of donors have selected both funds, while 40% have donated to just one. The number of donors each year has declined sharply from more than 170,000 in the first year, to about 50,000 in recent years. More competition for tax refund dollars has certainly contributed to the drop; a check-off option for military veterans' injury relief was added in tax year 2005, and a new check-off for the Ohio Historical Society has been introduced in the 2011 tax form.

The initial intent of the tax check-off program was to provide a source of funding for activities over and above normal operations.

For 25 years, the program focus included land protection, including acquisition of new nature preserves and critical additions to existing preserves; public use development, involving public access improvements and boundary protection; endangered species and natural community research, to provide good science for preserve management, biological inventories and research grants; and special projects such as statewide biological inventories, the Ohio Breeding Bird Atlas, and the division's public newsletter.



With the economic challenges and reduced budgets the state has faced in the past several years, however, the need for financial support has grown to include all aspects of the Natural Areas and Preserves

mission. For the past few years, the check-off has funded projects critical to protecting the integrity of the most fragile preserves, DNAP's most basic mandate. With the support of conservation groups and retired DNAP staff, the check-off funds have been made available through a legislative initiative to help providing funding to retain our experienced professional preserve managers.

Estate gifts, donations through the check-off and donations from taxpayers who are not receiving tax funds, along with the interest income earned on the fund balance, remain critically important to the continued success of our state nature preserve program, and the long-term health of our nature preserves.

### Contributors:

Guy Denny  
 Bob McCance  
 Dick Moseley

### Want to be a Greener Reader?

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