

If similar construction and disturbance were done on the same scale today, the resulting plant communities would likely be dominated by non-native and invasive species. Savanna Army Depot was closed in 2000 and the acreage was divided among USFWS (9,860 acres), IDNR (270 acres), and developers (2,932 acres).

Jockeying for the Depot land began in 1995 when the base was listed for closure by Congress. Initially USFWS wanted only the bottomlands, then requested the entire acreage when convinced of the biological value of the uplands by IDNR Natural Heritage staff. After much acrimonious debate and several land trades later lines in the sand were drawn around the acres noted above. Originally Lost Mound was to be a stand alone refuge distinct from the Upper Mississippi because the size and types of habitats were different enough from the rest of the refuge that a dedicated budget and staff were needed. Unfortunately, negotiations between the Army and USFWS to develop an MOU to allow the service to establish the refuge dragged on interminably. By the time the paperwork was ripe, the Bush Administration declared a moratorium on new refuges so the only option was to incorporate Lost Mound into an existing refuge; thus the name Lost Mound Unit of the Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge.

The prairie isn't out of the woods yet

Although Lost Mound contains nearly 10,000 acres, about 6,000 of those acres are floodplain forest, backwater sloughs, and open water. In the uplands, the nearly 4,000 acres are in Lost Mound United include prairie, savanna, and woodland. Developers have control of nearly 3,000 acres, all of it uplands, and much of it sand prairie. Even more troubling is the arrangement of these acres. Lost Mound Unit is shaped like a diamond doughnut surrounding a 300-acre tract zoned for industrial use. The company in charge of this parcel has been charged for environ-



The chip-chup-bzzzzz song of the Grasshopper Sparrow can be heard throughout the sand prairie at Lost Mound. This one is perched on Ohio spiderwort.

mental violations at another site and has a history of non-compliance. In addition, a few weeks before Lost Mound Unit was established, all the earth-covered storage bunkers on the refuge were leased by the Army to a computer company for high-security data storage. Thus, the doughnut refuge was punctured by 437 one-acre holes -- one for each of the bunkers equally spaced across the uplands north and south of the doughnut hole. A Swiss-cheese doughnut is certainly not the recommended recipe for a wildlife preserve. The logic, apparently, is that with 10,000 acres of refuge, taking out a few acres here and there is fine (like Arctic National Wildlife Refuge). Never mind that the few are spread out over most of the upland portion of the refuge, and more to the point, in the most ecologically sensitive part of the refuge, potentially impacting the entire upland area. When Lost Mound was dedicated as an Important Bird Area in spring 2005, the response from a former state legislator was "it appears that the IBA designation at Lost Mound is 'for the birds' and not the benefit of the residents of Northwestern Illinois." A year later a bill was drafted to exempt recently closed military bases from the Illinois Endangered Species Act and Natural Areas Preservation Act. The reasoning was

that endangered species prevent economic development. If passed, this bill would essentially eliminate any obligation or incentive toward economic development compatible with a wildlife refuge. Potentially it could destroy the very asset that makes this area so unique, the aspect that will draw people (and development) to this area. The two regions of Illinois are Chicagoland and downstate; the northwest corner is suffering from malign neglect. The progress at Lost Mound is largely attributable to dedicated members of Jo Daviess County Natural Area Guardians, Northwest Illinois Audubon Society, Friends of the Depot, Jo Daviess Conservation Foundation, The Nature Conservancy, and Prairie Enthusiasts. Future progress will also depend on how much the citizens of Illinois make their conservation voices heard in the legislature.

When to visit...

Something interesting can be found any time of year but the best times to go are whenever an organized field trip is scheduled. Otherwise, access to most of the site is restricted to a 3-mile stretch along the edge of the river. The highest number of species can be found during early-mid May. Grassland birds are best seen from late-May into June. Fall migrants can be found from mid-August through early October, with raptor migration continuing into late October. Bald Eagles can be seen year round but the most impressive numbers are found in late February and early March. Waterfowl numbers peak in March and April.

How to get there...

The entrance road to Lost Mound is located on IL-84 about 7 miles north of Savanna and 5 miles south of Hanover (page 15 of the DeLorme Gazetteer). You can get to IL-84 from the north via US-20 from Dubuque or Rockford, from the east via IL-64/US-52 (Oregon, Dixon etc), or from the south via I-74/I-80 in Quad Cities. More detailed directions can be found on the Web site. To reach the field station office turn west on Army Depot Road from IL-84 and go about 2 miles, cross the railroad