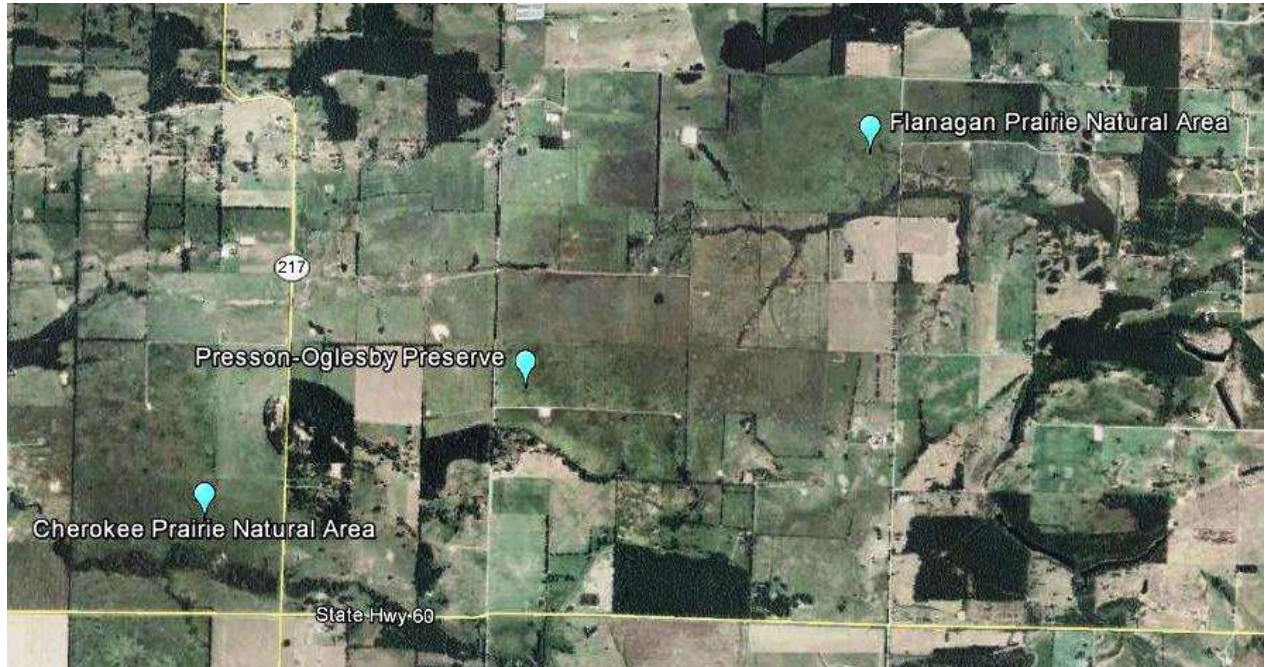


CHEROKEE, FLANAGAN, AND PRESSON-OGLESBY PRAIRIES in the Arkansas Valley



In Franklin County, a few miles northeast of Charleston, are significant remnants of the tallgrass prairie. Protected remnants described below total approximately 1,100 acres. These are parts of approximately 135,000-acres of prairie that once occupied the western portion of the Arkansas River Valley. The areas have native prairie grasses and spectacular seasonal wildflower displays that peak in summer. These prairies differ from others in that their soils are derived from shale. There are no formal trails but visitors are welcome to travel by foot within the areas.

DIRECTIONS: Cherokee Prairie Natural Area: From highway 22 in Charleston, head north on Arkansas 217 approx. 2.7 miles to Arkansas Highway 60. You can park right in front of the natural area sign at the intersection of 217 and 60 or turn west and travel 0.5 mile to parking on the south side of highway. CPNA extends on both sides of 60. **Presson-Oglesby Preserve:** From highway 22 in Charleston, head north on Arkansas 217 approx. 2.7 miles to Arkansas Highway 60. Turn east on 60 and travel about 0.8 miles to Rattlesnake Road (Franklin County 21). Turn north. Drive approx. 0.8 miles and look for the preserve sign on the right side of the road. Park along the road. P-O provides a connection between Cherokee PNA and the following, Flanagan PNA. **Flanagan Prairie Natural Area:** From highway 22 in Charleston, head north on Arkansas 217 approx. 2.7 miles to Arkansas Highway 60. Travel east approx 2.3 miles to Grand Prairie Road (Franklin County 25). Turn north and travel approx 1.7 miles to parking on the left (west). FPNA extends on both sides of the road.

SOME GENERAL COMMENTS ON THE THREE PRAIRIES:



Summer birds of special interest include Henslow's Sparrow (records between late April and late July), Bell's Vireo, Painted Bunting, and Northern Bobwhite. Painted Buntings are surprisingly common in roadside and field edge fencerows.

During a fall field trip to these prairies on October

29, 2011, a group of us from northwest Arkansas had a great day with sparrows: Savannah, Song, Le Conte's, Swamp, Lincoln's, Fox, White-throated, Vesper, Grasshopper, White-crowned, Harris's Sparrow. We had many other species as well. Just a few examples: Loggerhead Shrike, Eastern Towhee, Bald Eagle, Northern Harrier, ducks (Mallards, Wood Ducks), Sedge Wrens. There were hundreds of vultures in the air at times, including both species.

Bill Holimon, Chief of Research & Inventory at Arkansas Natural Heritage Commission, has studied these prairies over the years. From his own field work he shares the following: Sedge Wren is an occasional summer resident. Grasshopper Sparrows can sometimes be found using nearby hayfields. Lark Sparrows occur at Flanagan and in the general area. He has observed Diana Fritillary at all three prairies, though it is rare. In each case it was in prairie that was close to woodland. Short-eared Owls are fairly reliable in winter, especially at Cherokee. There are also wintering Le Conte's Sparrows and Sedge Wrens. While for some reason Cherokee is better for wintering birds than Flanagan, one good bird that you can get fairly reliably at Flanagan and more often than at Cherokee is Bald Eagle. "One afternoon between Flanagan Prairie and some creek drainages east of there I spotted over 50 Bald Eagles either soaring or roosting. I've seen enough eagles in the general Flanagan Prairie area in the winter that it makes me think that there must be a large winter roost somewhere between there and the Arkansas River."

CHEROKEE PRAIRIE NATURAL AREA



At approx. 584 acres, Cherokee Prairie Natural Area is the largest of the three. Preservation efforts date at least to 1976, when Betty Bumpers encouraged Arkansas Natural Heritage Commission to begin an inventory.

Cherokee contains a diverse array of flowers and grasses including compass plant, purple prairie clover, Indian paintbrush, and huge swaths of purple gay feather (late June-early July). Prairie Creek flows through Cherokee, with a fine series of beaver ponds -- a good place to seek water and marsh birds. Henslow's Sparrow has been found on several occasions on Cherokee, including an outstanding record of 13 reported by Bill Holimon on July 13, 2005.

H. E. Flanagan Prairie Natural Area

H.E. Flanagan Prairie Natural Area (340 acres) is an excellent example of the tallgrass prairie that once occurred across this part of the Arkansas Valley. Along with prairie grasses, the natural area hosts a wide variety of flowering plants. Many of the Henslow's Sparrow sightings are from Flanagan.

Flanagan and Grand Prairie Road are associated with the origins of Elizabeth Callan Flanagan Bumpers, better known as Betty Bumpers, wife of former US Senator Dale Bumpers.

Presson-Oglesby Preserve

The Nature Conservancy's Presson-Oglesby Preserve (155 acres) is open to the public. The preserve is named for the late Hazel Presson, an educator and author from Fort Smith whose donations enabled the Conservancy to acquire the site. There are no trails, but visitors are welcome to walk out onto the prairie (foot traffic only). The terrain is mostly flat. Viewing is also possible from the county road.

According to Conservancy scientists, initial inventories show the P-O protects more than 150 species of plants. In addition to common prairie grasses like cord grass, big bluestem, and side oats grama, P-O exhibits a diversity of wildflower species with spectacular blooms throughout the growing season. Showy species include: swamp mallow (*Hibiscus moscheutos* ssp.



lasiocarpus), scurf pea (*Psoralea psoraloides* var. *eglandulosa*), prairie blazing star (*Liatris pycnostachya*), narrow-leaved sunflower (*Helianthus angustifolius*), hoary pea (*Tephrosia onobrychoides*), rattlesnake master (*Eryngium yuccifolium*), large coneflower (*Rudbeckia grandiflora*), pale purple coneflower (*Echinacea pallida*).

Butterflies are in abundance. For example, we were amazed at numerous gorgeous Gulf fritillaries visiting tall flowering ironweeds during a late June 2012 trip.

Prepared by Joe Neal in June 2012