Wilson Springs Preserve is located in Fayetteville, Arkansas. Parking and entrance are at Sam’s Club on Highway 112. The Preserve was officially opened to the public in September 2019. It protects 121 acres of bottomlands, including woodlands with prairie mounds and open wetland fields along Clabber Creek.
There are now trails that provide easy access to much of the Preserve. Restoration activity is ongoing. It is a highly unique place.

Here is an eBird bar chart with data to September 2019:
https://ebird.org/barchart?byr=1900&eyr=2019&bmo=1&emo=12&r=L502921

Just a friendly warning here: this includes 159 species. It is still possible to find most of these. A fair amount of data was collected before a past Mayor of City of Fayetteville sold parcels for housing development, including all of the fields where Henslow’s Sparrows once nested. That said, the 121 acres that remain are permanently protected in the Preserve. There is a lot of good bird habitat. This provides for numerous plant and animal species, including some that are rare and unusual.

I wrote the following (now somewhat edited) in October 2014, about a “Big Sit” the Preserve sponsored. Even though that was 5 years ago, the points I was making are as relevant now as then.

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Northwest Arkansas Land Trust put on its second fall Big Sit birding event yesterday at Wilson Spring Preserve alongside I-49 in northwest Fayetteville. I was among 15 or so who tallied 30+ bird species. Favorites among my group were Sedge Wren, Marsh Wren, and Swamp Sparrow.

A Great Horned Owl flew right over Doug James’ head where he sat with another group. Mitchell Pruitt’s bunch found Yellow-rumped Warblers and Sharp-shinned Hawk, both fall arrivals, plus stragglers like Indigo Buntings.

Blue Jays were imitating Red-shouldered Hawks. Or were they hawks? There were also Monarchs.

Fun and casual, Big Sit generates basic bird data in 121 biologically-rich acres smack midst the boomiest part of booming northwest Arkansas. Terri Lane, who directs the Trust, also uses the event to make the case for preservation and restoration. She terms this “A tail-gate birding event.”

Northwest Arkansas now exceeds 300,000 people, will go to 500,000 soon; full speed ahead to predicted 700,000. Almost all is built, and will be built, on former grassy, flower-rich Tallgrass Prairies, including endemic Osage Burrowing Crayfish-rich wetlands like this Preserve. If you can’t differentiate between a parking lot and a former prairie field, this is the place. There are clumps of Indian Grass with honor in their plumes. Welcome to your heritage, with Sawtooth Sunflowers.

Wilson Spring is dominated by its remnant prairie flora like Rattlesnake Master and two perennial free-flowing springs plus Clabber Creek. It has a small colorful fish, the Arkansas Darter. But what really makes Wilson Springs distinctive is EXISTENCE. Similar springs and prairie streams have been bulldozed and concreted into oblivion in Bentonville, Rogers, Springdale, and Fayetteville. The existence of Wilson Springs tests the proposition that Soras and delicate pink flowers like False Foxglove are as valuable as big box stores.

Wilson Springs came within a hair of this fate. Most of our 1830 landscape has morphed into profitable cornucopias. A big prize adjacent I-49, with the region’s highest traffic counts, its survival tests the proposition of whether or not we as a community are ready to recognize 1830 is over. We’ve driven Henslow’s Sparrows out of our fields and turned native grasslands into Henslow’s Sparrow Drive and Kentucky bluegrass lawns.

Yesterday, Mitchell Pruitt saw a big darner (type of dragonfly) that he didn’t recognize. That points toward the future. That’s what this is all about. I’ll bet it’s been there since 1830. Come the annual Fayetteville Christmas Bird Count, I’ll be at Wilson Springs hoping for Sedge Wrens again.

In assuming responsibility, Northwest Arkansas Land Trust has given us some time to figure just how these ecologically rich 121 acres fit into our future. In that respect, the votes have not yet been all counted. – Joe Neal September 9, 2018