

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Neal Smith

National Wildlife Refuge



*“The first law of
intelligent tinkering
is to save all the pieces.”*

Aldo Leopold

Dickcissel in blazing star.
Allison, USFWS





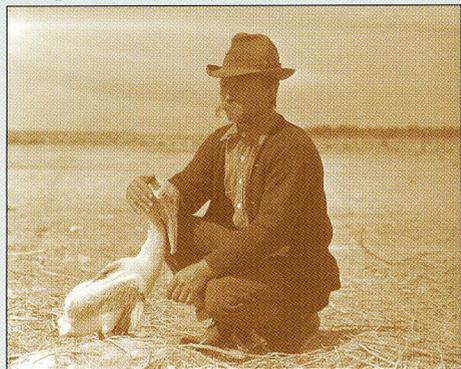
President Theodore Roosevelt. USFWS

National Wildlife Refuge System

The National Wildlife Refuge System was born in 1903, when President Theodore Roosevelt established three-acre Pelican Island in Florida as a Federal Bird Reservation to protect pelicans and other birds from plume hunters. From this humble beginning, National Wildlife Refuges have grown into a system of over 560 refuges encompassing nearly 150 million acres, protecting and conserving fish, wildlife and plants.



Pelican feathers used to make women's hats.
USFWS



Paul Kroegel, Pelican Island's first refuge manager. USFWS

The National Wildlife Refuge System is the world's most unique network of lands and waters set aside specifically for conservation of fish, wildlife and plants. These refuges are gifts to us and the many generations to come.



This blue goose, designed by J.N. "Ding" Darling in the 1930s, has become a symbol of the National Wildlife Refuge System.



New England Aster. USFWS

Origins of the Refuge

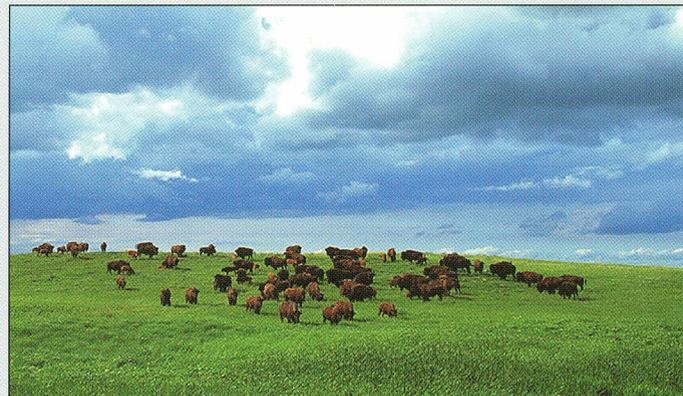
Neal Smith National Wildlife Refuge is named after former Congressman Neal Smith, who played a vital role in its establishment. The refuge acquisition boundary includes approximately 11,200 acres, of which close to 5,600 acres have been purchased.

Neal Smith National Wildlife Refuge is one of the largest tallgrass prairie reconstruction projects in the world!

Refuge Aspirations

The refuge works to recreate, restore and protect native communities of tallgrass prairie, oak savanna, sedge meadow and aquatic ecosystems to ensure healthy populations of associated wildlife. It also provides wildlife-dependent recreational and educational opportunities for visitors so that they may experience and develop an appreciation for the native tallgrass prairie.

Restoration of the refuge's tallgrass prairie and oak savanna remnants is accomplished through management activities that include harvesting and planting native prairie seeds, mowing, removing trees and using prescribed fire. In addition, bison and elk have been reintroduced to their roles in helping to shape the tallgrass prairie.

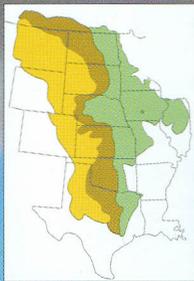


Bison grazing at Neal Smith National Wildlife Refuge. USFWS

Bringing Back the Tallgrass Prairie

The tallgrass prairie and savanna ecosystems once covered most of the Midwest, but now they are almost gone. One hundred and fifty years ago, tallgrass prairie covered at least 85% of Iowa. Today, less than one-tenth of one percent of that prairie remains! That's why Neal Smith National Wildlife Refuge was established – to bring back some of our native plants and animals by reconstructing a piece of these globally-endangered ecosystems.

Neal Smith National Wildlife Refuge offers a rare peek into the past and the incredible collection of life we call the tallgrass prairie.



Big Bluestem.
USFWS

The tallgrass prairie is named after its plants, which can grow over eight feet tall. Some common grasses you will see scattered throughout this magnificent landscape are big bluestem, switchgrass, and Indian grass. The prairie is also home to more than 300 species of wildflowers. Prairie plants are always changing: spring sprouts, beautiful summer blooms, golden seeds in the fall and snow-covered winter foliage all make an appearance. With each season, prairie plants provide ceaseless enjoyment.

Interwoven within the tallgrass prairie ecosystem are oak savannas: scattered oases of widely spaced trees with unique grasses and wildflowers beneath. The spreading branches of the oak trees provide welcoming shade and shelter for such wildlife as red-headed woodpeckers, indigo buntings and the endangered Indiana bat.



Fire! USFWS



*Oak tree in
ice storm.*
USFWS

The plants and animals growing and living in prairies are well adapted to the hot summers, cold winters, fires and endless cycles of heavy rains and droughts. In fact, prairie and oak savanna ecosystems depend on fire to stimulate new growth, which is why you may see blackened areas of land as you explore the refuge.

Today, these ecosystems provide a home for an astounding diversity of life, including hundreds of plant and bird species, numerous species of mammals, amphibians, reptiles and thousands of insect species.

Already, the restoration and reconstruction efforts have had a profound impact. Grassland birds, such as Henslow's sparrows and meadowlarks, have dramatically increased in numbers on the refuge, despite long-term declines nationally.

Take a journey through the refuge to experience what Iowa used to be, and think about what it could become.

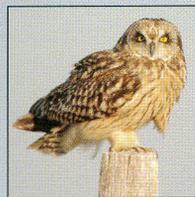
After all, we are not just reconstructing the past; we are building the future, too.

Visitor Center

The Visitor Center is at the heart of the refuge. Leisurely explore hands-on exhibits depicting the native plants and animals that existed in central Iowa prior to Euro-American settlement, and learn how the landscape has changed since the 1840s. Discover the present focus on restoration, reconstruction, and management of tallgrass prairie and oak savanna ecosystems.

You can also learn more about prairie life through special events and ranger-led public programs, or just come and browse the Prairie Point Bookstore, run by volunteers and Friends of Neal Smith National Wildlife Refuge.

The Visitor Center is open year-round, and there are always fun activities to enjoy on the refuge. As you head outside, pick up a map of the auto tour at the information desk, then begin exploring!



Short-eared owl.
K. Viste-Sparkman,
USFWS

In the spring, look for newborn bison calves and migrating grassland birds. Summer offers ever-changing multitudes of wildflower blooms. In the fall, wander through tall yellow sunflowers and volunteer to help us collect prairie seeds. Winter brings the opportunity to check out at no cost our adult and child-sized snowshoes, and get outside for exhilarating exploration.

Refuge Information:

- Visitor Center hours may change seasonally. Please call 515/994 3400 for hours.
- Refuge trails and auto tour route are open daily from sunrise to sunset.
- Bison and elk are wild, unpredictable animals. Remain in your vehicle while driving through the bison and elk enclosure.
- Designated trails are for foot traffic only. Please ask at the Visitor Center about bike trails.
- For additional, or specific regulations, contact the refuge, or visit our website.



Visitor Opportunities

Have you ever watched a hawk soar over a sea of golden prairie? Listened to the clear flutelike song of a meadowlark? Smelled the minty fragrance of wild bergamot as you brush against its leaves? These experiences, and more, are waiting for you at Neal Smith National Wildlife Refuge.



Our visitors can enjoy a variety of ecosystems by taking any one of our five designated trails. Take the **Tallgrass Trail** and lose yourself in grasses taller than you. This hard-surfaced, two-mile loop begins at the Visitor Center and weaves its way through portions of reconstructed and remnant prairies, where you might spy a dickcissel drinking water from the leaves of a cup plant. The half-mile universally accessible **Overlook Trail** provides the chance to witness butterflies sipping nectar from colorful prairie flowers and to observe the endless sky turn orange as the sun sets over rolling hills.



Experience the cool shade of the oaks as you wander the **Oak Savanna Trail**, a half-mile gravel surfaced loop located just a short drive from the Visitor Center. This trail allows you to explore an oak savanna in the process of being restored. Listen to the sounds of oak leaves crunching underfoot, and perhaps hear turkeys gobbling or red-headed woodpeckers drumming as you leisurely hike this trail. To find more woodland animals, take the **Basswood Trail**, which is a mowed half-mile trail located at the southern end of the refuge. Tucked away on this trail is a small pond, where you can listen to frogs croak and see dragonflies skimming the water.



Having trouble deciding which ecosystem to explore? Experience them all on our longest trail, the **American Volkspport Association (AVA) Trail**. This trail is a ten kilometer loop and connects the Tallgrass Trail with the Oak Savanna Trail before leading you back to the Visitor Center.

Photos from top: Dickcissel, eastern tailed-blue butterfly, dragonfly, red-headed woodpecker. USFWS



Volunteering at the information desk. USFWS



Volunteer!

You can become a vital part of this unique project! People of all ages, talents and backgrounds can help.

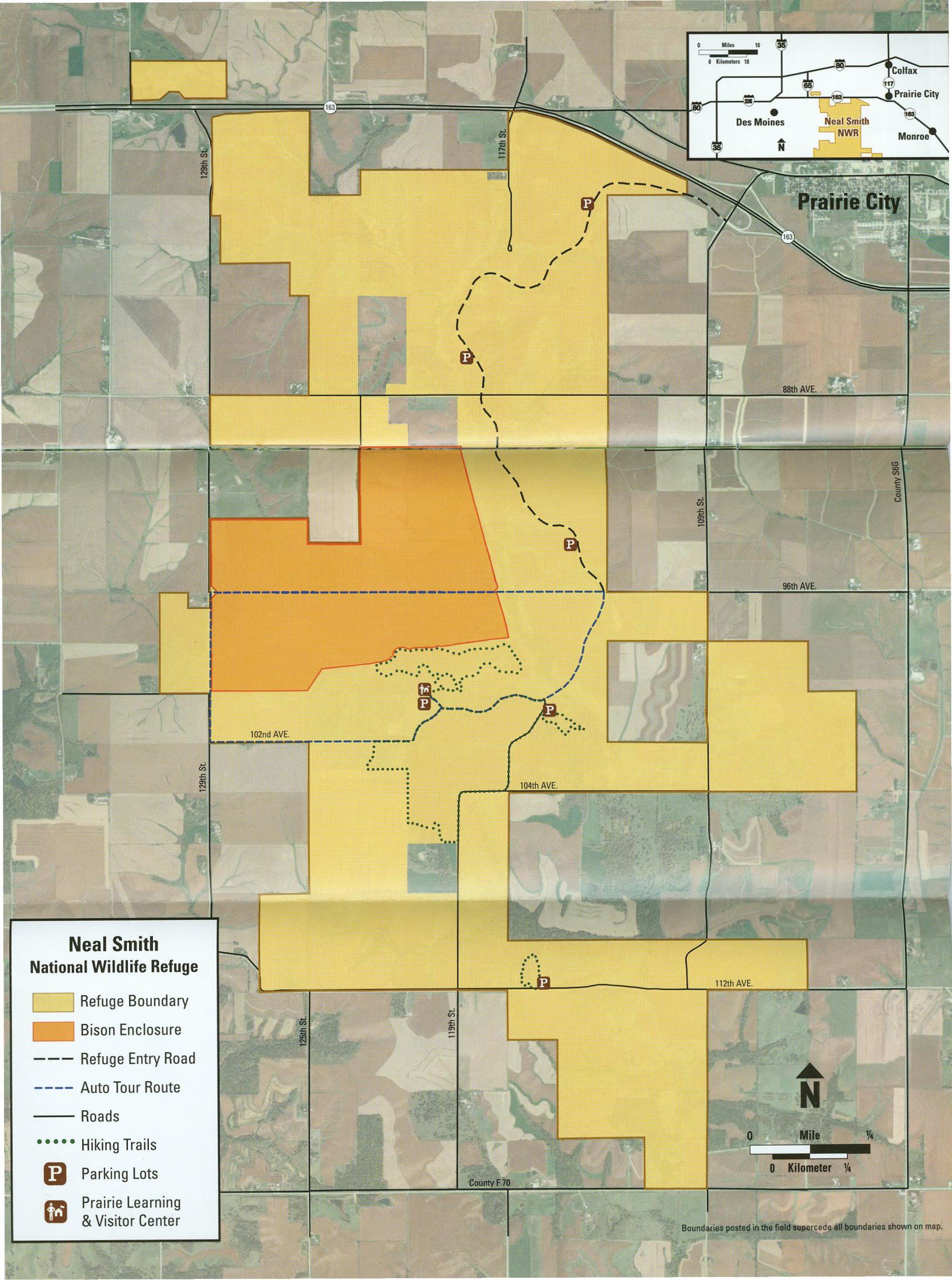
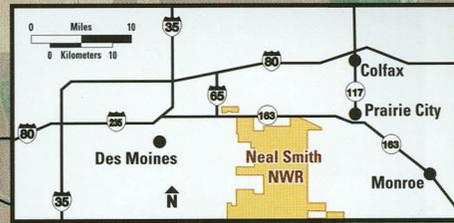
The only requirements are enthusiasm and an interest in nature!

Help us collect and clean seed, plant prairie plants, or teach children about the natural environment. Or maybe you'd prefer monitoring and controlling invasive species, assisting with research efforts, or greeting the public at the refuge information desk and bookstore. Whatever your inclination, refuge staff can find a project that fits your skills and interests.

Remember, all volunteers have one thing in common— they are essential to the refuge's success! Contact us at 515/994 3400, or learn more about us at www.fws.gov/refuge/Neal_Smith.



Students collecting seed. USFWS



Prairie City

163

88th AVE.

County S66

96th AVE.

102nd AVE.

104th AVE.

112th AVE.

125th St.

119th St.

County F 70

Neal Smith National Wildlife Refuge

-  Refuge Boundary
-  Bison Enclosure
-  Refuge Entry Road
-  Auto Tour Route
-  Roads
-  Hiking Trails
-  Parking Lots
-  Prairie Learning & Visitor Center



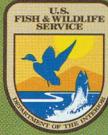
Boundaries posted in the field supercede all boundaries shown on map.

Neal Smith National Wildlife Refuge
9981 Pacific St
PO Box 399
Prairie City, IA 50228-0399

Phone: 515/994 3400
TTY users may reach Neal Smith through the Federal
Information Relay System at 1 800/877 8339

Web address:
www.fws.gov/refuge/Neal_Smith

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
1 800/344 WILD



Volunteer girdling trees - one way to restore the oak savanna.
USFWS

Bison at Neal Smith National Wildlife Refuge. Scott Fairbairn