

Shagbark Hickory

Long plates of curling bark make this tree look shaggy. These trees provide important habitat for solitary bats, who hide during the day under the bark.



To explore more about bats, visit the Covered Bridge, where a colony raises its young each summer.

Prescribed Fire

In late fall, you may see evidence of prescribed burns in the woodland. Prescribed burns are an important management tool in east-central Illinois woodlands, since fire is a natural part of that ecosystem.



Fires remove dead plant matter and prevent invasive shrubs, like honeysuckle, from taking over the forest.

Evidence of past fires can be seen on the tree trunk—look for blackened areas at the base of the trunks.

Barred Owls

Several species of owls live in these woodlands, including barred owls (pictured). They can sometimes be heard calling during the day, with their distinctive 'Who-cooks-for-you' call.



Tree Snags

Dead tree snags provide essential habitat for all kinds of life in the forest by supplying shelter, nesting, and feeding sites.

Bats, tree frogs, and insects make their homes between the bark and trunk. The insects provide food for pileated woodpeckers (pictured), who will also nest in tree snags.



Eurasian Honeysuckle

To help preserve healthy forest and prairie habitat for plants and animals, we work to control the very invasive Eurasian honeysuckle.



This invasive shrub can kill native understory forest plants and young trees by blocking sunlight.



History of Rayburn-Purnell Woods

This woodland is an old-growth oak-hickory forest. Some of the trees are believed to be over 175 years old!

The land was designated as a "woodlot" in the early 1900s for the purpose of providing lumber and fuel for woodstoves. Because it was set aside, it has never been farmed, and so many of the original wildflower species still grow here.

After being acquired by the Forest Preserves, it was named after the Rayburn and Purnell families of Mahomet, who previously owned the woods.

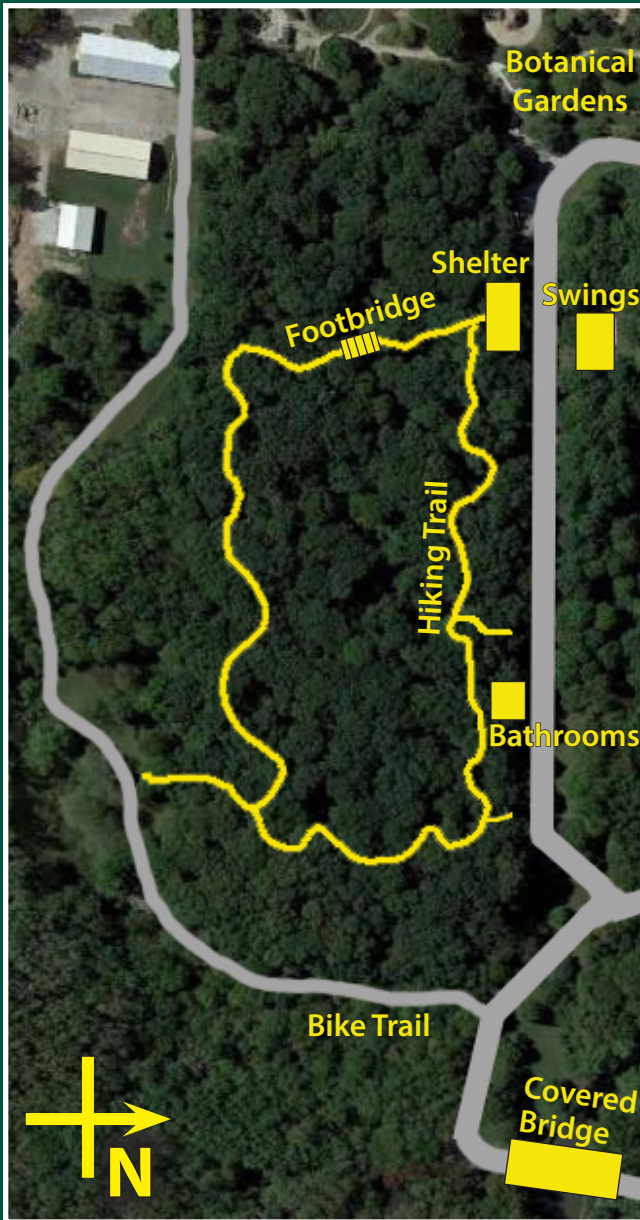
Forests originally covered 20% of Champaign County, most of them along rivers. (The other 80% was open prairie.)

These forests were important to Native Americans and settlers because they provided shelter from the wind and sun of the prairie, as well as food, wood, and other resources.

RAYBURN- PURNELL TRAIL

SUMMER/FALL NATURE GUIDE

Trail Map



Welcome!

This fall nature hike will take approximately 30 to 45 minutes and is roughly 0.5 miles long.

Enjoy your hike!

Joe Pye Weed

Blooms: Summer

One of the tallest woodland wildflowers, this plant's flowers are very attractive to butterflies. The large leaves grow in whorls of 3-4 on sturdy green stems four to seven feet tall. Its seed heads persist well into winter, adding interest to winter gardens.



White Snakeroot

Blooms: Summer

Once incorrectly believed to be a treatment for snakebite, white snakeroot is actually poisonous. People who drink milk from cows fed on this plant can develop a disease called milk sickness, because the toxins from the plant transfer to the milk.



Black Squirrels

Black (or melanistic) squirrels can be seen at Lake of the Woods. These squirrels are actually Eastern Grey Squirrels (*Sciurus carolinensis*) that have extra melanin, a pigment, in their fur.



Squirrel Nest

Large round leafy balls in tree branches are squirrel nests. They are made of leaves and twigs, and lined inside with shredded plant material. They can be waterproof and are used primarily in warm weather or by young squirrels.



Footbridge & Creek

Underneath the footbridge, an intermittent creek flows - usually it only has water flowing in it in the spring, and after rainstorms the rest of the year.

The water in the creek flows to the Sangamon River, just a short distance away.

Tracks, such as this deer track, can often be found in the mud.



Poison Ivy

Blooms: Summer

This plant can grow as a shrub, low spreading vine, or as a climbing vine. Deer, rabbits, and some moth caterpillars feed on the leaves, and birds eat the fruits. The highly variable leaves often have 'thumbs.' Vines growing up tree trunks are covered by coarse brown hairs. Oils of this plant cause blisters on human skin.



Wild Black Cherry

Leaves: Alternate, pointed tip

Bark: Like 'burnt potato chips'

The fruits ripen in August-September, and are eaten by a variety of wildlife and birds. All other parts of the tree, however, are poisonous, including the cherry pits. The wood has a rich red color, and is often used in woodworking projects.

