


# Forest Preserves of Cook County, South Holland, Illinois, USA

## Sand Ridge Campus: A Visitor's Guide

Nathaniel Garcia<sup>1</sup>, Elizabeth Wheelock<sup>1</sup>, Jeanette Louis<sup>1</sup>, Ed Wagemann<sup>1</sup> & Mario Longoni<sup>2</sup>  
<sup>1</sup>Forest Preserves of Cook County & <sup>2</sup>Field Museum

Photos: Nathaniel Garcia, Nick Paarlberg, Mary Jane Majcherek, Elizabeth Wheelock, Drelana Rambo, Laura Milkert, Kathlin Simpkins, Eric Schmitt, Sandy Wolkenberg, PeaKayTea, Visit Chicago Southland, Alexander Palmer, Joe Occhiuzzo, Glenn Berry, Illinois State Geological Survey, and Illinois Department of Natural Resources. Produced and Designed by Alicia Diaz. Acknowledgement: Laura Milkert, Catherine Hu, and Alicia Diaz.

 © Forest Preserves of Cook County (2024) CC BY-NC 4.0. Licensed works are free to use/share/remix with attribution, but commercial use of the original work is not permitted. [\[fieldguides.fieldmuseum.org\]](http://fieldguides.fieldmuseum.org) **[1756]** version 1 11/2024



### Sand Ridge Nature Center

15891 Paxton Ave, South Holland, IL 60473

### Things to Do & Amenities

- |                    |                  |
|--------------------|------------------|
| Bicycling          | Fishing Lake     |
| Nature Center      | Nature Play      |
| Trail Access (ADA) | Hiking & Walking |
| Aquatic Center     | Birding Hotspot  |
| Campground         | Nature Preserve  |

### Volunteer Opportunities

Volunteers of all ages work together each month to care for and restore biodiversity and health at Sand Ridge natural areas. Our volunteers include youth, adults, retirees, nature lovers, people who want to build job skills, people looking for a new experience, people who want to experience nature with a welcoming group—and many more.

For a complete list of programs, volunteer opportunities, maps, and visitor information, please scan the QR code.



Explore everything that makes the Calumet Region special at Sand Ridge Campus—a 585-acre nature-based education and recreation area that invites visitors to learn about and enjoy the natural and cultural history of the area while hiking, biking, fishing, camping and more. In addition to a Nature Center, visitors can find many other campus amenities, including Green Lake and aquatic center, Camp Shabbona Woods, and Clayhole Woods.

Sand Ridge Nature Center features interactive exhibits, programs, and knowledgeable staff to guide you through the natural and cultural history of the Calumet Region. Visitors will find Ambassador Animals—including birds of prey, reptiles, amphibians, and fish—as well as hands-on activities and self-guided nature fun. Watch birds at the feeders from the flight room, explore the nature play area, stroll through demonstration gardens, learn from the past at the replica log cabins, and walk four miles of nature trails through woodlands, prairies and wetlands.

Come to the Sand Ridge Campus to learn the story of the area's rare dune-and-swale landscape and its relationship to native plants and animals—and thousands of years of human history. Please use this guide as a brief introduction to start your journey through this unique ecological area.





# Forest Preserves of Cook County, South Holland, Illinois, USA

## Sand Ridge Campus: A Visitor's Guide

Nathaniel Garcia<sup>1</sup>, Elizabeth Wheelock<sup>1</sup>, Jeanette Louis<sup>1</sup>, Ed Wagemann<sup>1</sup> & Mario Longoni<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Forest Preserves of Cook County & <sup>2</sup>Field Museum

Photos: Nathaniel Garcia, Nick Paarlberg, Mary Jane Majcherek, Elizabeth Wheelock, Drelana Rambo, Laura Milkert, Kathlin Simpkins, Eric Schmitt, Sandy Wolkenberg, PeaKayTea, Visit Chicago Southland, Alexander Palmer, Joe Occhiuzzo, Glenn Berry, Illinois State Geological Survey, and Illinois Department of Natural Resources. Produced and Designed by Alicia Diaz. Acknowledgement: Laura Milkert, Catherine Hu, and Alicia Diaz.



© Forest Preserves of Cook County (2024) CC BY-NC 4.0. Licensed works are free to use/share/remix with attribution, but commercial use of the original work is not permitted.

[fieldguides.fieldmuseum.org]

[1756]

version 1

11/2024

### Land Acknowledgement

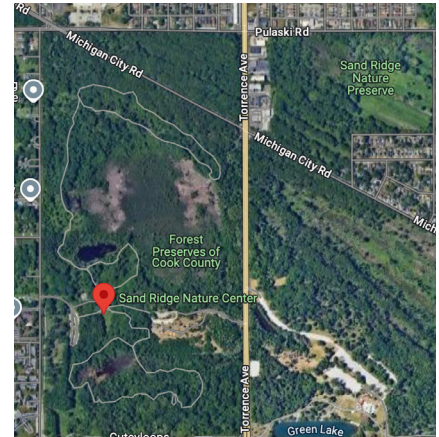
The Forest Preserves of Cook County acknowledges that we are on the lands of the Council of Three Fires—the Ojibwa, Ottawa and Potawatomi—as well as the Miami, Ho-Chunk, Menominee, Sauk and Meskwaki peoples.

As a land management agency, we acknowledge that we have played a role in shaping the histories of local Native

Americans by acquiring this land. We also recognize, share and celebrate their immemorial ties to this land.

We commit ourselves to developing deeper partnerships that advocate for the progress, dignity and humanity of the many diverse Native Americans who still live and practice their heritage and traditions on this land today.

### Regional and Campus History



Photos: All photos show the Sand Ridge Campus. (left) aerial view from 1939, (middle) aerial view from 2013 and (right) aerial view from 2024.

The Calumet Region at the southern end of Lake Michigan, home to Sand Ridge, is noted for its distinct role in the broader American story. Native Americans were the first human inhabitants of the Calumet Region. They worked alongside other industrial workers and continue to shape the region. Today, they are leaders in showing the way to economic and environmental sustainability.

For over 150 years large numbers of people from as far away as Eastern Europe, the American South, and Latin America have found opportunities and made their homes at Sand Ridge. Freedom seekers making their way north passed through southern Cook County on the Underground Railroad. The nearby village of Robbins was home to the first Black owned and operated airport in the United States, which produced aviators who trained the Tuskegee Airmen. Migration related to railroad work led to the far south side of Chicago and the nearby city of Blue Island. They became early centers of Mexican American life in the Upper Midwest.

Industrial development starting in the late 19th century made the Calumet Region a global center of heavy industry to the present day. Steel production, car assembly, and oil refining each can be found within 10 miles of the campus.

For more than 60 years, Sand Ridge Nature Center and its 235 acres has been part of the Forest Preserve of Cook County. Following its sale to Cook County in 1922 by the Van Koevening family, much of the land was used for a time by tenant farmers. The center opened to the public in 1962, and the current building was expanded in the 1990s.

Ecological restoration of the campus started in the late 1960s. The 6-acre “front prairie” was restored from use as an asparagus field. The front prairie was overtaken by brush but, with renewed restoration efforts, is expanding again. Following the end of a prescribed burn moratorium, burning resumed in the 2000s, allowing fire-adapted ecosystems to thrive once more.



# Forest Preserves of Cook County, South Holland, Illinois, USA

## Sand Ridge Campus: A Visitor's Guide

3

Nathaniel Garcia<sup>1</sup>, Elizabeth Wheelock<sup>1</sup>, Jeanette Louis<sup>1</sup>, Ed Wagemann<sup>1</sup> & Mario Longoni<sup>2</sup>  
<sup>1</sup>Forest Preserves of Cook County & <sup>2</sup>Field Museum

Photos: Nathaniel Garcia, Nick Paarlberg, Mary Jane Majcherek, Elizabeth Wheelock, Drelana Rambo, Laura Milkert, Kathlin Simpkins, Eric Schmitt, Sandy Wolkenberg, PeaKayTea, Visit Chicago Southland, Alexander Palmer, Joe Occhiuzzo, Glenn Berry, Illinois State Geological Survey, and Illinois Department of Natural Resources. Produced and Designed by Alicia Diaz. Acknowledgement: Laura Milkert, Catherine Hu, and Alicia Diaz.



© Forest Preserves of Cook County (2024) CC BY-NC 4.0. Licensed works are free to use/share/remix with attribution, but commercial use of the original work is not permitted.

[fieldguides.fieldmuseum.org]

[1756]

version 1

11/2024

### Geographical and Ecological Highlights



Sand Ridge gets its name from the High Tolleston beach and dune ridges on which it sits, deposited by the recession of Lake Chicago (ancestral Lake Michigan). It reflects the globally imperiled dune-and-swale geography of the Calumet Region, where well-drained sandy ridge dunes alternate with low, wet areas (swales), giving rise to significant plant species diversity within very small areas.

The water released from a melting glacier during the last Ice Age created Lake Chicago, which covered most of Cook County. As the water found its way to the ocean, the level of the lake fluctuated, forming beaches and low sand dunes on many temporary shorelines. Eventually, prairies and woodlands grew on the sandy soil of the long ridges left behind as the lake receded.

The Calumet Region is also where the eastern arboreal forest meets the prairie and the Canadian coniferous forest, juxtaposing arctic plants with desert species like prickly pear cactus. Four trails wind through eight distinct habitats: sand prairie, oak savanna, woodland, forest, marsh, swamp, pond, and ephemeral wetland, with 70+ acres of wetland.

### Sand Ridge throughout the Seasons

From roasting marshmallows at a spring family camp-out to enjoying a bonfire in the snow, Sand Ridge is worth a visit in every season. Walk through our beautiful spring wildflowers, cool off at Green Lake Family Aquatic Center in the summer

heat, or take shelter from the winter cold with the native reptiles and amphibians in our exhibit room. Take advantage of our seasonal programs, celebrations, special events, and field trips to enjoy Sand Ridge at any time of year.



**Spring:** With wildflowers in bloom, spring is a beautiful time at Sand Ridge. We kick off camping season with our popular spring family campout, and local students wrap up their school year with a field trip to Sand Ridge doing restoration or enjoying bird migration.



**Summer:** Hot summer temperatures bring staff-led themed camps, as well as our staff-led adventure and craft camps. Our annual Juneteenth celebration is one of our biggest events of the year. In July, our swamp rose mallow blooms are not to be missed.



**Fall:** Sand Ridge in the fall is a breathtaking sight. Enjoy fall colors during the day or search for owls and bats at one of our nighttime programs. Learn about local history from prehistoric times to present day at our Sand Ridge Heritage Day celebration.



**Winter:** While many animals might be hibernating, Sand Ridge is full of activity! Stay warm at our winter bonfire or take a guided walk to learn about Sand Ridge's role in the Underground Railroad. Help us prepare for spring by removing invasive species on a restoration day.



# Forest Preserves of Cook County, South Holland, Illinois, USA

## Sand Ridge Campus: A Visitor's Guide

Nathaniel Garcia<sup>1</sup>, Elizabeth Wheelock<sup>1</sup>, Jeanette Louis<sup>1</sup>, Ed Wagemann<sup>1</sup> & Mario Longoni<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Forest Preserves of Cook County & <sup>2</sup>Field Museum

Photos: Nathaniel Garcia, Nick Paarlberg, Mary Jane Majcherek, Elizabeth Wheelock, Drelana Rambo, Laura Milkert, Kathlin Simpkins, Eric Schmitt, Sandy Wolkenberg, PeaKayTea, Visit Chicago Southland, Alexander Palmer, Joe Occhiuzzo, Glenn Berry, Illinois State Geological Survey, and Illinois Department of Natural Resources. Produced and Designed by Alicia Diaz. Acknowledgement: Laura Milkert, Catherine Hu, and Alicia Diaz.



© Forest Preserves of Cook County (2024) CC BY-NC 4.0. Licensed works are free to use/share/remix with attribution, but commercial use of the original work is not permitted.

[fieldguides.fieldmuseum.org]

[1756]

version 1

11/2024

### Common Species at Sand Ridge



1 **Green Dragon**  
*Arisaema dracontium*



2 **Butterfly Weed**  
*Asclepias tuberosa*



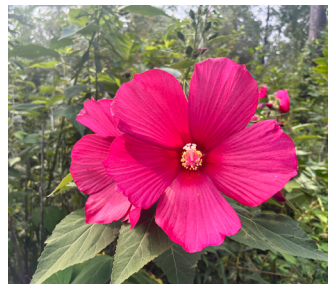
3 **Common Buttonbush**  
*Cephalanthus occidentalis*



4 **Red Osier Dogwood**  
*Cornus sericea*



5 **Bottlebrush Grass**  
*Elymus hystrix*



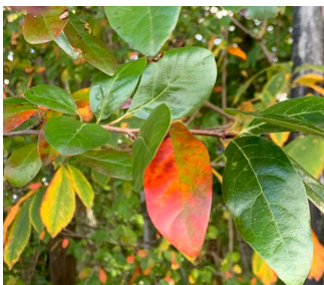
6 **Swamp Rose Mallow**  
*Hibiscus moscheutos*



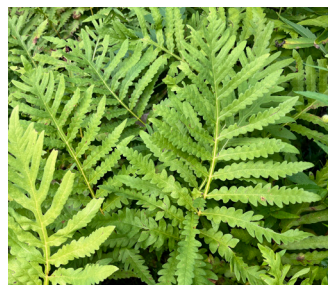
7 **Blue Flag Iris**  
*Iris versicolor*



8 **Wild Bergamot**  
*Monarda fistulosa*



9 **Black Gum**  
*Nyssa sylvatica*



10 **Sensitive Fern**  
*Onoclea sensibilis*



11 **Eastern Prickly Pear**  
*Opuntia humifusa*



12 **Bur Oak**  
*Quercus macrocarpa*



13 **White Oak**  
*Quercus alba*



14 **White Pine**  
*Pinus strobus*



15 **Little Bluestem**  
*Schizachyrium scoparium*



16 **Bald Cypress**  
*Taxodium distichum*



# Forest Preserves of Cook County, South Holland, Illinois, USA

## Sand Ridge Campus: A Visitor's Guide

Nathaniel Garcia<sup>1</sup>, Elizabeth Wheelock<sup>1</sup>, Jeanette Louis<sup>1</sup>, Ed Wagemann<sup>1</sup> & Mario Longoni<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Forest Preserves of Cook County & <sup>2</sup>Field Museum

Photos: Nathaniel Garcia, Nick Paarlberg, Mary Jane Majcherek, Elizabeth Wheelock, Drelana Rambo, Laura Milkert, Kathlin Simpkins, Eric Schmitt, Sandy Wolkenberg, PeaKayTea, Visit Chicago Southland, Alexander Palmer, Joe Occhiuzzo, Glenn Berry, Illinois State Geological Survey, and Illinois Department of Natural Resources. Produced and Designed by Alicia Diaz. Acknowledgement: Laura Milkert, Catherine Hu, and Alicia Diaz.



© Forest Preserves of Cook County (2024) CC BY-NC 4.0. Licensed works are free to use/share/remix with attribution, but commercial use of the original work is not permitted.

[fieldguides.fieldmuseum.org]

[1756]

version 1

11/2024

### Common Species at Sand Ridge



17 **Monarch Butterfly**  
*Danaus plexippus*



18 **Black Swallowtail Butterfly**  
*Papilio polyxenes*



19 **Boreal Chorus Frog**  
*Pseudacris maculata*



20 **Green Frog**  
*Rana clamitans*



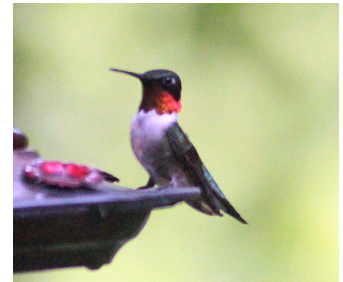
21 **Tiger Salamander**  
*Ambystoma tigrinum*



22 **Common Snapping Turtle**  
*Chelydra serpentina*



23 **Painted Turtle**  
*Chrysemys picta*



24 **Ruby-throated Hummingbird**  
*Archilochus colubris*



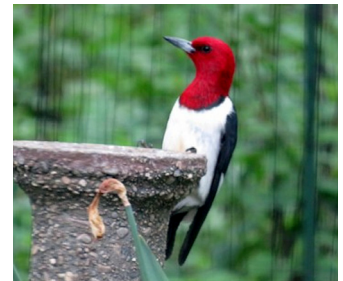
25 **Great Egret**  
*Ardea alba*



26 **Green Heron**  
*Butorides virescens*



27 **Baltimore Oriole**  
*Icterus galbula*



28 **Red-headed Woodpecker**  
*Melanerpes erythrocephalus*



29 **Indigo Bunting**  
*Passerina cyanea*



30 **Common Grackle**  
*Quiscalus quiscula*



31 **Chicken of the Woods**  
*Laetiporus sulphureus*



32 **Turkey Tail**  
*Trametes versicolor*



# Forest Preserves of Cook County, South Holland, Illinois, USA

## Sand Ridge Campus: A Visitor's Guide

Nathaniel Garcia<sup>1</sup>, Elizabeth Wheelock<sup>1</sup>, Jeanette Louis<sup>1</sup>, Ed Wagemann<sup>1</sup> & Mario Longoni<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Forest Preserves of Cook County & <sup>2</sup>Field Museum

Photos: Nathaniel Garcia, Nick Paarlberg, Mary Jane Majcherek, Elizabeth Wheelock, Drelana Rambo, Laura Milkert, Kathlin Simpkins, Eric Schmitt, Sandy Wolkenberg, PeaKayTea, Visit Chicago Southland, Alexander Palmer, Joe Occhiuzzo, Glenn Berry, Illinois State Geological Survey, and Illinois Department of Natural Resources. Produced and Designed by Alicia Diaz. Acknowledgement: Laura Milkert, Catherine Hu, and Alicia Diaz.



© Forest Preserves of Cook County (2024) CC BY-NC 4.0. Licensed works are free to use/share/remix with attribution, but commercial use of the original work is not permitted.

[fieldguides.fieldmuseum.org]

[1756]

version 1

11/2024



### Trails to Explore

- Lost Beach Trail
- Dogwood Trail
- Redwing Trail
- Pines Trail
- Swallowtail Trail
- Egret Trail
- Burnham Greenway Trail (BGT) System
- 
- 
- 

### Other Areas to Explore

- Green Lake (Family Aquatic Center)
- Fishing Areas
- Clayhole Woods
- 1 Rentable Picnic Grove
- Green Lake Woods
- 1 - 4 Rentable Picnic Grove



Access this map with your device!



### Sand Ridge Nature Preserve

Explore this rare dune-and-swale landscape. The area is rich in several species, including grass pink orchids, yellow-eyed grass and low-bush blueberry.



### Camp Shabbona Woods

From April to October, Camp Shabbona Woods, featuring three-season cabins, lets you extend your day trip to an evening under the stars in a tent or cabin, complete with group campfires and programs on weekends.



### Ambassador Animals

While visiting the Sand Ridge Nature Center, visitors will find Ambassador Animals including birds of prey, snakes, turtles and fish as well as hands-on activities and self-guided nature fun.