

## History









The History of the Wintergarden/St. John's Nature Preserve is rich and varied. Native Americans once followed the sand ridges in the preserve in search of game while living on the edges of The Great Black Swamp. Our pioneer ancestors also followed the ridges as they began to settle in this area over 200 years ago. In 1841, Stephen St. John, an attorney and farmer from New York state settled on what is now the Bordner Meadow portion of the preserve. St. John farmed row crops and pastured his cattle and hogs in St. John's Woods. The City of Bowling Green Water Works purchased the Wintergarden property and the northern portions of St. John's property in the 1940's to drill wells in order to provide the city with a supply of fresh water.

In 1954, the Rotary Club of Bowling Green began a day camp for local children, and in 1969, Wintergarden Lodge was built to support camps, scouts, and other community meetings and events. American Youth Hostels utilized the lodge as an overnight facility until 1995. At that point, the Bowling Green Parks and Recreation Department began renovating the lodge as a Nature Center with major support from the Rotary Club. The facility was renamed the Rotary Nature Center.

In 1999, a group of citizens concerned with the rapid loss of open green space purchased the Bordner Meadow property to the south of the Wintergarden property. Total acreage of the preserve now stands at 103 acres of meadow, prairie, old growth forest, wetland, fields, and pioneer woods. The group responsible for the purchase of the Bordner Meadow is now called the Bowling Green Parks and Recreation Foundation, and continues in its efforts to establish open green space throughout the Bowling Green area.

## Wintergarden/St. John's Nature Preserve Rules and Regulations

For the enjoyment of all park users,  
we ask that you adhere to the following rules:

-  Park closes at dark
-  Dogs must be on a leash and in control at all times\*
-  Please clean up after your pet, mutt mitts provided\*
-  Please do not litter, cigarette butts included\*
-  Alcohol and intoxicants are prohibited\*
-  Please respect the plants and animals that live in this preserve
-  The removal of plants and animals from this preserve is strictly prohibited\*
-  Please stay on marked trails

For questions or comments regarding Wintergarden/St. John's Nature Preserve and the Rotary Nature Center, please contact the Naturalist Office at 419-353-0301.

For facility rentals or for general information regarding the City of Bowling Green Parks and Recreation Department, please call 419-354-6223, ext. 0.



E-mail us at [bgparks@bgohio.org](mailto:bgparks@bgohio.org)  
[www.bgohio.org/parks-and-recreation/index.html](http://www.bgohio.org/parks-and-recreation/index.html)

\*All City of Bowling Green ordinances are enforced.

## Wintergarden/St. John's Nature Preserve



Butterfly and frog photos provided  
by Sheri Doust

THE CITY OF  
**BOWLING GREEN**  
PARKS & RECREATION  
*Ohio*

## Natural History

The natural habitats historically found in northwest Ohio were greatly shaped by the impact of the last Ice Age. As the glaciers and lakes repeatedly advanced and retreated the landscape was altered, scraped away and flattened. This geologic process combined with the remaining heavy clay soil resulted in an area of poor drainage, later to be known as the Great Black Swamp. Ten thousand years ago, a predecessor to Lake Erie known as Lake Warren, deposited sand along its edges. The deposits of this ancient lake are the sand ridges that run through Wood County today. Although dominated by a swamp, the heart of the county contained lush prairie grasses, flowers and open oak savannas. The Wintergarden/St. John's Nature Preserve hosts a variety of habitats which help one to visualize what the Bowling Green landscape looked like prior to American settlement. This includes the Great Black Swamp, oak savanna, prairie and wetland habitats.

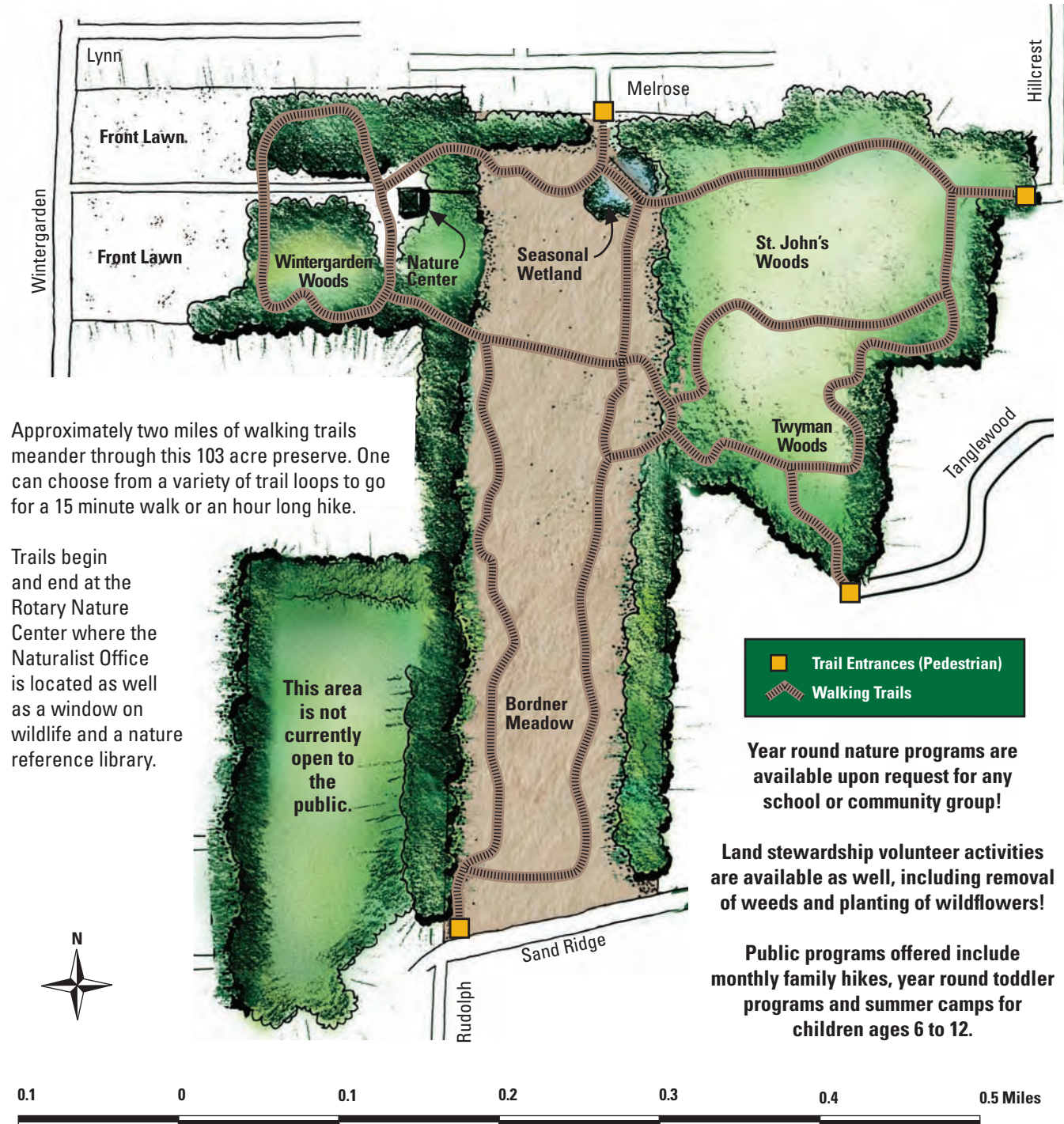
## Restoration

The preserve is currently undergoing restoration efforts through selective land management techniques in order to enhance the habitats within and preserve our local biological diversity.

Visitors may witness park staff and volunteers removing non-native and invasive plant species to make room for plants that are native to these unique habitats. Prescribed burning and mowing (to simulate burning) will also be used as a management tool to restore this degraded landscape into a healthy environment. Plants and animals native to oak savannas and prairie habitats are adapted to, and sometimes dependent upon, periodic fires.

Nature Center staff and volunteers will also be collecting seeds of desirable plants from around the county to plant in the preserve. Some of the seeds will be used to produce transplants of rare, threatened and endangered Ohio plant species.

## The Nature Preserve



Approximately two miles of walking trails meander through this 103 acre preserve. One can choose from a variety of trail loops to go for a 15 minute walk or an hour long hike.

Trails begin and end at the Rotary Nature Center where the Naturalist Office is located as well as a window on wildlife and a nature reference library.

**Trail Entrances (Pedestrian)**  
**Walking Trails**

**Year round nature programs are available upon request for any school or community group!**

**Land stewardship volunteer activities are available as well, including removal of weeds and planting of wildflowers!**

**Public programs offered include monthly family hikes, year round toddler programs and summer camps for children ages 6 to 12.**

