

BLUFFWOODS CONSERVATION AREA

Tom Nagel, 2017

2,281 acres Buchanan Co. De Lorme 26, 3-A

GPS: 39.622563,-94.9684482

Owned by MDC. For information call 816-271-3100

Bluffwoods Conservation Area is on the Great Missouri Birding Trail. It is in the northern part of the Audubon Iatan/Weston River Corridor Important Bird Area. The Important Bird Areas Program (IBA) is an effort to identify and conserve areas that are vital to birds and other biodiversity. This area offers excellent opportunities to observe neo-tropical migrant forest birds, many of which are uncommon to rare in northwestern Missouri.

Directions: From the intersection of U.S. Hwy. 59 south & State Hwy. U/Alabama Street in the southwestern part of Saint Joseph, go 4.1 miles to SW Bluff Road & turn left. When the road forks less than 0.1 miles from Hwy. 59, stay to the right on SW Bluff Rd. 0.75 miles to SW Warnicks Rd. and again stay right at this intersection. From SW Warnicks Rd., go another 1.25 miles on SW Bluff Rd. to SW Bethel Rd. (As an alternative, SW Bethel Rd. can be accessed more directly where it intersects US 59 3/10ths of a mile west of it's intersection with SW Bluff Rd. However, the US 59/SW Bethel intersection is a sharp turn and rises at a fairly steep angle before crossing the railroad.)

From the intersection of SW Bethel Rd. and SW Bluff Rd., either turn left and go 0.6 miles to the entrance to the Forest Nature Trail parking lot which will be ~0.2 miles from SW Bethel or, to get to the Kerlin Creek Picnic Area, continue 1.5 miles on SW Bluff Rd. to CR 226 SW/Henman Rd. and turn left. Go 0.6 miles on C R 226 SW/ Henman Rd. to 60 SW and turn left. From this intersection, go 0.1 mile (crossing a small bridge) and turn left into the Kerlin Creek Picnic Area parking lot.

Coming from the south on U.S. Hwy. 59, from the U.S. Hwy. 59 & State Hwy. 116 intersection at Rushville, go 5.3 miles to CR 226 SW/Henman Rd. or 6.5 miles to Bethel Rd., turn right, and follow the directions in the preceding paragraph. **A note of caution: Almost immediately after turning off of US 59, both County Road 226 SW/Henman Road & Bethel Road cross an active railroad crossing without signals. This railroad carries coal to the Iatan Power Plant to the south and is very active. Use extreme caution before crossing.**

ADA Information: Meadow Trail (.3 mile) and Prairie Trail (.2) are paved, rated easy, and disabled accessible. See below for additional information.

Parking lot names used in the following are as they are labeled on the 01/13 area map available at the Missouri Department of Conservation web site at <https://mdc.mo.gov/> . For a more direct link, Google "Bluffwoods Conservation Area Map" & click on the map link at the lower left of area information page.

When to Visit & What to Expect: One of the larger forest/woodland complexes in the Missouri River bluffs north of Kansas City, roughly 3/4ths of this area is forested with the remainder being a mix of small open grasslands, shrub lands & young forest. The bluffs are loess capped with a mix of limestone and shale bedrock at their base. The area is heavily dissected by a number of small, rock-bottomed, low flowing to intermittent streams and has

approximately 200 feet of vertical relief within its boundaries. Despite the apparent ruggedness of the area from the roads dissecting it, the areas noted below offer low to moderate grade trails providing much easier access than might at first be expected.

The best time to visit is during the spring and fall migration season but there are opportunities to view a few of these forest neotropical migrant species during the nesting season from late May until mid July. Peak time for migrating spring warblers is usually from late April through the middle part of May.

Features of Interest to Birders: The Forest Nature Trail (parking lot E) is accessed from Bethel Rd. in the northeastern part of the area. It is a paved trail starting at the parking lot and has three loops labeled as Prairie Trail, Meadow Trail, and Bluff Trail on the area map. The first loop, Prairie Trail, encircles a small planting of native grasses & wildflowers. The second loop, Meadow Trail, encircles another small planting that is more shrubby while the third loop, Bluff Trail, is primarily woodland and forest.

The first two loops are accessible to the disabled. They parallel or intersect a rocky stream in several places and sometimes produce Winter Wrens in the late fall and late winter/early spring. The third loop has a slightly steeper grade in places. Louisiana Waterthrush can be found here during spring migration while Hermit Thrush occur intermittently from late fall through early spring. Red-shouldered and Broad-winged Hawks as well as Pileated Woodpeckers may broadcast their presence during the spring courtship season.

Kerlin Creek Picnic Area (parking lot A) and the lower part of Maple Falls Trail (1.5 miles, rated difficult) are in the bottom of a deep valley and more heavily forested than the Forest Nature Trail noted above. Maple Falls Trail is a natural surface trail that is level to gently undulating, parallels Kerlin Creek & splits at the bridge to start the first loop of this double loop trail (as labeled on the area map, the second loop being the 1.5 mile Lone Pine Trail). Scarlet Tanagers, Acadian Flycatchers, Kentucky & Northern Parula warblers, and Wood Thrush have all been observed here during the nesting season in June.

A part of the area less visited by most birders is a gated, graveled (at the time this is written) service road that goes out from parking lot B located on Lewis School Rd. in the southern part of the area. There is a small stream immediately past the gate. If it is passable (do not try to cross when flooded), the service road, which is closed to private vehicles, goes approximately a mile to the top of the hill. The first half-mile is level to gently rolling while the last half-mile is a moderate climb. The road corridor and associated utility line corridor (two lines on standard poles, not high voltage lines) are 20 to 30 yards wide. Beyond a small field shortly after crossing the stream at the gate, it is mostly forested on both sides on the lower slopes transitioning to a younger aged woodland with scattered openings on top of the ridge.

The areas around parking lots C & D on Lewis School Rd. and the roughly 1 mile of small stream that parallels the road between these two lots also offers good birding opportunities.

Parking lot F is located in the northeast corner of the area off of SW Warnicks Rd., 1 mile from its intersection with SW Bluff Rd. The area around this parking lot is deeply forested, heavily dissected & looks like it would offer excellent warbler possibilities during spring migration.

Toilets: Privies (pit toilets) accessible to the disabled are located at the Kerlin Creek & Forest Nature Trail parking lots and noted on the area map.

Camping: There is a primitive camping area at parking lot C in the south central part of the area. Another primitive camping area, available by special use permit only, is available off of Bethel Rd. in the northern part of the area.

Other Facilities: There is a picnic shelter at the Forest Nature Trail (parking lot E, and picnic tables near the Kerlin Creek Picnic Area parking lot (parking lot A).

Nearby Birding Sites: Located in the Missouri River flood plain, the four oxbow lakes described below can at times be productive for waterfowl, shorebirds, grebes, gulls, terns, herons, loons, etc. during spring and fall migration.

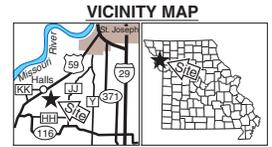
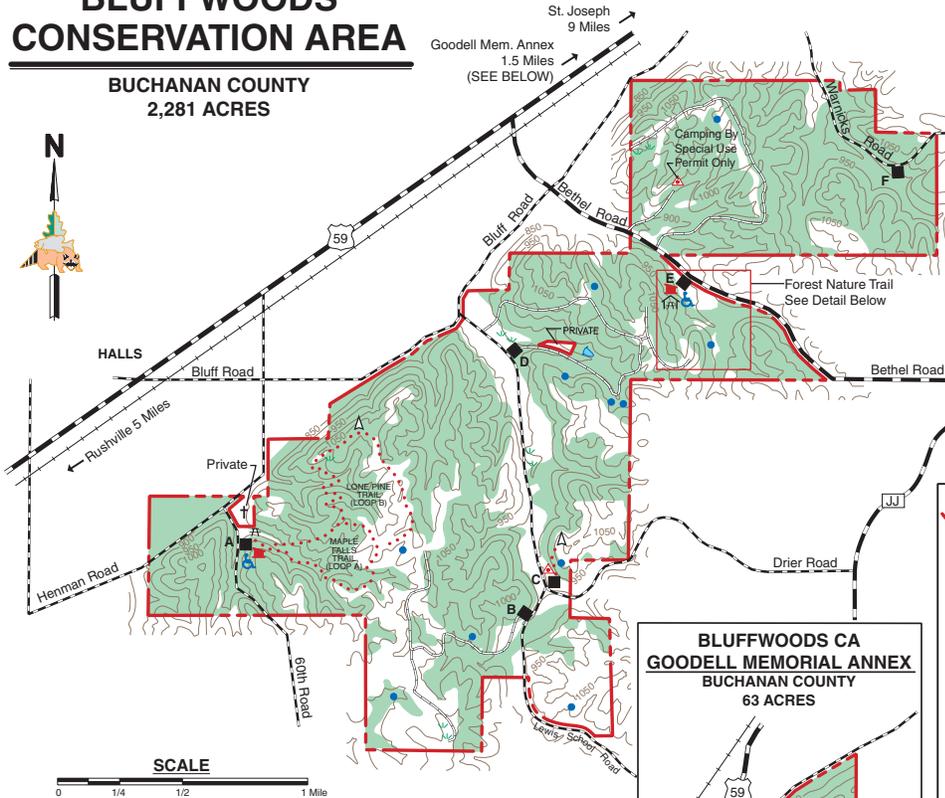
Horseshoe Lake is on the west side of US 59 on the south side of Pettet Road approximately 1.75 miles north of this area. Muskrat Lake is about ½ mile further west of Horseshoe Lake along 41st Rd. Both of these abandoned Missouri River channel lakes are on private land but visible from nearby public roads. **Please do not trespass!**

Lake Contrary, another Missouri River oxbow lake, is about 4.5 miles north of Bluffwoods. There is some public access on the northeast and north side of this lake but the majority of its shore is private.

Lewis & Clark SP, yet another oxbow lake, is about 9 miles to the southwest of Bluffwoods. South of Rushville, MO at the intersection of US 59 (which goes to Atchison, Kansas) and MO 45, proceed 1 mile south to on MO 45 to Lakecrest Blvd., turn right and go about 3/4ths of a mile to the park.

BLUFFWOODS CONSERVATION AREA

BUCHANAN COUNTY
2,281 ACRES



LEGEND

Boundary	
Paved Road	
Gravel Road	
Service Road	
Hiking Trail	
Disabled Accessible Trail	
Railroad	
Parking Lot	
Wildlife Water Hole	
Picnic Area	
Picnic Shelter	
Privy	
Primitive Camping Area	
Scenic Overlook	
Native Grass	
Pond	
Disabled Accessible	
Cemetery	
Forest	
Topography	

