

A BIRDERS' GUIDE TO MISSOURI PUBLIC LANDS

WELDON SPRING CONSERVATION AREA

Edge Wade, March 2012

8,359 acres St Charles Co. DeLorme 40, F-4

Owned by MDC; for additional information call 636-441-4554

Directions: From I-64 westbound, exit at MO 94 and go south, from I-64 eastbound there is no exit at MO 94. Exit at the sign for August A. Busch CA and follow the south side outer road to MO 94. Stay on MO 94 for Weldon Spring sites.

Prairie Lake is reached from Missouri Research Park Dr., off MO 94, between I-64 and the outer road intersection. Take Research Park Dr. to just past the commuter parking lot. A gravel road on the right leads to a lot and the lake. The remainder of the area is reached from lots along MO 94.

When to Visit/Species to Expect: Any time is good here. The habitat variety is about as great as can be expected in Missouri. The 201 species checklist includes 17 species of sparrows, 13 raptors, and 33 warblers (the Lost Valley Trail is one of the best places in the state to find nesting Cerulean Warblers). If the chickadees at Weldon Spring were sorted out, the list would be 202 or 203.

So many rarities have been found here that birders can enter the area with high hopes of finding something special. In December, 2004, a Lark Bunting was found, in August, 2006 Swallow-tailed Kite spent several days around the sealed hazardous waste mound birders call "Mt. Doom" [see Hazards/Limitations section]. Recorded in August A. Busch CA, the bird flew over Weldon Spring CA more than once. A Painted Bunting was reported regularly near the Katy Trail parking lot from June 2002 into July 2007, and a Common Ground Dove spent the last six weeks of 2011 hanging around the "Blue Grosbeak Trail" [see below].

Features of interest to birders: Several parking lots provide access to trails. A favorite trail has no "official" name. Dubbed "The Blue Grosbeak Trail" by birders, it is beyond the orange gate at the first part of the parking lot nearest Fire Lake. This is the first parking lot along the south side of MO 94 when coming from I-64. It is east of the intersection with Rt. D, and is east of Francis Howell H.S.

The Blue Grosbeak trail is a birder's delight for seeking sparrows (including Le Conte's), Bell's Vireo, and a host of migrant and breeding passerines. American Woodcocks can be found at dawn and dusk along the trail in late February and early March.

Another excellent trail for birding is the Lost Valley Trail, accessed from the last (westernmost) parking lot on MO 94. The trail goes into the Little Femme Osage Creek valley where towering sycamores provide nesting habitat for Cerulean Warblers. A walk here in spring and early summer for a mile or so of this 11-mile loop is about as idyllic as birding can get. Mountain bikes can be expected along this trail.

The Lewis and Clark Trail loops begin at the first lot on the south side of MO 94 west of Francis Howell H.S. The combined trail (stay to the right from the parking lot) goes along high ground and drops toward the Missouri River just beyond the 1 mile marker. The Clark Trail splits off for a return loop through the 385-acre Weldon Spring Hollow Natural Area with upland and bottomland forest through rugged river breaks topography (total about 5.3 miles). The longer Lewis loop (8.2 miles) is a gentler trek. These trails are for foot travel only.

The Hamburg Trail roughly parallels MO 94 for most of the length of the area and connects into Busch CA. It is a 6-mile non-loop multi-use trail.

A 5.3 mile section of Katy Trail SP runs along the Missouri River through Weldon Spring CA.

There are several ponds near trails. The road off MO 94 to the Katy Trail parking lot continues through Femme Osage Slough to a boat ramp on the Missouri River, giving access to habitat different from trail areas.

Toilets: One vault toilet at the Katy Trail SP parking lot off road leading to boat ramp.
Camping: Missouri River boaters may camp within 100 yards of the river between April 1 and September 30.

Hazards/Limitations: The MDC area description includes these statements, "Portions of the Weldon Spring Conservation Area were used by the Department of Army in the 1940's for TNT and DNT production and by the Atomic Energy Commission in the 1960's for uranium ore processing. The affected portions were all part of a federal environmental cleanup project and required to meet certain environmental health and safety standards. The area is now considered safe for all recreational pursuits allowed on the area, as well as the wildlife found within the area. To find out more about the history of these activities on the area, you can visit the Weldon Spring Site Interpretive Center located at 7295 Highway 94 South, St. Charles, MO, 63304."

Hunting activity can be heavy. Extreme caution should be taken and orange clothing worn, even on trails, during hunting seasons, especially dove and quail seasons.

Nearby Birding Sites: August A. Busch Memorial CA, Katy Trail SP; Weldon Spring CA Darst Bottom Tract 1,008 acres is accessible only by river.