

# Kishwaukee Headwaters Conservation Area

This September the Conservation District will open the gates to the Kishwaukee Headwaters Conservation Area, a 153-acre wetland, sedge meadow, and remnant savanna complex, located south of Route 14 and east of Dean Street in Woodstock.

The site allows residents a unique opportunity to explore the large wetland complex along a 1.75-mile mowed path and elevated boardwalk nature trail. A parking lot, bus pull in, picnic shelter and restrooms have also been added to the site.



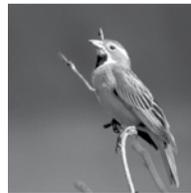
Bur reed, flower

Within the site, over 132 native plant species such as great blue lobelia, wild mint, marsh marigolds, asters, and prairie star are thriving. Sandhill cranes, bobolinks, dickcissels, and eastern meadowlarks can be spied amongst the towering sunflowers and soaring over the meadow.

The acquisition and vision of Kishwaukee Headwaters Conservation Area is the result of cooperative efforts from four separate entities sharing the same common goal of setting aside parcels for the creation of open space and protecting the upper watershed of the Kishwaukee River. In 2000, McHenry County Conservation District, McHenry County Soil & Water Conservation District, Environmental Defenders of McHenry County, and the City of Woodstock submitted a joint application to the IDNR, Open Lands Grant Program to assist in the acquisition of 200 acres of sensitive

properties within Woodstock and to help pay for 50% of the acquisition costs—86 acres of which are now part of Kishwaukee Headwaters Conservation Area.

Extensive restoration began on the site in 2004 as old tile lines, fence posts and wire were removed, as well as invasive reed canary grass. The area was reseeded with native species and prescribed burns



L–R: Dickcissel. Seating area overlooking a sedge meadow.

were conducted. A master plan was approved for the site in 2008 that outlined the preservation of the diverse natural resources, and allowed for enhanced educational opportunities that promote the awareness, understanding and appreciation of the site, while building a strong collaborative effort between the associated land holding groups.

*Join us in the  
dedication of this site  
Thursday, September 9  
from 3:30–5 p.m.*

## History

Pre-settlement conditions of the Headwaters showed that large blocks of oak dominated woodlands and prairie expanses along the higher portions of the site once existed, while a majority of the site was once composed of a large wetland complex. By 1872, plat maps show a large amount of agricultural activity and timber clearing. By 1939, the wetland complex had been ditched for crops and cattle grazing. A small gravel pit also once existed on the western portion of the site. By the 1960s, agricultural practices continued to expand to cover nearly every portion of the site. When Route 14 was constructed in the 1960s, the fens and wetlands to the north were separated from the large basin marsh and sedge meadow to the south. Eventually farming was abandoned, leading to the invasion of exotic plant species along the disturbed areas.

Of the natural communities that once existed on the site, only a high-quality basin marsh and sedge meadow, known as the 151-acre Dean Street Wetland, which extends south of the site, still remains intact.

## From Woodstock to the Gulf of Mexico

The 153 acres that currently make up the Kishwaukee Headwaters Conservation Area and the surrounding land area are responsible for the initial flow of the Main Branch of the Kishwaukee River. The springs, seeps and fens release subsurface waters onto the land that converge at the southern end of the conservation area into a defined stream bed channel. The channel then flows eastward from Woodstock toward Crystal Lake where it makes a half circle and turns west converging with the Southern Branches of the Kishwaukee River near Marengo. The Kishwaukee River continues west to the Rock River which eventually feeds into the Mississippi River. The Kishwaukee basin covers 1,250 square miles.