

One of seven new interpretive signs that tell about the ecosystems and history of the Richard T. Anderson Conservation Area in Eden Prairie.



Signs help explain ecosystem, history

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Nestled along the Minnesota River bluffs in Eden Prairie is an area where people can enjoy nature — and history — as they amble along on walking trails. A collection of colorful, informative signs recently was installed along the Elizabeth Fries Ellet Interpretative Trail, a mile-long walkway that weaves through different natural ecosystems within the city's Richard T. Anderson Conservation Area. The 125-acre area is located off of Flying Cloud Drive near the Chanhassen city border.

The signs: A sign is placed in each of the six natural habitats along the Interpretive Trail. Each sign displays pictures of animals, birds, plants and insects that make their home in that particular ecosystem. Along the top of each sign is a panoramic picture of the habitat. The middle includes short stories, facts and pictures of people who are historically important to the ar-

ea. Along the bottom, children can easily see images of critters that live in each ecosystem. On each sign is a different picture of Elizabeth Fries Ellet, a New York writer who visited the area in 1852 and whose positive description of the land led to the name "Eden Prairie." A seventh sign includes more history and images, including a timeline of Ellet's travels.

The interpretive trail: The trail's different ecosystems marked by the six signs include the "Bottomland Forest," "Oak Savanna" and "Prairie." The pathway, a mixture of dirt and wood chips, winds around two separate loops that together equal almost 1 mile.

How it came to be: Since 2004, Writers Rising Up, a local nonprofit group, has raised funds and led efforts to create the trail signs. The city of Eden Prairie approved the signs' designs and allowed them to be placed within the conservation area.

Funding: Nearly 200 private Eden Prairie donors contributed more than \$35,000



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The interpretive trail winds through six natural habitats. The signs tell not only about the animals and plants, but also about Elizabeth Fries Ellet, the New York writer who gave Eden Prairie its name.

A CELEBRATION

Attend a celebration of the completed sign project Aug. 2 at 6 p.m. Enter the conservation area at 18700 Flying Cloud Dr. Expect a walking tour and refreshments.

and hundreds of volunteer hours to the sign project; the money helped pay for designing and constructing the signs, and for the use of proprietary images. The Eden Prairie Lions Club, the Clark family of Eden Prairie, the Metropolitan Airports Commission and the Eden Prairie Foundation each contributed a significant amount to the project.



Eden Prairie residents Mike Mohn and Anna Steider enjoyed a view of the Minnesota River from a bluff top at the Richard T. Anderson Conservation Area. New interpretive signs have been posted along nature trails at the park, including one at the top of this hill.