

## **Luther College Natural Areas Walking Trail – 5 mile loop**

- Trails may be muddy after rain – wear sturdy shoes
- Watch for blue arrows nailed to trees that mark the path.
- The trail is designed for walking, and may be suitable for some runners.
- Most sections are not recommended for skis, but snow shoes should be fine.
- Check for ticks after walking, and seek medical attention if a bull's-eye rash appears around a bite.

From the Union, walk in the front of the CFL, Valders, and the Sampson-Hoffland Labs. Head out onto the grass, following the line of trees beside the city pool. Cross College Drive, and walk across Anderson Prairie towards Hickory Ridge Woods. You will see the apartments of Baker Village to your left, and with the red barn past them. The upper portion of Anderson Prairie was planted in 1988, the lower half in 1998. Several sections are burned each year to maintain diversity and prevent trees from encroaching.

Enter Hickory Ridge Woods and turn right. You'll cross a small wooden bridge, then turn to the left to on the trail beside the stream channel (A). The trail will head uphill, bending to the left. You'll walk through a mixed forest of oak, hickory, hackberry, and elm. What is now forest would have been an oak savanna or woodland 150 years ago. It was logged, then grazed for many decades. In the spring, look for wildflowers including hepatica, anemone, blood root, and showy. As you reach the top of the hill, you'll see an agricultural field and the Vennhjem apartments above you. The forest is more open here, with more oak and hickory. After you cross the gully, watch for where the loop trail heads right (B), away from the Hickory Ridge Woods trail. Cross the bike path and walk through the open woodland. The path enters thicker forest, heads downhill, then leaves the forest near College Drive and the old red hog shed.

Cross College Drive, pass the disc golf sign, and head right (northwest) down the hill along the cross country course (C). Follow the trail as it heads north along the base of the slope. You'll pass wetlands on your left, a few seeps on the slope to your right. Bend left (west) and continue along the trail beneath the maples, parallel to Pole Line Road. When you reach the berm, cross Pole Line Road and the bridge.

Turn right (north) onto the mowed path on the west side of the berm, and follow it path past the agricultural fields, heading towards the white pines at the base of the slope. The trail enters dense forest, heading gradually up hill. This area was open pasture in the 1950s: most of the trees are invasive European buckthorns, with a few impressive natives mixed in. The path will widen into an old 2-track, then bend left (west) to climb to the summit of Hawk Hill. Follow the path west along the summit, then turn north to walk across the meadow to the opening in the fence line (D). Turn west and head down to US 52.

Carefully cross US 52 and enter the forest on the opposite side. The trail heads north for a short distance to cross a gully, then west for a quarter mile until it leaves the forest and enters an open field with scattered young trees. The US Forest Service is conducting trials with elms that are resistant to Dutch elm disease here. Stay right (west) to walk up to the summit (E), then follow right fork of the trail as it turns south (F). You'll see forest ahead. The loop trail crosses over a low berm and drop into a lovely open forest (G). The trail heads through the forest for 200 yards, then bends east as it drops down the slope and enters a grove of pines. When you leave the pines and intersect the mowed trail (H), turn right (south) and go down hill through the plantation of pines and hardwoods (planted in 1990). The mowed trail ends at a group of sheds: follow the driveway down past the community garden plots to Pole Line Road.

Cross Pole Line Road, and enter the trail on the left side of the driveway on the opposite side. Follow the trail as it meanders east between Pole Line Road and the river. Near the corner of US 52 and Pole Line Road, the trail turns right (south). The trail passes two ponds and follows the river south: a side branch leads to a beach on the river. Continue along the trail and cross under the 52 bridge.

Follow the trail along the south edge of Gateway Prairie (planted in 2005) until you cross the berm and reach the campus dike road. During the 2008 flood, Gateway Prairie was completely submerged, and captured six inches of sediment. Walk towards the gap between the stadium and the Regents Center (gym), then climb the stairs to reach the Union. (If the Union stairway is locked, you can walk left along the back of the gym to reach the trail to the top).

