

## A PROPOSAL

To: The Campus Planning Committee

From: The Campus Natural Areas Advisory Group

Re: Demarcation of a Native Prairie - Woodland Complex;  
Dedicated to Education, Environmental Quality, Recreation and  
Greenspace

### Introduction

Six small areas on the west side of the campus contain significant ecological resources. These areas include dry, mesic, and wet prairie, marsh, pond, and deciduous forest. They are of prime value as outdoor laboratories, especially because they are compact and on campus, so can all be visited and studied in a short time, with no extra transportation. Four of these sites lie on land that is either steep or has poor drainage, and are clearly unfit for building. The other two (the forested sites D and E on the map) may be developable, but add greatly to the ecological value and class-use of the area. The purpose of this proposal is to outline how and why the university should preserve this natural resource.

The area provides a unique setting for outdoor studies in botany, zoology, geology, and ecology classes because of the variety of landscape and vegetation units present. They could be used for other recreational activities, such as hiking, jogging, birdwatching, and photography. Until recently, they have been little used because they were little known. The proposed natural area would also continue to be an attractive greenbelt at the west entrance of the campus.

For convenience, this assemblage of natural areas is herein referred to as the West Campus Ecosystem. It would serve as a connecting link of greenspace between the main campus and the Mormon Handcart Park. Dedication of this area would certainly be compatible with both Iowa City's and Johnson County's efforts to identify and preserve selected areas of natural habitat. Although the University has not traditionally dedicated buildings or tracts to specific long term purposes, these natural areas are virtually irreplaceable once developed, thus needing a long term commitment to insure their survival.

### Outline of Sites and Proposed Schedule (keyed to map - Figure 1)

#### Site A - "Arena Prairie"

A dry-mesic steep-slope prairie remnant, now heavily overgrown with sumac. Ten native species were identified in summer 1984. Based on earlier surveys, another dozen species are probably present but suppressed by the sumac. Maintenance required is the development of an enclosing firebreak footpath. Initially, the sumac should be cut or mowed and the stumps painted with 2,4,D (spring 1985). Periodic burning every few years will release suppressed species and later surveys will suggest whether additional species should be planted.

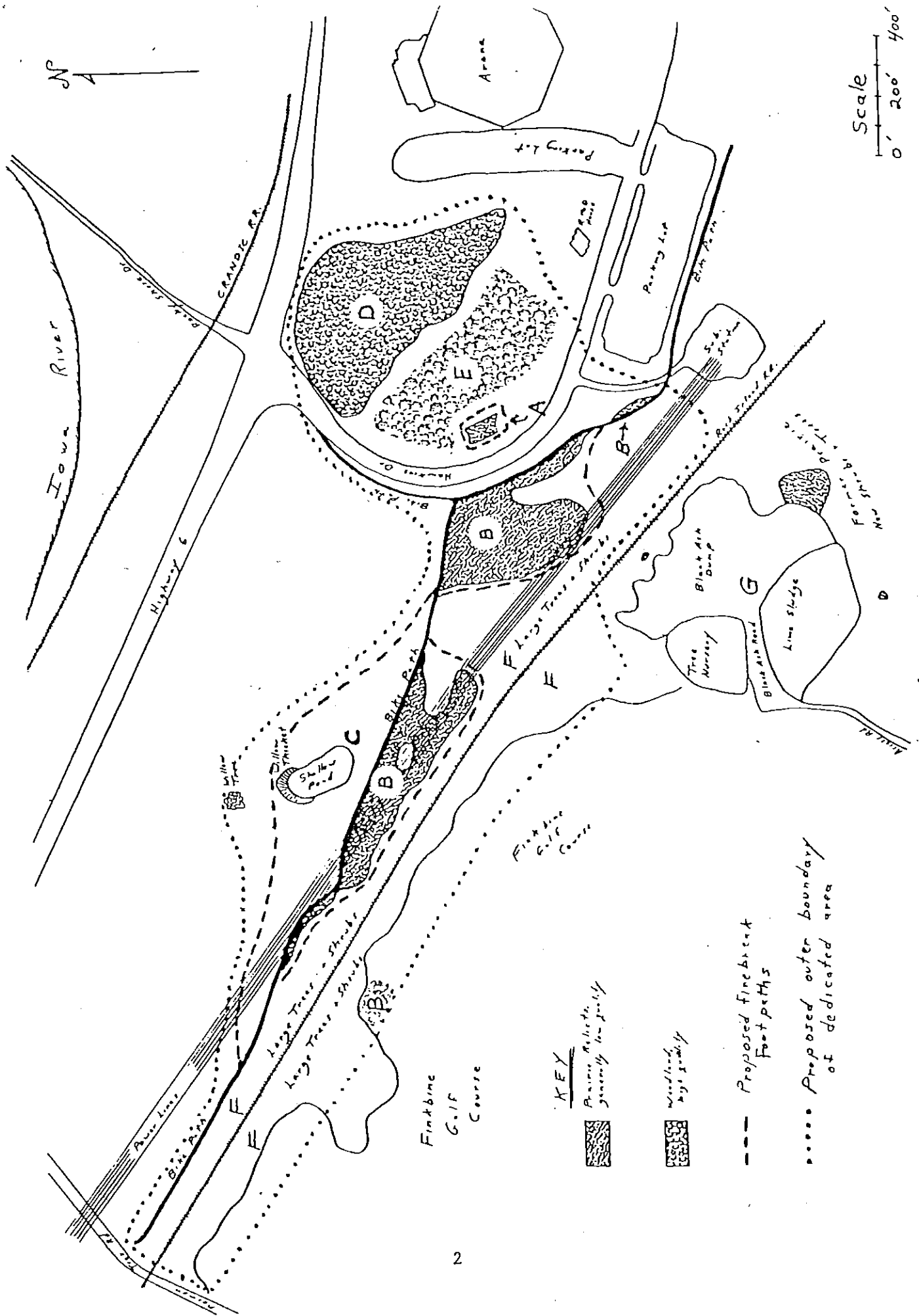






Figure 1

- KEY**
-  Prairie Ashes, generally low quality
  -  woodlands, high quality
  -  Proposed firebreak footpaths
  -  Proposed outer boundary of dedicated area

#### Site B - "Bike Trail Prairies"

This is a cluster of prairie relicts, mostly located between the bike trail and the Rock Island railroad. A total of 23 native prairie species were identified in summer 1984 and many others are certainly present, suppressed below the encroaching underbrush. As at Site A, maintenance required consists of a series of firebreak footpaths tying into the paved bike trail. We propose this development begin in 1985. Part of this prairie maintenance will also serve a useful function in eliminating tree growth below the high-tension electric lines connecting the west side substation.

#### Site C - "Floodplain Wet Prairie & Pond"

One small shallow pond still remains on the edge of the floodplain, surrounded by a few acres of marshy ground. This area has been disturbed by machinery, but at least eight native species remain. The pond is supplied from an extensive shallow water table and does not go dry during most summers. Our proposal is therefore to gradually replant and restock this area with additional native pond and prairie marsh species. A perimeter firebreak footpath would allow occasional burns to control future invasion of willow and other trees. Plants should be transplanted into the site as they become available over the next 5 years. The vegetation would help stabilize this lowland as a low-maintenance drainageway for the surrounding areas.

#### Site D - "Arena Forest"

This is a fine relict of native upland hardwood forest. Even though the largest trees have been logged, it still retains the classic 3-tiered structure of canopy trees, understory shrubs and forest floor wildflowers. Maintenance consists mainly of dedicating it to the native condition, occasionally removing invading species (like multiflora rose) and possibly establishing a nature trail through it. A survey will indicate if any missing species should be replanted.

#### Site E - "Hawkins Drive Park"

This area was originally forested like Site D but thinned and mowed in modern times, so that the understory shrubs and wildflowers have been largely replaced by grass. The dominant species are now mature spreading oak trees. We propose that Site E be preserved in this condition by occasional mowing and be dedicated to parkland, recreational and educational activities. Since it has been modified already, it could withstand some moderate development and use such as picnic areas, exercise trails, or archery range, without degrading its present condition.

#### Site F - "Railroad Succession"

An elongate strip on both sides of the Rock Island railroad was modified by construction during the Civil War era. The initial regrowth was probably prairie but as Iowa City developed and prairie fires and bison vanished from the scene, biological succession shifted to favor shrubs and trees. This area now exhibits educational examples of various stages and types of succession. This succession also provides habitat for some of the more valued wildlife species including deer, hawks, owls and badgers. Virtually no maintenance is needed other than a commitment not to develop it for other purposes. The center strip kept open by the railroad serves as a corridor for people and animals. Generations of local children have used this area as their "wilderness" in an otherwise urban setting.

### Interested Parties

A diverse assemblage of groups have expressed an interest in assisting the University preserve, develop and utilize the West Campus Ecosystem. Their proposed contributions are listed below:

- UI Physical Plant - routine mowing of footpaths and firebreaks
- UI Architect's Office - advise on design and integrate into other campus use patterns
- UI Botany & Zoology Dept. - class surveys of flora & fauna
  - prairie, forest, & wildlife projects
- UI Geology Dept. - prairie surveys
  - organize prairie burns
- UI Recreation Dept. - lay out trails, information signs
- Project Green - plant marsh area around pond to additional prairie
  - volunteers for management projects
- Iowa City - provide Fire Dept. backup for prairie burns
- Iowa Conservation Commission - advise on prairie, forest & wildlife management
  - provide some seed for projects
- Johnson Co. Heritage Trust - legal advice if necessary
  - volunteers for projects
- Johnson Co. Board of Supervisors - have located uncommon "roadside refugee" plants which could be transplanted into prairie and woodland sites
- Boy Scout Troop 222 - assist planting marsh area

### Signatories

The following persons are members of the Campus Natural Areas Advisory Group and offer their assistance in designing, developing or maintaining the sites described above:

Jerry Costello	UI Physical Plant
Don Sinek	UI Physical Plant Office
Dr. Jeff Schabilion	UI Botany Department
Dr. Stephen Hendrix	UI Botany Department
Dr. Richard Baker	UI Geology Department
Dr. Lon Drake	UI Geology Department
Peter Kollasch	Iowa Geological Survey
John Nesbitt	UI Recreation Ed.
Nancy Seiberling	Project Green
Marianne Milkman	Iowa City liaison
Timothy Thompson	Iowa Conservation Commission
Jud Te Paske	Johnson Co. Planning Board
Bill Hines	Johnson Co. Heritage Trust

PRAIRIE SPECIES IDENTIFIED IN PRELIMINARY SURVEY

WEST SIDE CAMPUS

Summer, 1984, (L.D., B.K., & R.B.)

A ("arena prairie")

leadplant  
white wild indigo  
big bluestem  
Indiangrass  
bush clover  
partridge pea  
little bluestem  
whorled milkweed  
a species of lobelia  
yellow stargrass

B ("bike trail prairies")

butterfly weed  
little bluestem  
Canada anemone  
beebalm  
black-eyed susan  
lance-leaved coreopsis  
New Jersey tea  
a species of mountain mint  
a species of willow herb  
wild henna  
Indiangrass  
bush clover  
rigid goldenrod  
white wild indigo  
New England aster  
Gaura coccinea  
a species of lythrum (alatum?)  
prairie coneflower  
tickseeded sunflower  
rosinweed  
woodland sunflower  
Culver's root  
alum root ?

C (floodplain wet prairie and pond)

verbena  
swamp milkweed  
a species of boneset  
spike rush  
norwegian cinguefoil  
ditch stonecrop  
cattails  
red-rooted umbrella sedge

D ("arena forest")

E ("Hawkins Drive Park")

F ("railroad succession")

little bluestem  
Indiangrass  
big bluestem  
whorled milkweed

G (ash dump prairies")

bush clover  
thimbleflower  
rigid goldenrod  
New Jersey tea  
black-eyed susan  
New England aster  
big bluestem  
Indiangrass  
sideoats grama  
wood sage  
trowel holes