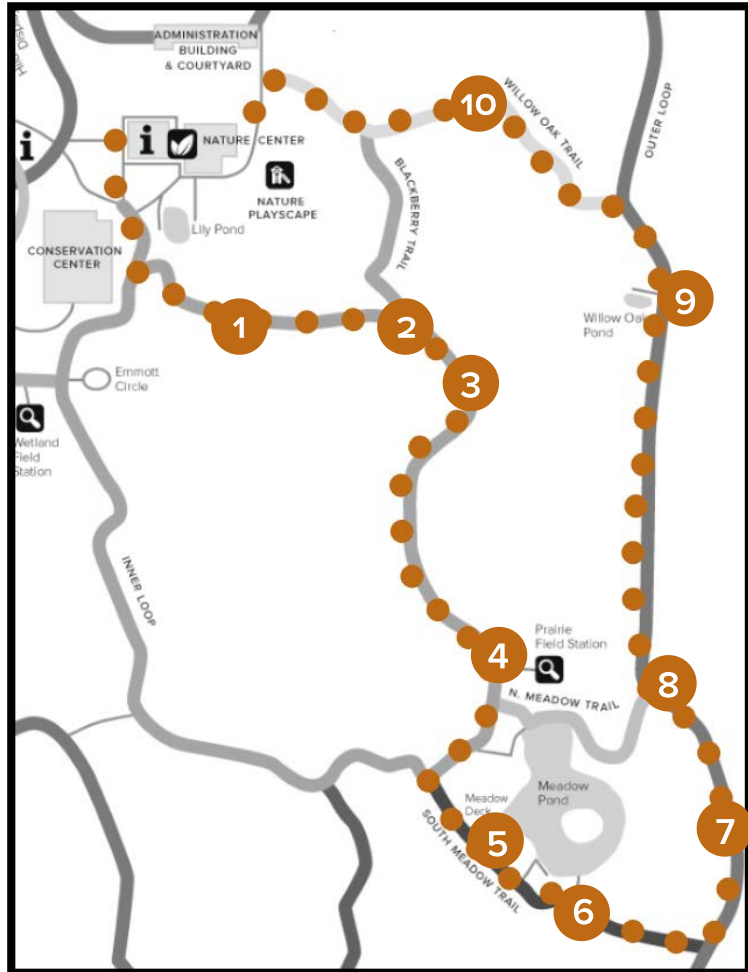


# HABITAT HIKE: PRAIRIE

## About the hike

This self-guided hike should take about 30-45 minutes. The path is a mixture of mulch, boardwalk, and gravel. Distance: 1 mile.

The Arboretum Prairie is a window into Houston's past. Historically, thousands of acres of grassland and wildflowers covered the area that would become the City of Houston. Buffalo and frequent natural fires would keep the prairie free of trees. Today, we keep trees and shrubs at bay by mowing and weeding.



### 1 *Fallen Post Oak*

Look for the huge, fallen post oak tree on your left. This tree died during the drought of 2011. Tree roots usually only reach a few feet below the surface, making them vulnerable to drought, wind, fire, and floods. Grass roots can reach up to 14 feet deep, allowing them to thrive in conditions that would kill a tree.

### 2 *Eastern Red Cedar*

At the intersection of the Inner Loop and Blackberry trails you will find a large eastern red cedar tree. Look up to see the feathery, green needles and touch the soft, shredded bark. Red cedars are often the first trees to grow back after wildfires or droughts.

### 3 *Hollow Pine*



Not far down the trail is a huge loblolly pine tree on your left. Look at the base of the trunk to find a scar left by a fire in the 1940s. In the past, regular fires would sweep through the area, maintaining open grassland.

### 4 *Prairie Field Station*



Do you see a light shining from the trail on your left? Turn and pass through a dense tunnel of trees until you finally emerge at the edge of the prairie. At the Prairie Field Station, you can learn all about this resilient habitat and admire amazing views of the open sky.

## BEING IN NATURE

Being part of the natural world means taking responsibility for our environment, for ourselves, and for each other. Slow down for nature - no jogging or biking. Look and listen, but stay on the trails. Leave no trace - carry out what you carry in. Leash and clean up after pets. Be kind and stay safe!

## 5 *Meadow Deck*

Walk up the ramp to the elevated Meadow Deck. Watch for hawks soaring overhead, turtles basking on logs, and maybe a baby alligator cruising through the water. Prairie ponds are a crucial habitat, especially for migrating birds and dragonflies.



## 6 *Bur Oak and Red Maple*

At the southern edge of the Meadow Pond, look for a fence shaded by a huge bur oak and a slightly smaller red maple. These majestic trees are not crowded by neighbors here and so they grow wide, spreading branches. In the fall, the maple turns a brilliant red.



## 7 *Prairie Panorama*

The prairie grows and changes color through the year. Grasses grow from tiny spring sprouts to summer giants. They develop silver or gold seed heads in fall, then die back in winter. Different flowers bloom at different times. In summer, look for purple blazing stars. You might see tall clusters of yellow goldenrod in late fall.

## 8 *Mason Bee House*



The north side of the prairie is lower and wetter. Here you can find the dark green, spiky stems of sedges. In the fall, this area is crowded with golden swamp sunflowers that attract butterflies and mason bees. We put up a bee house to give our pollinators a place to rest and lay their eggs.

## 9 *Willow Oak Pond*

You have just walked along the Outer Loop trail from the open prairie back into a dense wooded area. The Willow Oak Pond is a quiet spot among the trees where you can sit in the shade. Check the tree stumps for striped five-lined skinks, and listen for the splash of frogs leaping into the water.

## 10 *Savanna Bend*

On your right, you can see our restored savanna habitat. Savannas are a mix of grasses and trees, forming a transition between prairie and woodland. You will see many of the same grasses and wildflowers here that live in the prairie, and the same oaks and pines that grow in the woodland.



Enjoy these curated musical selections as you walk the Prairie Habitat Hike. Each piece of music was selected to complement the ecosystem and features of this hike.



 LISTEN

**BECOME A MEMBER, VOLUNTEER,  
AND SIGN UP FOR EVENTS AT:**  
[www.houstonarboretum.org](http://www.houstonarboretum.org)

