

## Facts

- The sand dunes were formed when glacial Lake Agassiz began to drain into Hudson Bay. Extensive erosion occurred when upstream water from glacial Lake Koochiching, flowing on the south edge of the retreating glacier, deposited sand as it entered the lake.

- 49,000 years ago very dry climate conditions caused the sand to be subject to wind induced drifting causing the dunes to form. Current periods of excessive rainfall have allowed for extensive vegetation to cover the dunes and reduce/prevent sand movement.

- An interesting phenomena occurs in the sand hills. North, facing the bluffs, forests of birch can survive due to moist, cool conditions. On the south facing hillsides, drier and warmer conditions allow mixed oak-aspen-birch forests and grassland to survive.

- Whereas most of the original grass prairie in the Red River Basin has been converted to agricultural production, the sand hills, due to low fertility and dry sandy conditions, remain in virtually pristine condition supporting rare and unique plant communities.

- Approximately ten acres of native grasses were planted replacing a historic alfalfa hay field. A matching fund grant from the MN Department of Natural Resources made this possible. Several years are required to establish this pre-settlement native grass.

- One-third of Minnesota was once covered by prairie. The combination of plants found within the sand hills is available no where else. Therefore, it is necessary for mankind to use this area, but not abuse it, preserving it for future generations.

- Dry sand savanna is an area of dry sand prairie with scattered bur oak trees. This combination is very rare. In the sand hills, the non-fertile soil has caused the oak to have a gnarly, twisted shape. Currently, aspen are becoming the dominant tree species. This is due to the fact that natural occurring fires have not controlled the plant growth. A controlled burn was conducted in an attempt to duplicate natural conditions.

- The sand hills are also home to many unique species of birds and animals. Desert-like heat conditions dictate the species that survive and thrive. A wolf spider, for instance, burrows about thirty-nine inches in the ground to build its' lair.

- Controlled Aspen harvesting is also practiced in the sand hills. Aspen are a very important source of food for wildlife. New growth Aspen can re-establish itself in one year, in previous years harvest areas, with a very dense plant population.

*Some more interesting facts...*

- The Fertile Sand Hills were originally formed by Glacial Lake Agassiz and later periods of drought and wind. Today several rare Minnesota landscapes and species make their home in the Sand Hills.

- The Fertile Sand Hills is a 640-acre natural area open to the public throughout the year. Over 10 miles of scenic recreational trails allow visitors to enjoy the many natural wonders of this special place.

- Campers can stay at the 10-site campground near the Nature Center. The Sand Hills offer spectacular overlooks and rolling landscapes unusual in the Red River Valley. Parts of the Sand Hill River remain open all winter-enhancing wildlife and bird observations.