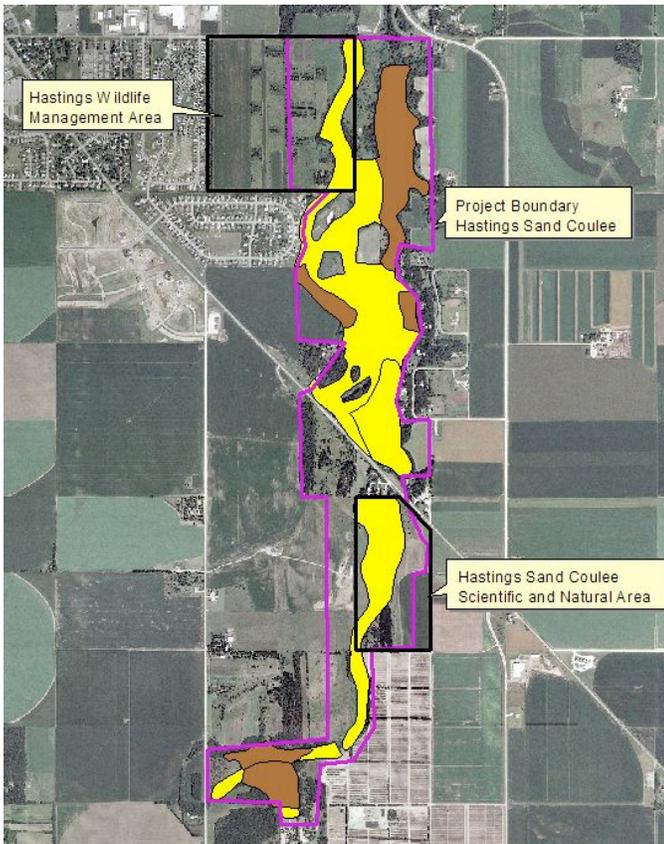
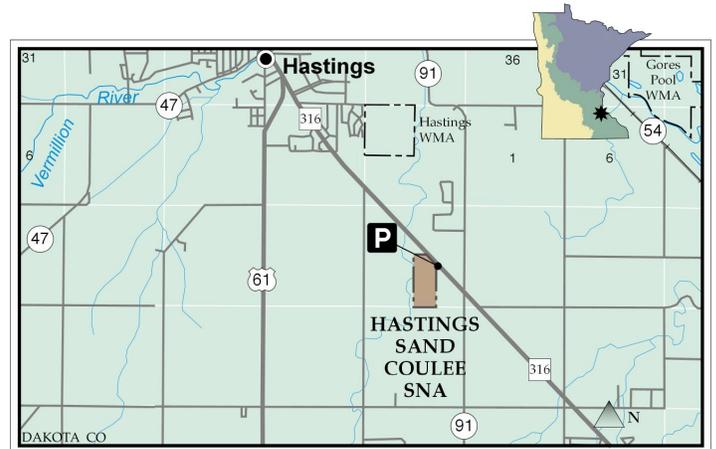




Hastings Sand Coulee Marshan Township, Dakota County

The unique, picturesque valley of Hastings Sand Coulee contains the largest extent of native prairie still remaining in Dakota County. A proposed natural area of over 500 acres would protect 13 rare species of animals and plants. The northwestern end of the coulee is protected by a portion of the Hastings Wildlife Management Area and its southern end is anchored the recently designated Hastings Sand Coulee Scientific and Natural Area – both units owned and managed by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR).



The Unique Landform...

Settlers to this area found a steep-sided valley cutting through a glacial outwash plain blanketed in prairie. An unnamed tributary stream to the Vermillion River runs down the middle of the flat valley between the steep-sided sandy slopes on either side. Though the stream is often dry, it does fill up and flood in wet springs.

... With Rare Plants

Remaining native plant communities mapped by Minnesota County Biological Survey include Dry Sand-Gravel Prairie and Dry Sand-Gravel Oak Savanna. The dry prairie community supports populations of nine rare plant species. One of these, *Polanisia jamesii* (James' polanisia), has been documented in only four other sites in the state besides the Hastings Sand Coulee – all in Washington or Dakota Counties. The other endangered plant species, *Lechea tenuifolia* (narrow-leaved pinweed), is known recently in only one other site in Minnesota.



Showy Penstemon



Photographs thanks to Friends of the Mississippi River.

www.dnr.state.mn.us/snas

October 2007.

Home to Rare Animals

Five rare animal species have been documented in the site, including two butterfly species and three snake species. One of the butterflies, *Hesperia ottoe* (ottoe skipper), is threatened in Minnesota, and the other, *Speyeria idalia* (regal fritillary), is special concern. Two of the snake species – *Elaphe vulpina* (eastern fox snake) and *Pituophis catenifer* (gopher or bull snake) – are of special concern, and the third snake is *Coluber constrictor* (blue racer). All of these animal species use the sand prairie habitat as well as the site's oak savanna and oak woodland.



Herpetologist with gopher snake



Habitat Management is Essential

The lack of fire, planting of pine and spruce trees, spread of native shrubs and trees, and invasion of exotic invasive plants have all caused the prairie habitat to degrade over time. In response, the Friends of the Mississippi River has worked with landowners in the Coulee to manage their land and the Friends have hosted numerous volunteer work days which are helping revitalize the native prairie.

Threats to the Coulee

All the rare resources of the coulee are under siege: not only by invasive species, but more destructively by people who ride their ATVs on this fragile landscape and by encroaching gravel mining & development.



Land Protection is Critical

Landowners are key to protecting the unique resources of the coulee – by managing their land as native habitat and protecting it from vehicles and other use. For long term protection, landowners may place a conservation easement on the land or sell and/or donate undeveloped areas to the DNR for inclusion in the Hastings Sand Coulee SNA. Acquisition of the new SNA from the Maher family was possible through the Metro Conservation Corridors partnership with funding from the Dakota County Farmland and Natural Areas Program and the state Environmental and Natural Resources Trust Fund as recommended by the Legislative-Citizens Commission on Minnesota Resources.

Before & after prescribed burn

