

Purchased before the Civil War by Judge Lawrence Weldon, a close friend of Abraham Lincoln from their days on the Eighth Judicial Circuit, the original 40-acre property was the site of annual Chautauqua from 1901 to 1921. These events were summertime educational, religious and entertainment assemblies popular nationwide from the mid-1800s until movies, radio and the automobile made them obsolete in the 1920s.

For 10 days each summer, area residents gathered at the site to hear some of the best public speakers and entertainers of the day. Among the most popular speakers were William Jennings Bryan, evangelist Sam Jones, the Reverend Billy Sunday, Helen Keller and Carrie Nation. Representing varied fields of interest, programs were presented for the enjoyment, education and "moral elevation" of the participants, who paid \$1.50 for a season ticket. As many as 325 families camped for the entire term, enjoying the opportunity to socialize with their neighbors.

Following the Chautauqua's demise, the site passed to the city of Clinton through a bequest of the Weldon family in 1936 and became a state park in 1955. It is managed by the Department of Natural Resources.

History

A 550-acre park for all seasons, Weldon Springs State Park is situated southeast of Clinton in DeWitt County. Its recreational agenda is among the most comprehensive in the state park system, offering outdoor opportunities year-round. During the milder seasons, you are invited to fish, boat, picnic, camp, hike and view wildlife. Or, you might want to pitch horseshoes at the park's tournament-quality horseshoe pits. When the snow flies, harder outdoor enthusiasts add sledding and tobogganing on a one-eighth mile hill plus ice fishing and cross-country skiing to their itineraries.

Weldon Springs State Park



More than a museum, Union School is a hands-on learning center emphasizing science and local history with a "please touch" philosophy. Included in the center is a collection of taxidermy mammals, representative of those making their homes in the park, that encourages visitors to pet a squirrel's tail, feel a badger's claws or examine beaver's teeth.

The Texas Township Community Building was moved to the prairie in 1995 and serves as the interpreter's office. The Town Hall houses collections of bird nests, rocks and minerals, musseis, animal tracks, grasses, butterflies and other insects.

Union School Interpretive Center can be reached at (217) 935-0373.

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The spring water has a very shallow source located above the elevation of the springs. Rainfall and snow melt that seeped into the ground about 20 years ago, has migrated about one mile through layers of sand and gravel before emerging at the springs. This thick deposit of silty sand and gravel was left by a continental-size glacier that covered the Clinton area 10,000-25,000 years ago. The water in the lake and Salt Creek are constantly fed by the same source that feeds the springs.

The Springs

Schoolhouse Trail is a loop of the 80-box bluebird trail maintained in the park. Bluebirds can be observed from late February to October. Circling the native prairie restoration project, walkers may observe various stages of the restoration process as a meadow dotted with trees gives way to tallgrass prairie. More than 30 different butterfly species have been identified among prairie and meadow flowers. Big bluestem and Indian grass may reach heights of 6 to 10 feet by September.

Heritage Trail traces Weldon Springs' heritage. A brochure guides the visitor to interpretive signs describing each stop. Beginning at Union Schoolhouse, the trail visits native prairie, white oak savanna and old-growth woodland demonstrating

White-tailed Ski Trail quickly drops into the bottomlands of Salt Creek. Birds should watch for migrating warblers, wild turkeys, eastern bluebirds, herons, hawks and owls. The biggest tree in the park, a silver maple, grows beside the creek near the primitive campsites. This 3-mile-long trail may be flooded in spring.

Beaver Dam Trail winds between woodland slopes, along side the Hidden Ponds and across and beside a small stream. This mile-long trail is ideal for night hiking, as visitors can listen to frogs, insects and whippoorwills in spring and summer and owls year-round.

Lakeside Self-Guiding Interpretive Trail circles the lake, winding for 2 miles through riparian habitat where the forest and lake communities meet. A brochure and numbered posts beside the trail interpret natural features along the way. With a series of stairways and footbridges to negotiate, it is the toughest trail to hike but is especially scenic.

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Trails

Nature has provided Weldon Springs with a wide variety of wildlife, wildflowers and tree species. Along the trails or from wildlife observation areas, especially at Lookout Point, you can anticipate seeing deer, beavers, turtles, raccoons, mink, muskrats, foxes, coyotes and groundhogs, as well as chipmunks and squirrels. Bird species include songbirds, hawks and owls and, occasionally, bald eagles.

Weldon Springs' forest is dominated by hardwoods such as oak, hickory, walnut, maple, ash, hackberry, sweetgum, sycamore, black locust and honey locust. Wildflower fanatics will find spring beauties, violets, red trillium and Dutchman's breeches. Patches of native tallgrass prairie can be seen in the park's southeast corner, near the sledding hill, at the Black Locust group camping area and by the Union School Interpretive Center.

The Natural Scene

the landscape as it appeared when European settlers arrived. Other sites describe the Chautauqua meetings and the springs that formed millions of years ago.

Habitat Trail highlights the variety of habitat types represented in the park. Wetlands feature lake, pond, stream, marsh and riparian habitats; deciduous forest includes upland slope, creek bottomland and woodland savanna; meadow and prairie represent grasslands found in the park; and linear habitats include fencerow, thicket, suburban lawn and greenbelt. Walkers on this trail visit all 14 habitats.

Salt Creek Backpack Trail provides 6 backpack camping sites along its route for those who prefer a more rustic setting for camping. Campers may hear the evening serenades of coyotes, whippoorwills and wild turkeys as well as great-horned, barred and screech owls. White-tailed deer, beaver, muskrat and mink are frequently seen along this trail. Backpackers are asked to register at the campground before heading out.

Old Farm Trail traverses 40 acres of the original Weldon Farm. Old buildings, natural springs and abundant wildlife await the more adventurous hiker. No Name cemetery, dating back to the mid-1800's, lies on a ridge amidst a hickory grove. Long term plans are to restore the tombstones of approximately twenty-five early settlers.

All of the trails are routed through excellent wildlife habitat. None of them are open to horseback riding or snowmobiling.

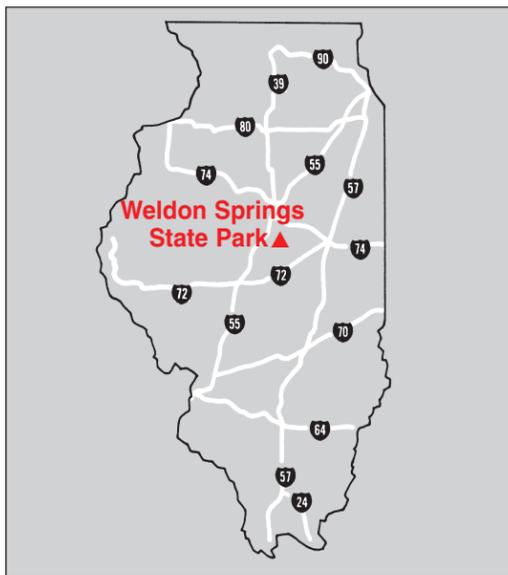
Camping

Named by Family Circle magazine to be one of the "Top Twenty Campgrounds in America," Weldon Springs' campground offers a quiet and friendly atmosphere for a relaxing camping experience.

The Class A campground has 75 camping sites with electricity, water service, vehicular access, a sanitary dumping station for camping trailers, a shower building, cooking grills, picnic tables, pit toilets and playground equipment. Areas for tent, backpack, large-group and youth camping also are available. Primitive backpack camping sites are located along Salt Creek. Call ahead for conditions. The Black Locust large-group area can accommodate 200 to 300 campers at one time. Reservations can be made for one tent camp site, and ten camp sites with electricity.

Disabled campers also are served. Three campsites designed for special needs offer a hard-surfaced pad. Privies and water are easily accessible.

Alcohol is prohibited in the tent area, Long Point and Black Locust Group Camp and the backpack sites.



Weldon Springs State Park

1159 500 North
Clinton, IL 61727, (217) 935-2644

- While groups of 25 or more are welcome and encouraged to use the park's facilities, they are required to register in advance with the site office to avoid crowding or scheduling conflicts.
- At least one responsible adult must accompany each group of 15 minors.
- Pets must be kept on leashes at all times.
- Actions by nature can result in closed roads and other facilities. We hope you enjoy your stay. Remember, take only memories, leave only footprints.
- For more information on state parks, write to the Department of Natural Resources, Office of Public Services, One Natural Resources Way, Springfield, IL 62702-1271, call (217) 782-6302 or visit our website at <http://dnr.state.il.us>.
- For more information on tourism in Illinois, call the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity's Bureau of Tourism at 1-800-2CONNECT.
- Hearing-impaired individuals may call the Department of Natural Resources' TTY number, (217) 782-9175, or use the Ameritech Relay Number, 1-800-526-0844.

Equal opportunity to participate in programs of the Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) and those funded by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and other agencies is available to all individuals regardless of race, sex, national origin, disability, age, religion, or other non-merit factors. If you believe you have been discriminated against, contact the funding source's civil rights office and/or the Equal Employment Opportunity Officer, IDNR, One Natural Resources Way, Springfield, IL 62702; 217/785-0067, TTY 217/782-9175

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State of Illinois
Rod R. Blagojevich, Governor

Weldon Springs

STATE PARK

Illinois
Department of
Natural Resources



Picnicking

In addition to eight large picnic areas, six of which have shelters, the picnic enthusiast will find small groups of tables at a number of locations throughout the park. Cooking grills or fire rings, water hydrants, toilet facilities and parking spaces are available at each picnic ground. Most of the large picnic areas also have electrical service and playground equipment. All six shelters are available on a reservation basis. Sand volleyball courts are located at White Oaks Picnic Area, Lookout Point, and Meadowview.

Fishing

A 29-acre, spring-fed lake, which ranges in depth from 10 to 28 feet, features 2 miles of shoreline dotted with bank fishing platforms and a boat launching ramp. The fish population boasts sizeable largemouth bass, catfish, bullhead, crappie, bluegill and sunfish. There are size and catch limits for some species, and only electric boat motors may be used. Anglers may rent boats at the concession.

Wildlife Carving

Chainsaw artist and wood sculptor Paul Hoffman of Mount Pulaski created a masterpiece from a dead bald cypress tree. Featuring an owl, three raccoons, a squirrel, a woodpecker and

two beavers, his chainsaw sculpture stands on the edge of the marsh on the park's northeast corner.

Amphitheaters

The park has two outdoor amphitheaters, Lone Oak and Red Pine, which can be used for plays, weddings, movies and other programs. Both are positioned on wooded hillsides. Lone Oak, the more remote of the two structures, will accommodate groups of up to 60 people. Red Pine is accessible to physically disabled visitors. Both amphitheaters can be reserved.

For the Disabled

Virtually every part of the park is available to people with physical disabilities. In addition to the Red Pine Amphitheater, the fishing pier and accessible campsites, disabled visitors will find a shelter, fishing dock and handicapped-accessible toilets in the Lakeview Hill Picnic Area. They'll also find accessible toilets at the east dam turn-around, Meadowview Picnic Area and the boat ramp. A pull-off area and observation deck are located at the turn-around area on the east side of the dam.



Concession Stand

The concession at Weldon Springs is operated as a full-service restaurant with inside seating. Carry-outs are available by calling

935-0605. Anglers will find bait, tackle, fishing boats, and paddle boats. Firewood and ice are convenient for campers.

Veterans Point

Veterans Point honors all veterans for the sacrifices they have made, are making, and will make in order to secure our freedom. Twenty tons of granite honor and memorialize fifteen hundred veterans from at least twenty-five states. A footing along the Veterans Point walkway accommodates the addition of memorials in perpetuity. Fifty "Flags of Freedom" are flown on Memorial Day, July 4, Flag Day, Labor Day, Patriots Day, Veterans Day and Pearl Harbor Remembrance Day. "Freedom is not Free" is inscribed on the base of the sculpture created by Marianne Caroselli of Far Oaks, Texas. At a cost of more than \$150,000, Veterans Point was completed after four years of planning and construction. Black granite recognizes supporters of Veterans Point in honor or memory of loved ones. Veterans Point was dedicated to all veterans during a day of celebration and remembrance on Sunday, October 9, 2005.

Directions

From the traffic light south of Clinton on U.S. Route 51, follow the signs 3 miles to the east, or from east of Clinton on Illinois Route 10, go to the park sign, turn south and follow the signs 2 miles to the park.

Weldon Springs Foundation

With individual dues of \$10 per year, the Weldon Springs Foundation Inc. supports park projects and programs with gifts of time, talent and funding. The Department of Natural Resources thanks the Foundation and all volunteers for their support.

For more information about the park, contact Weldon Springs State Park, 1159 500 North, Clinton, IL 61727 or phone (217) 935-2644 or log on at <http://dnr.state.il.us>.

