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A New Way to Experience the Outdoor Dianne Nora Nature Trail at Nygren Wetland Preserve

Rockford, IL – Natural Land Institute (NLI) announced today the availability of a hike app featuring the Dianne Nora Nature Trail located at Nygren Wetland Preserve in Rockton, Illinois. The app, called, “Prairie State Hike App”, is available to smartphone and tablet users through the Apple and Android stores and costs 99¢. The head of the Dianne Nora Nature Trail is at West Rockton and Hansberry Roads, 1.5 miles west of Rockton, Illinois. The trail is open daily from 7 a.m. until the gate to the parking lot is locked, about one half hour past sunset. Admission is free.

The hike app serves many purposes including enhancing the experience of visitors to the trail, attracting young people, incorporating natural areas into tourism efforts, and heightening awareness about the value of preserving natural land and wildlife habitat. “For me, I see a big advantage to using this hike app while I walk the trail. It allows me to see where I am walking, as well as to look around at the scenery. I can look at the flowers and trees or watch for birds, butterflies and turtles,” said Kim Wheeler Johnsen, Director of Marketing & Membership for NLI.

There are multiple tours within the app for natural areas throughout Illinois. NLI’s tour is called *Nygren Wetland – Nora Nature Trail*. Once the “Prairie State Hike App” is downloaded users may choose any or all of the tours within the app to download and enjoy at no additional cost. The *Nygren Wetland – Nora Nature Trail* tour covers the history of the geographic area, restoration and management work of NLI, descriptions and photos of plants, animals, birds, insects and bodies of water, and information about the mission and history of NLI. There are twelve points of interest along the 2.5 mile groomed trail featuring information and images from signs that are already on the route.

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When the GPS supported app is open and the user is walking near one of the signs it will automatically start playing a voice recording of the information for that specific point of interest. The user can choose to listen or read the text on the screen. The images can be moved by touching the arrows. Visitors to the preserve are invited to post their comments and photos from their experiences on the Facebook page for Nygren Wetland Preserve.

NLI is grateful to the Smith Charitable Foundation for providing funds to pay for the participation fee for the “Prairie State Hike App”. Thank you to the voice of the tour, Jan Herbert, and to Curt Johnsen who recorded, edited and digitally mastered the voiceover.

The “Prairie State Hike App” project was spearheaded by the Prairie State Conservation Coalition (PSCC), a “non-profit organization created to assist conservation land trusts, land owners, and communities in their efforts to protect land and water resources in Illinois.” It was created with the support of PSCC, the Donnelley Foundation, and the Grand Victoria Foundation. For more information about PSCC visit: www.prairiestateconservation.org.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The Dianne Nora Nature Trail may be closed at times during migration season in order not to disturb nesting of waterfowl species such as Sandhill Cranes. Signs will be posted when this is the case. During winter months the parking lot is closed, but access to the trail is still allowed for hiking, snowshoeing and skiing. Rockton Township owns and manages the land where the parking lot and overlook structure are located.

About Nygren Wetland Preserve:

The Carl & Myrna Nygren Wetland Preserve is the largest wildlife sanctuary, at 721 acres, that is owned by NLI. It is located about a mile west of Rockton, Illinois, at 3190 W. Rockton Rd. The land was purchased in 2000 with the help of a gift from the Nygrens. There are upland sand prairies, lowland prairies, wetlands, bottomland forest, oxbow lakes and ponds in the preserve. Raccoon Creek runs through the preserve and the Rock and Pecatonica Rivers flow along its borders. Much of the land was farmed at one time and the creek was straightened out by one of the previous landowners. NLI Staff and hundreds of volunteers began work to restore the prairies and wetlands to native wildflowers and grasses in 2000. In 2004 they embarked on one of the most difficult restoration initiatives by returning Raccoon Creek to its original channel, which took three years. See more at www.naturalland.org under Preserves, Carl & Myrna Nygren Wetland.

About Natural Land Institute:

The **Natural Land Institute** is a non-profit land conservation organization whose mission is to create an enduring legacy of natural land in northern Illinois for people, plants and animals. Since 1958, the **Natural Land Institute** has helped to preserve and restore more than 16,000 acres of natural land in Illinois. See more at www.naturalland.org.

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