Grasslands at Merry Lea

Meadow:
- Combination of native and non-native grasses and forbs such as Queen Anne’s Lace, Goldenrod, Black-eyed Susan and Bee-Balm
- Typically formed in abandoned agricultural fields

Black Oak Savanna:
- Well-drained soil with widely spaced Black Oak trees in a field of grasses and forbs such as Little Bluestem, Butterfly Weed and Round-headed Bush Clover

Tall-Grass Prairie:
- Native grasses such as Indian Grass, Big and Little Bluestem, Side-oats Grama, Switchgrass, Canada Wild Rye
- Forbs include Black-eyed Susan and New England Aster

History of Merry Lea’s Land

Pre-1830s: The Miami Nation lived in the region for centuries.
1830s: Settlers used upland forests as woodland pastures and timber harvests or cleared them for farming.
Pre-1880: Nine hundred acres of wetlands and open water covered lowland areas.
1880s: Ditches were dug to drain the lake and expose rich soil for growing potatoes, onions and peppermint.
1930s-1950s: Luckey’s Landing Resort on High Lake was a popular public destination for camping, fishing & boating.
1964: Lee and Mary Jane Rieth began purchasing parcels of land for preservation and environmental education.
1980: The Rieths generously donated Merry Lea, as well as an additional piece of land that was purchased in 1986, to Goshen College.
1991-present: Merry Lea continues to restore 75 acres of wetlands and 50 acres of prairie on what was once agricultural land.

Merry Lea’s Mission

- Providing a natural sanctuary for Northern Indiana’s plants and animals
- Providing environmental education for people of all ages
- Providing a setting for re-creating opportunities that benefit the human body and spirit while not exploiting the land or excessively disturbing its ecosystems.

Eight miles of trails open daily, sunrise to sunset, year-round.

Merry Lea’s 1,189-acre nature preserve is home to a diverse selection of Indiana ecosystems.

Forests at Merry Lea

Lowland Forests:
- Poorly drained soils
- Trees include Silver and Red Maple, Bur and Pin Oak, Cottonwood and Sycamore

Upland Forests:
- Well-drained soils
- Trees include Red, Black and White Oak, and Shagbark, Pignut and Bitternut Hickory

Wetlands at Merry Lea

Bog:
- Peat-forming wetland with layers of sphagnum moss
- Nutrient-poor, oxygen-deficient, slightly acidic water

Fen:
- Peat-forming wetland lacking sphagnum
- Nutrient-rich, alkaline water
- Typically comprised of grasses and sedges

Marsh:
- Wetland characterized by sedges, cattails, rushes and other water-loving plants

Shrub-Carr:
- A wetland with neutral to alkaline water and scrubby vegetation

Swamp:
- Wetland dominated by trees and shrubs
- Soil saturated with water for most of the year

Vernal Pond:
- Collects water in spring from melting snow and rainfall
- Dries up during summer
- Important breeding ground for salamanders

Wet Meadow:
- Dominated by non-woody vegetation, usually grasses
- Saturated soil

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Merry Lea
Environmental Learning Center
of Goshen College

Where Earth and People Meet