Go Back in Time

Look around and you can glimpse what Minnetonka looked like before settlement. A restored black-ash swamp lies in front of you. Beyond this soggy swath, a small stand of the “Big Woods” survives—a remnant of what was once a vast old-growth forest. Here, individual basswood and maple trees over 150 years old tower above the site.

A Wild Home

Many birds prefer these old stands of forest. The mature trees are irresistible to Downy Woodpeckers. You could also see a Scarlet Tanager darting out from the forest canopy or an Eastern Bluebird on the woods’ outskirts.

A diversity of plants harbor a multitude of butterflies and dragonflies. It is a paradise for amphibians at water’s edge, while waterfowl of all kinds come here to find food, shelter and nesting spots.

A Relative Rarity

The Big Woods have all but disappeared in Minnesota. Since settlement, roughly 98 percent of this deciduous forest community has been cut down. Today, mostly just small fragments like this one still exist. It is a reason why Gideon Glen is a place that is worth protecting.

Restoring the Past

Nearby development degraded the wetland and imperiled the forest. To reverse the trend, the City of Shorewood and the Minnehaha Creek Watershed District restored the glen to a healthy condition.