

## **RYERSON'S WOODS PARK: A RELICT WOODLAND FROM A PRAIRIE LANDSCAPE IN EASTERN IOWA**

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**Abstract:** Ryerson's Woods is a wooded, 49-acre Iowa City park bisected by a deep ravine. It supports at least 183 species, of which 91% are native, and the habitat with the highest percentage of natives (95%) is the ravine. There are at least 10 rare/infrequent species, including Wild Sarsaparilla (*Aralia nudicaulis*) and Spikenard (*A. racemosa*), two sedges, *Carex jamesii* and *C. tenera*, Spinulose Fern (*Dryopteris spinulosa*) and Purple Rocket (*Iodanthus pinnatifidus*). The ravine is remarkably pristine and supports extensive colonies of Wild Sarsaparilla, Maidenhair Fern (*Adiantum pedatum*) and Interrupted Fern (*Osmunda claytonii*). Both the upland, though disturbed, and the ravine support a spectacular spring flora with abundant Large-flowered Bellwort (*Uvularia grandiflora*), and carpets of Spring Beauty (*Claytonia virginica*) and Dutchman's Breeches (*Dicentra cucullaria*). Soils data indicate development under deciduous forest in both the ravine and upland, and the earliest aerial photographs reveal that the park was wooded. The General Land Office surveys for the four townships surrounding the Ryerson's Woods site reveal an 1830s landscape dominated by treeless prairie in the uplands and dense trees in the floodplain, while ravines likely were wooded. The ravine in Ryerson's Woods surely is a woodland relict, and the upland likely was wooded. Honeysuckle (*Lonicera* spp.) is invading, particularly along the park edges, but it could be eradicated with a concentrated effort. Ryerson's Woods harbours a diverse woodland flora, including a number of rare/infrequent species, and a pristine time-of-European-settlement remnant ravine flora. This remarkable site warrants recognition as a State Preserve.