

Species Inventory

Felton Prairie is best known to the general public for the numbers and variety of rare birds found in the area. It is the best place in Minnesota to catch a glimpse of the chestnut-collared longspur along with other prairie species including Sprague's pipit. The area is also featured in the Detroit Lakes Birding Festival held every year in June. Visitation rates to the area are difficult to monitor and estimate, but anecdotally, Felton Prairie is an important site on the national level. *Audubon Magazine*, *Minnesota Birding*, and the recently published *Birding the Fargo-Moorhead Area* have all highlighted the area. Additionally, many people from the Fargo-Moorhead Area visit Felton along with Bluestem Prairie near Hawley, MN to see native prairie and experience a landscape similar to that seen by early settlers of the region.

C. Fragmentation

A quick glance at Figure 25 reveals gaps in the linear ribbons of prairie types running north to south with a slight east to west tilt. One of the most prominent gaps is Section 1 in Flowing Township, also known as the Zillmer site. This section has some wet prairie (11 acres) but the southeast corner disrupts the continuum of dry and mesic prairie from the county land to native grasslands south of the study area. The landscape topography may have been altered by mining activity in the 1960's to such a degree that it cannot support dry prairie, however, mesic prairie could be restored there.

The most critical link in the study area connects habitat north of the county pit with the Bicentennial Prairie SNA. This corridor narrows down to 100' between the county pit and the aggregate mining site northeast of it, but its existence is critical to preventing further fragmentation and loss of Dakota skipper habitat among others. Note the clustering and concentration of species north of county pit, along the isthmus between the pits, and on Bicentennial Prairie seen in Figure 33. In general, the greatest concentration of species occurs on mesic and dry prairie. Although it is private land, the agricultural and mined quarter section (NW 1/4, Section 5 Keene) northeast of the county pit also creates a gap in the habitat that could be addressed when mining operations conclude. If the mined area were restored to mesic prairie, then another corridor would exist between county land north of the pit and Bicentennial Prairie SNA. This corridor would be strengthened further by integrating the southern portion of the State Trust Fund land. The goal of achieving prairie preservation with aggregate mining may be accomplished by ensuring the gravel pits are islands of disturbance in a matrix of prairie habitat rather than the prairie existing as islands in a mined landscape. This way corridors and links will maintain the functionality of habitats and allow dispersion along the ridges and swales.

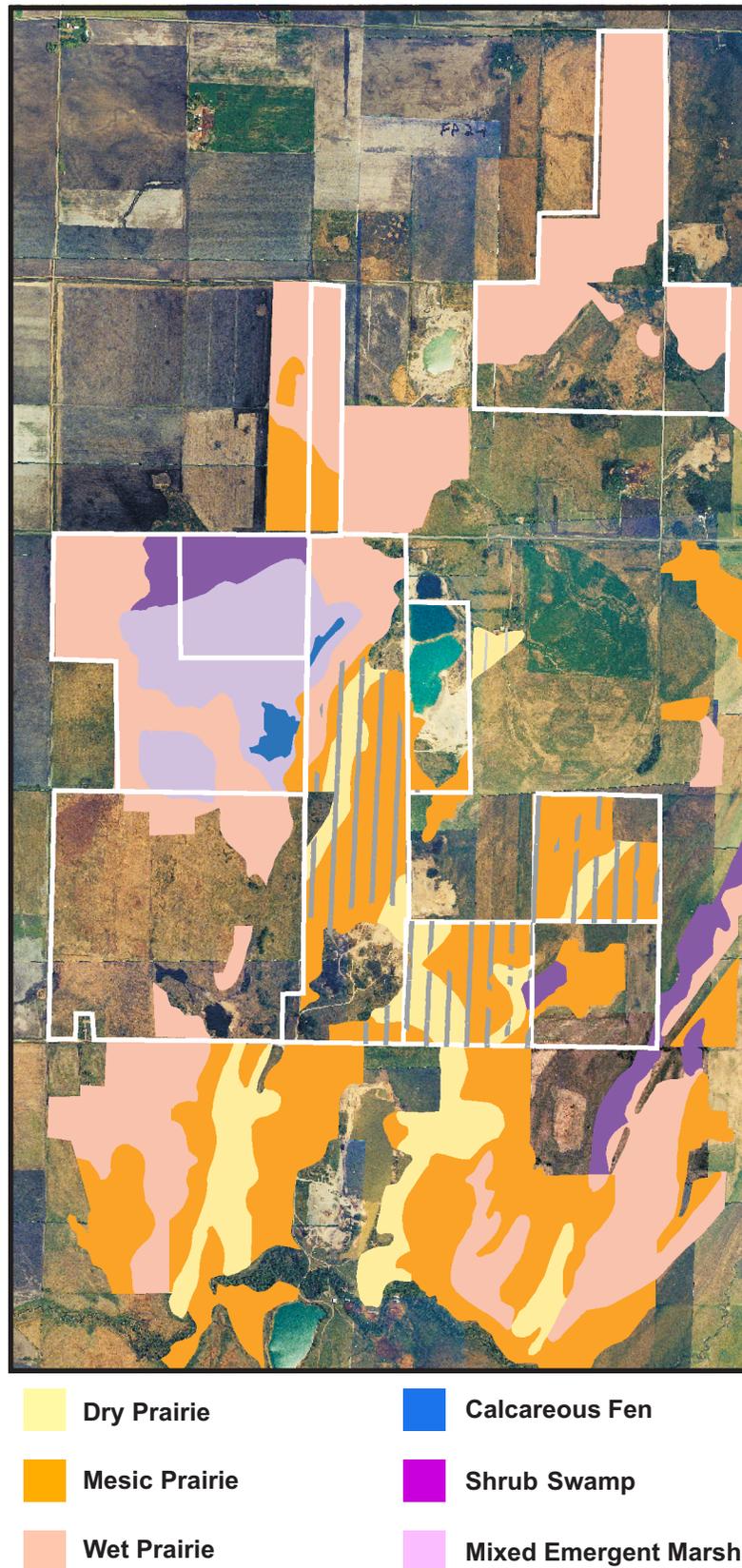


Figure 25: Note gaps in habitat type and coverage, grey stripes indicate Dakota skipper habitat.