



F DIFFERENT



U MINNESOTA



*Biomes are regions of the
state that look different
and have their own mix of
plants and animals.*

By Maarit Mattson

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Imagine you're taking a long road trip all around the state of Minnesota. As you travel, you'll probably notice many new things. Maybe you'll visit new parks and towns or even try new foods. You might notice the landscape around you changing, too. The plants and trees may start to look different, and you may see different animals than the ones you see back home. The changes you see in the natural world are because you're traveling through the state's different *biomes*.

A biome is a large area with a specific climate, which might mean different temperatures or rainfall, and unique plants and animals. You might have heard of *habitats* before, which is where a plant or animal lives. Biomes are much larger and can include many different habitats.

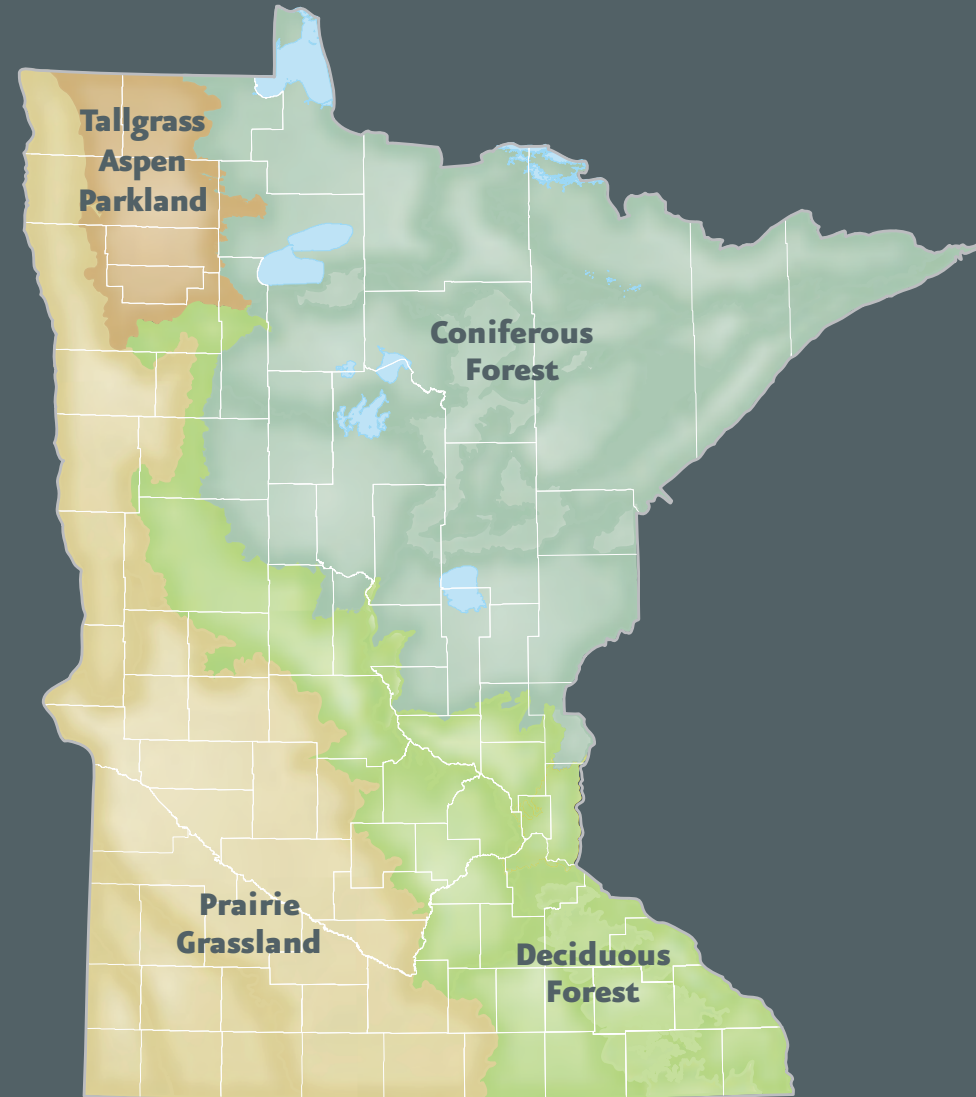
Minnesota is home to four different biomes: deciduous forest, prairie grassland, coniferous forest, and tallgrass aspen parkland. Think of them as four different Minnesotas, each of them showing off different natural features of our big and beautiful state.

Changing Biomes. Minnesota's biomes have been changed by people, especially in the past 200 years. The most dramatic changes were made by European settlers who plowed up prairies and cut down forests in order to create farms and build things. In fact, less than 1 percent of Minnesota's original prairie grassland biome is still prairie; most of the rest has been turned into farmland.

Despite all these changes, there are still plenty of places to experience Minnesota's biomes in their natural state and to see the plants and animals that live there. Public lands including parks, forests, refuges, preserves, and other kinds of natural areas are all places where people can experience biomes.

Let's take a closer look at Minnesota's four biomes and learn where you can go to see these fascinating landscapes in person.

Minnesota Biomes



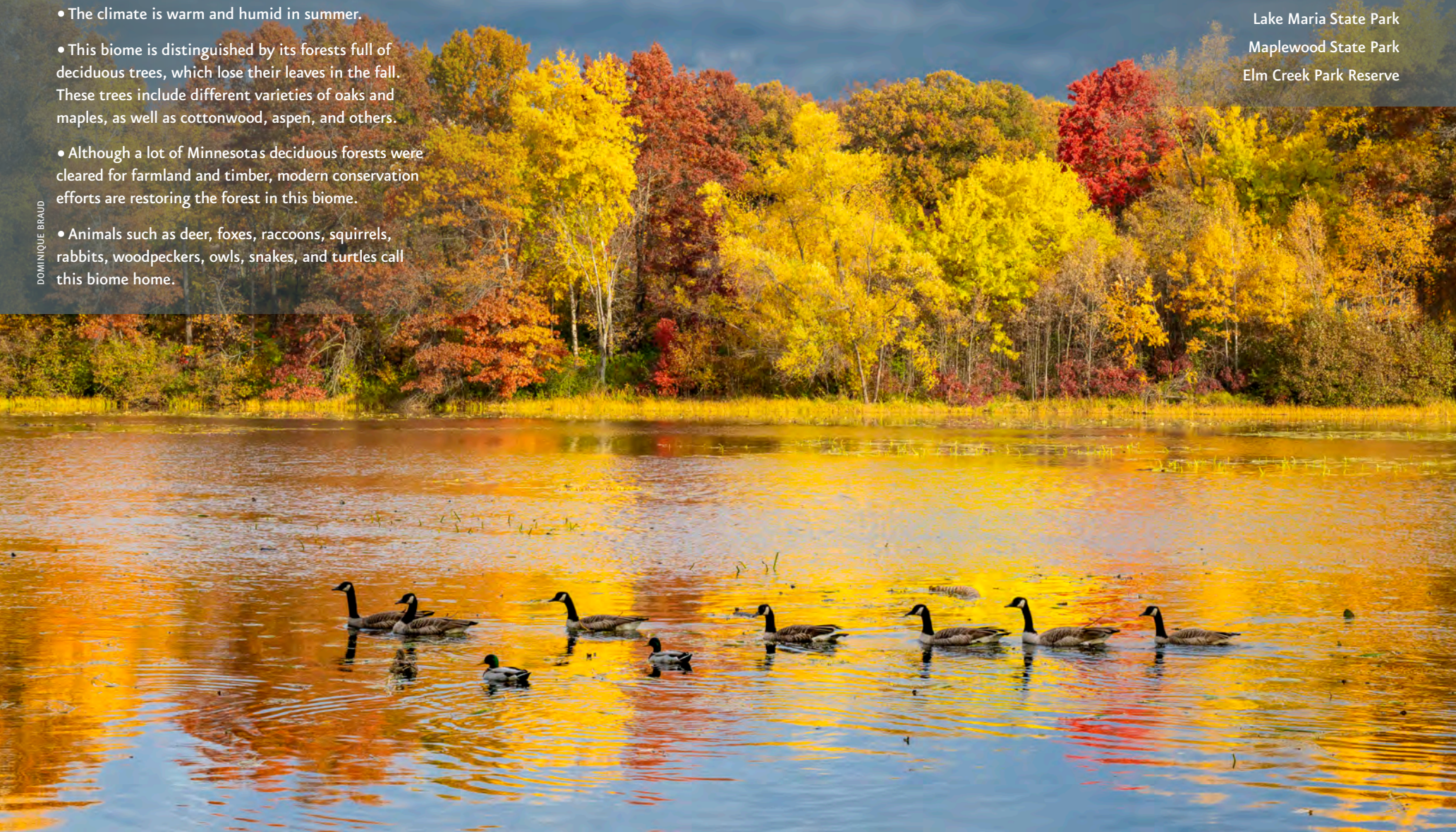
The deciduous forest biome extends diagonally across Minnesota from the southeast toward the northwest.

- The climate is warm and humid in summer.
- This biome is distinguished by its forests full of deciduous trees, which lose their leaves in the fall. These trees include different varieties of oaks and maples, as well as cottonwood, aspen, and others.
- Although a lot of Minnesota's deciduous forests were cleared for farmland and timber, modern conservation efforts are restoring the forest in this biome.
- Animals such as deer, foxes, raccoons, squirrels, rabbits, woodpeckers, owls, snakes, and turtles call this biome home.

DOMINIQUE BRAUD

Places to experience this biome

Nerstrand Big Woods State Park
Richard J. Dorer Memorial Hardwood State Forest
Lake Maria State Park
Maplewood State Park
Elm Creek Park Reserve



The prairie grassland biome ranges from southwestern to northwestern Minnesota.

- Climate conditions include hot summer temperatures and low rainfall.
- Because droughts are common in this biome, many prairie plants have adapted an ability to go *dormant*, or shut down, until conditions for survival improve.
- The prairie grassland biome is characterized by large areas of flat grassland or rolling hills without tree growth. Minnesota has many types of grasslands, from sparsely vegetated sand dunes to wet meadows to vast fields of tall grasses.
- Historically, fire burned off trees and woody shrubs, keeping these areas clear and full of well-adapted prairie grasses and wildflowers. Some fires started naturally; others were set by Indigenous people. Today, people sometimes still use carefully controlled fires, called *prescribed burns*, to keep prairie lands grassy.
- Animals in the biome include coyotes, foxes, badgers, voles, owls, greater prairie chickens, western meadowlarks, and various reptiles, amphibians, and insects. Historically, bison also inhabited prairies.

JIM BRANDENBURG

Places to experience this biome

Minneopa and Blue Mounds state parks, where reintroduced bison roam on grasslands

Buffalo River State Park

Bluestem Prairie Preserve

Glacial Ridge National Wildlife Refuge



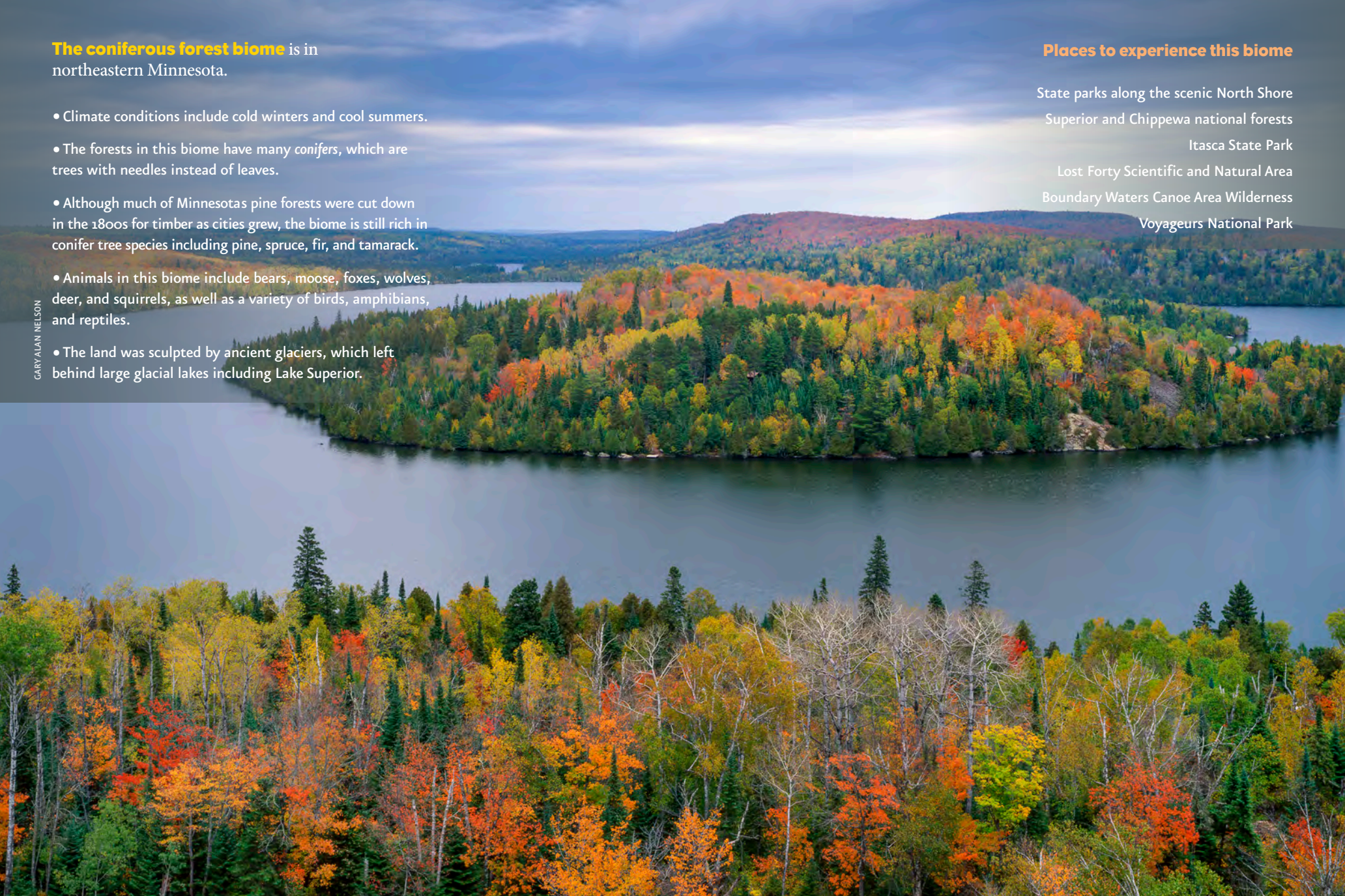
The coniferous forest biome is in northeastern Minnesota.

- Climate conditions include cold winters and cool summers.
- The forests in this biome have many *conifers*, which are trees with needles instead of leaves.
- Although much of Minnesota's pine forests were cut down in the 1800s for timber as cities grew, the biome is still rich in conifer tree species including pine, spruce, fir, and tamarack.
- Animals in this biome include bears, moose, foxes, wolves, deer, and squirrels, as well as a variety of birds, amphibians, and reptiles.
- The land was sculpted by ancient glaciers, which left behind large glacial lakes including Lake Superior.

GARY ALAN NELSON

Places to experience this biome

- State parks along the scenic North Shore
- Superior and Chippewa national forests
- Itasca State Park
- Lost Forty Scientific and Natural Area
- Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness
- Voyageurs National Park




The tallgrass aspen parkland biome is in northwestern Minnesota.

- Cold winters and hot summers are typical in this biome.
- A huge lake called Glacial Lake Agassiz used to cover this area. When it receded, it left behind large, flat plains that are rocky, wet, and poorly drained, making them unsuitable for farmland.
- The landscape is covered in fields of prairie grasses and wildflowers, with scattered bur oaks or groves of aspen.
- Wildfires in this biome naturally control the growth of trees, although human intervention has limited these events, allowing aspen to take over much of the grassland.
- Much of the parkland has been turned into grazing land for livestock, such as cows, although parks, preserves, and other public lands still protect large parts of the biome.
- Animals such as elk, bears, squirrels, beavers, sandhill cranes, waterfowl, raptors, hares, various amphibians, and rare butterflies live in this area.

RICHARD HAMILTON SMITH

Places to experience this biome

Lake Bronson State Park
Two Rivers Aspen Parkland Scientific and Natural Area
Beaches Lake Wildlife Management Area 

To learn more about Minnesota's biomes, visit mndnr.gov/biomes.

TEACHERS RESOURCES. Find a Teachers Guide and other resources for this and other Young Naturalists stories at mndnr.gov/young_naturalists.