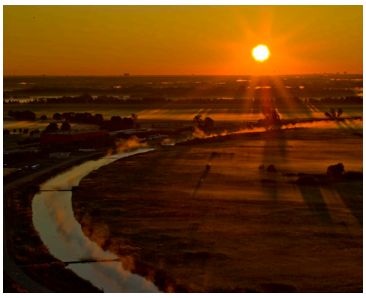
Fermilab and the Environment

Since its founding in 1967, Fermilab has remained committed to responsible stewardship of the environment.



The 6,800-acre Fermilab site is open to the public and offers interpretative nature trails. The site contains most of the major types of ecosystems representative of the Midwest: tallgrass prairies, oak savannas, woodlands, grasslands, wetlands and agricultural fields. Habitat restoration encourages the growth of native flowers and trees in these areas.

The Fermilab site contains one of Illinois' largest reconstructed native tallgrass prairies. These prairies help cleanse area aquifers and prevent erosion. Less than one-tenth of 1 percent of the state's original prairies remain, including the 1,100 acres Fermilab has restored.

Since 1993, residents of neighboring communities have joined Fermilab employees for the annual Prairie Seed Harvest. Fermilab has donated native prairie seeds to more than 40 schools as well as the Kane and DuPage county forest preserves.

A multitude of wildlife lives onsite or uses the lab as a migratory way station. Wildlife includes approximately 282 species of birds, 56 species of butterflies, 10 species of frogs and endangered Blanding's turtles. Native species have been returning to the area as the prairie restoration proceeds. Several rare species of birds and butterflies call the site home for portions of the year.

Every year, the DuPage County Audobon Society and volunteer bird watchers conduct bird counts onsite to check migration patterns and species health. Fermilab annually monitors the health of plants, butterflies, frogs and birds.

Fermilab keeps a herd of about two dozen bison. The animals represent the laboratory's connection to its prairie heritage and mission to conduct pioneering research at the frontier of science.

Fermilab hosts state and regional early-warning monitoring sites for West Nile mosquitoes and invasive pests.

Fermilab has conducted an environmental monitoring program on site for more than 40 years. The laboratory has earned many national awards and consistent recognition for pollution control, environment-friendly "green" business practices, recycling programs and conservation efforts.

Fermilab has earned the designation of a National Environmental Research Park, one of only seven in the United States. These outdoor laboratories evaluate the environmental consequences of energy use and development as well as strategies to mitigate these effects. They also study possible environmental and land-use options. Under that designation, scientists now use the Fermilab site to conduct about a half dozen ecology research projects.

Argonne and Fermilab study the use of root systems of plants and native grasses to store carbon to reduce greenhouse gases. Fermilab hosts three test sites.

Argonne and Fermilab partner on a research study that examines how soil type, fertilizer and other factors affect the growth of switchgrass for ethanol production.