

# Sielbeck Forest

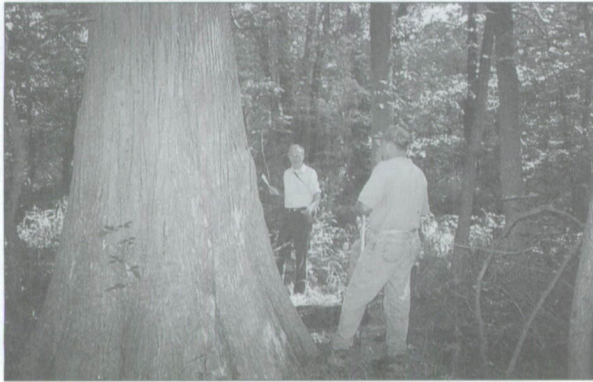
NATURAL AREA



**Illinois**  
Department of  
**Natural Resources**

---





### Sielbeck Forest Natural Area

Visitors to Sielbeck Forest are passing through bottomland hardwood forest and a forested swamp that mirrors the wilderness documented by public land surveyors back in 1807. This island of somber grey timber was once part of the Big Black Slough, a wetland-rich floodplain that in days gone by covered thousands of acres in Massac, Pope and Johnson counties in southern Illinois. Today, nearly all of this part of the Ohio River floodplain has been drained, cleared and tilled to feed a world hungry for corn, wheat and soybeans. Despite the insatiable appetite of plow, ax and saw, this tract of land remains largely undisturbed. How did this chunk of forest persist when nearly all the trees around it fell?

The answer resides in the hearts of Ruth and the now deceased Louie Sielbeck, whose family has owned and loved this tract of land for nearly 100 years. Thanks to these two, magnificent oaks and ancient cypress trees remain to provide mute testament to the natural character that was once present throughout the Big Black Slough. But while love might last forever, people do not, and soon after Louie's death this land would be sold. As you might guess, competition for the high quality timber was intense. However, there were others who saw value in this place for its natural character.

When bids were opened in 1997, it was The Nature Conservancy (TNC) who won the day. In 1998, TNC sold the Sielbeck Forest to the Illinois Department of Natural Resources. Sielbeck Forest now is managed as a satellite of Mermet Lake Fish & Wildlife Area. Continuing a commitment for conservation begun by Ruth and Louis Sielbeck and perpetuated by TNC, the site was enrolled in the Register of Land and Water Reserves by DNR. The Illinois Nature Preserves Commission oversees the management of land enrolled in this program. Against all odds, the natural character of Sielbeck Forest is now protected in perpetuity.

### The Landscape

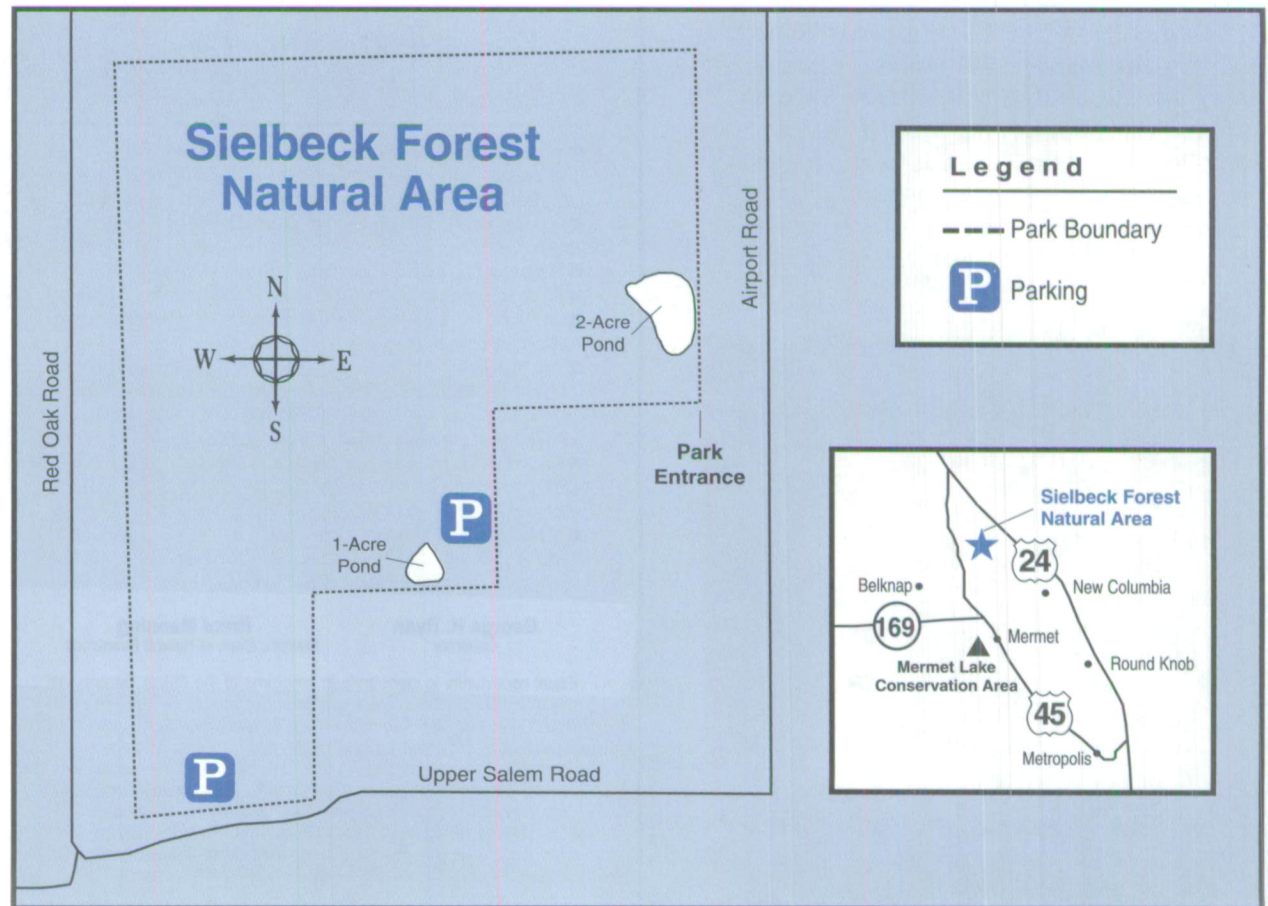
Within the 385-acre Sielbeck Land and Water Reserve occurs 110 acres of high quality wet-mesic floodplain forest dominated by cherrybark oak, sweetgum and pin oak. Hidden within the surrounding soggy forest is 35 acres of forested swamp dominated by cypress and tupelo. Written on the faces of visitors is open-mouthed amazement at the size of the trees in this old growth remnant. Many of the trees are well over 200 years old and nearly 4 feet in diameter! Another common site in ancient timber is a good number of dead and dying trees. While this may make visitors a little upset, it means food and life for woodpeckers, cavity nesting birds and many other wildlife species. Because of this, pileated and red-headed woodpeckers, nuthatches and tree swallows abound in Sielbeck Forest.

Another denizen of Sielbeck Forest that makes its home on the soggy forest floor is the swamp rabbit. Once common throughout the floodplain of the Ohio and Mississippi rivers, this

large rabbit is now restricted to scattered tracts of floodplain forest. Although seldom seen, this critter has a curious habit of relieving itself on top of stumps and logs. A cluster of round pellets is a sure sign that a swamp rabbit is nearby.

Also found at Sielbeck Forest are the state threatened storax, a small tree also known as American snowbell, and the state endangered giant sedge. Both species are found only in southern Illinois, and only in high quality floodplain forests and swamps.

Not all of the reserve is forested. There were 212 acres of tillable ground on this site when DNR took possession. To contribute to the sites natural quality and provide additional habitat for wildlife, this land is being reforested. As trees are planted the mosaic of successional stages coupled with the existing core of mature forest and swamp will help to improve water quality and provide a tremendous diversity of habitat for myriad wild plants and animals.



## Hunting

Hunting for species such as deer, squirrel, doves, rabbits, quail, ducks and turkey is allowed on the area. It is regulated through statewide hunting regulations. No site specific regulations are used at this site. No night hunting of any type is allowed.

Two hunter sign in boxes are available at the area. at the southernmost entrance parking lot and on the northwest corner parking lot on Upper Salem Road. Deer hunters can obtain a "deer hunter's packet," which allows them to hunt both Mermet Lake Conservation Area and Sielbeck Forest Natural Area without signing in each time they hunt.

## Fishing

Fishing is allowed in the two small ponds. Largemouth bass and bluegill are the predominant species caught.

## Hiking

Hiking is allowed at the area. There are not trails within this area and no plans to build designated hiking trails in the future. While hiking around the area one can see some of the enormous trees that have been protected by the Sielbecks.

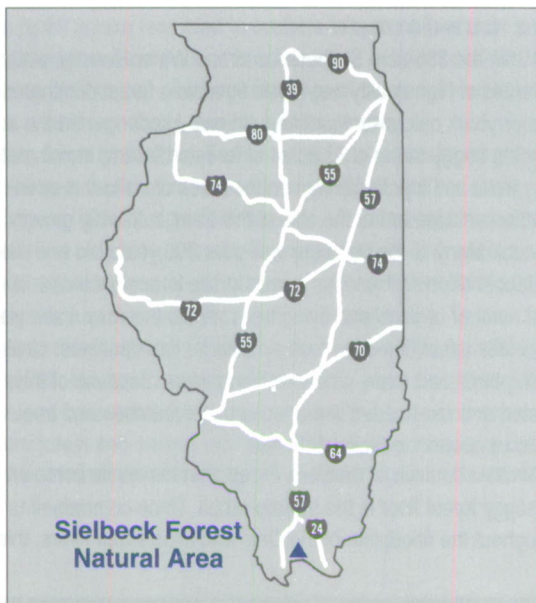
Sielbeck Forest will be kept in as natural of a state as possible. Because of this, no day use areas, trails or major improvements will be built. After the reforestation project is completed converting all row-crop fields back into trees, all fields and wood lots will be left to revert back to their natural state.



*Water works wonders*

Celebrate with us and discover just how much fun fishing and boating can be when you do it together.





## Siebeck Forest Natural Area

1812 Grinnell Road

Belknap, IL 62908, (618) 524-5577

- While groups of 25 or more are welcome and encouraged to use the park's facilities, they are required to register in advance with the site office to avoid crowding or scheduling conflicts.
- At least one responsible adult must accompany each group of 15 minors.
- Pets must be kept on leashes at all times.
- Actions by nature can result in closed roads and other facilities.
- We hope you enjoy your stay. Remember, take only memories, leave only footprints.
- For more information on state parks, write to the Department of Natural Resources, Office of Public Services, One Natural Resources Way, Springfield, IL 62702-1271, call (217) 782-7454 or visit our website at <http://dnr.state.il.us>.
- For more information on tourism in Illinois, call the Illinois Department of Commerce and Community Affairs' Bureau of Tourism at 1-800-2CONNECT.
- Hearing-impaired individuals may call the Department of Natural Resources' TTY number, (217) 782-9175, or use the Ameritech Relay Number, 1-800-526-0844.

Rod R. Blagojevich  
Governor

Joel Brunsvold  
Director

of Natural Resources (IDNR) and those funded by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and other agencies is available to all individuals regardless of race, sex, national origin, disability, age, religion or other non-merit factors. If you believe you have been discriminated against, contact the funding source's civil rights office and/or the Equal Employment Opportunity Officer, DNR, One Natural Resources Way, Springfield, IL 62702-1271; (217) 785-0067; TTY (217) 782-9175. This information may be provided in an alternative format if required. Contact the DNR Clearinghouse at (217) 782-7498 for assistance.