

# land management



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In this case, we are not referencing the popular recording artist, but instead the very general term given to the secluded valleys that occur amongst the rolling terrain of the Rock River Valley and elsewhere. Many of us in the Midwest are familiar with Wisconsin Dells and the iconic images of the sheer rock faces and bluffs. Our Colman Preserve is home to some dells which have small cliff faces. Aside from the tranquility of a stream coursing below a steep bluff, these rock faces provide niche habitat for many plants and animals due to their rare occurrence and uniqueness. Things such as directionality, aspect, contour, and height determine sun exposure, and the type of rock dictates the ability of root growth depending on its permeability and acidity. Historically, a small meadow called a hill prairie was found atop the bluffs, while just below, a starkly different micro-habitat hung on to the rock walls.

At Howard Colman Hall Creek Preserve, the signature limestone cliff tucked into the dells is a steep and shaded curtain of ferns and spring ephemerals, looming below the sunny opening of an oak savanna. Odd wetland plants, such as skunk cabbage, line the base of the bluff where they are not cut off by the meandering Hall Creek as it continues to scour a trench into the base of the rock wall. Above in the open sunlight, sedges and shooting stars proliferate amongst the litter of oak leaves. Lurking behind the curtain of plant life on the cliff face are slugs and snails, only able to exist here because of the damp and cool conditions provided by overhanging plants trapping humid air which becomes condensed and refrigerated in the crevices of the rock. Many different spiders build webs along the cliff, hoping to intercept the various insects that are swept along the creek by tiny air currents. Bats also wedge themselves into the rock crevices, waiting for nightfall to arrive so they may emerge and gorge themselves with mosquitoes. In the daylight, a Pagoda dogwood, dangling atop the peak of the bluff, provides nectar to a Spring Azure Butterfly hovering effortlessly in the updraft of the cliff. These are just some of the amazing occurrences that take place at our Colman bluff (at right), and hopefully someday you can see it for yourself.

