The hidden gems of Eden Prairie: All about the city's natural springs

NATALIE TRIMBLE
natalie.trimble@apgecm.com



(SUN PHOTO BY NATALIE TRIMBLE)

LEFT: The Fredrick-Miller Spring, located at 9995 Spring Road in Eden Prairie. **RIGHT:** An access site at Fredrick-Miller Spring at 9995 Spring Road in Eden Prairie provides visitors with fresh spring water through an underground pipe.

There's no shortage of natural beauty in Eden Prairie. With over 4,500 acres of open space wetlands and more than 1,000 acres of active use parkland, the city is home to countless vibrant natural spaces that attract residents and visitors from across the Twin Cities metro area.

Unique to Eden Prairie are two natural springs located along Spring Road and Flying Cloud Drive. While community members often learn of the local springs by word-of-mouth, the water bodies have become essential features to the neighborhoods they inhabit.

"Natural springs, they're a special occurrence. You can find them in areas across the country. But it's where water from underground will seep up to the surface in a natural way and humans have collected that over time and found ways to drink it," Eden Prairie Parks and Recreation Director Amy Markle said. "We're really fortunate, here in Eden Prairie, because we have two natural springs. We have the one called Fredrick-Miller Spring and then we have another one at the Richard T. Anderson Conservation Area. So it's pretty special we have two in one place."

A spring occurs when water pressure causes groundwater to naturally flow onto the earth's surface. It can provide information on hydrologic trends and insight to human impacts on groundwater quantity and quality, according to the Suwannee River Water Management District.

The earliest mentions of springs in what is now Eden Prairie were recorded in mid-19th-century government surveys, as well as in the diaries and memoirs of the area's first European American settlers, according to edenprairiemn.gov. These sources helped determine that springs occurred relatively abundantly in areas along the Minnesota River valley and were in high demand.

Acres of protected parkland surround the springs as part of the city's preservation efforts. Visitors from across the region frequent the water bodies with large drinking containers to collect fresh water through an installed spout.

Fredrick-Miller Spring is located at 9995 Spring

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Road, with an access site on the east side of the street through an underground pipe and the spring source on the west side. Site improvements were made by the city in 1972 and 2003, but little else has been modified. Through the city's ongoing preservation efforts, the spring still closely resembles how it did in the late 1800s, according to edenprairiemn.gov.

The second spring is located in the parking lot of the Richard T. Anderson Conservation Area at 18700 Flying Cloud Drive. The natural underground spring is piped to the surface to allow for easy water collection.

"When you're out there, you'll definitely see people with large drinking water collection containers, large jugs, and people will fill them and use that for their drinking water," Markle said. "So that's the main use, is drinking water; and the area itself, when you pull in, there's a spot for just a handful of cars at a time, and we have about a 5-acre area around the spring that's protected as parkland."

While protected parklands contribute to the preservation of the local springs, they can also attract unwanted pests. As part of the city's preservation efforts, staff regularly monitor the surrounding environment for invasive plant species, including buckthorn, garlic mustard and honeysuckle.

The city partners with Hennepin County and the Riley Purgatory Bluff Creek Watershed District to thoroughly track and manage invasive plant species in the area. Often, local environmental groups will assist with plant removal efforts by organizing community volunteer events..





(SUN PHOTOS BY NATALIE TRIMBLE)

LEFT: An access site at Fredrick-Miller Spring in Eden Prairie provides visitors with fresh spring water through an underground pipe. **RIGHT:** An underground spring located in the parking lot of the Richard T. Anderson Conservation Area, 18700 Flying Cloud Drive, in Eden Prairie is piped to the surface to allow visitors to fill up water jugs.

Herbicides — chemicals used to manipulate or control undesirable vegetation, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency — are rarely employed by the city when removing or managing invasive plant species. To eliminate the risk of water contamination in the springs, herbicide usage is strictly prohibited in the surrounding areas.

"With all invasive species, you kind of have a toolbox of tools you can use to manage them. But because of the sensitivity of the springs, we've never used herbicide in that area," Markle said. "It's always been, let's say, for instance, we're working on buckthorn in that area; it's been a lot of mechanical pulling.It's hand pulling, cutting, things like that."

A number of methods have been employed by the city to remove invasive plant species throughout the years. Everything from cutting, hand pulling, chain-sawing, mowing and prescribed burnings have been used to handle various environmental scenarios. In certain instances, cities can even partner with the State of Minnesota to receive beetles that eat certain invasive plant species.

Markle clarified that while herbicides have never been used on or near the local springs, the city will occasionally employ the chemicals on isolated plants, or in circumstances where herbicide usage would be considered best practice.

"I think anytime you're around water that people are drinking, you naturally wouldn't want to use any chemicals, period. I mean, you wouldn't want anyone to go and spill an oil can there or gas can," Markle said. "You just want to be cautious because people are drinking water. So, knowing the sensitivity that people are using it for water, we use common sense and we just use the tools where it's just hand-pulling, or using a chainsaw or saw to cut the plant."

Though the fast-spreading nature of these invasive plant species can be difficult to wrangle, the city continues its partnership with Hennepin County and the watershed district to provide safe upkeep of these natural gems for future generations of residents and visitors to come.

"I think there's so many benefits to having a healthy natural world. [Natural spaces] give us a lot of our basis for living," Markle said. "So wanting these spaces to be the highest quality, not only for ourselves, but for future generations, and then not only just human species, but our natural species. We have a wide variety of plant and animal species that call our conservation and park areas home, and I think creating natural habitats for them to thrive and live here is important, too."

For more information on the natural springs in Eden Prairie, visit bit.ly/4qo9h60.

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