

Sunfish Lake Park Hiking Guide by John Neitge, 2022 – recommendations for an “excellent” hike:

Sunfish Lake Park has about 5 miles each of hiking/multipurpose trails and mountain bike trails. By City Council resolution, **walking on the bike trails and hiking on the bike trails is prohibited** for safety reasons. The nine bike/hike trail intersections are well marked, but please be observant at these points, bikes can travel fast and quietly, and curves and vegetation obscure the views. Earth berms are used to indicate unused (unmaintained) trails. About 5 miles of the old trail system was declared "abandoned" (unmaintained) when the biking trails were installed, based on an agreement between the City of Lake Elmo and the Minnesota Land Trust, holder of the Conservation Easement on the Park.

The hiking trails are clearly and logically signed with markers at every trail head and trail intersection. These are numbered #1 through #21 in a double loop arrangement clockwise with outer loop numbered first and then the inner loop. These are the numbers shown in this Guide. On each sign is a compass image and a QR code leading to a description of local features. The included map is unofficial and is marked with John's suggested trail walks in RED, ORANGE, GOLD, and PURPLE. Navigation advice for prairie hikes- You will come to an unmarked T junction with an abandoned trail heading south, just before you get to #2. Turn right (north) and go to #2. The trail to #3 begins immediately to the left of #2 sign.

RED –Short Prairie and Forest Loop - an easy walk, this hike is relatively flat with some gently rolling terrain. You begin by walking across an open prairie, then finish with a nice walk through the woods, ending at the parking lot. Start at flagpole behind the nature center, follow the trail west across the prairie to Sign #2, turn right to #15 and return eastward past #15, #14, and #13.

ORANGE – Longer Prairie to Forest Loop (35 minutes) This hike combines a prairie walk with a nice walk through the forest, it is relatively flat with some gently rolling terrain. Begin at flagpole behind the nature center, and follow the path south onto the prairie where it joins the main trail. Turn right (west), as you walk you encounter #2, #3, #4, where you turn right (east), #16, #15, #14, and #13 which brings you back to the parking lot.

GOLD - Ridge Walk - (about 35-40 minutes, loop starts and ends at the parking lot) This is a relatively flat hike with some gentle ups and downs. You will walk along forest trails that overlook ponds below you. From the Northwest corner of the parking lot, proceed to #13, then #14, #15, #16, #17, #18, #19, #20, #21, #14, and back to #13. As you enter the forest, the trail curves to the right. At #14, do not turn right, proceed along the ridge towards #15. You will see a bench along the way on your right. It is a lovely spot to rest. Between #15 and #16 the trail descends gently, and there is a gentle climb between junctions #17 and #18. There is a gentle decline on the way to junction #20. After this decline, you will follow a nice flat trail with a pond on your right. The trail between #20 and #21 can be wet after heavy rains, but there are walk-arounds. At #21, turn right and climb a gentle switchback to #14. At #14 turn left (east) and return to the parking lot, passing #13 along the way.

PURPLE - Boundary hike - about 1 hour, is the longest and most strenuous, leading across prairie and through dense forest. There are gentle to moderate climbs and descents throughout the hike, which begins and ends at the parking lot. From the Northwest corner of the parking lot, proceed west to #13. At #14, do not turn right, proceed along the ridge towards #15. You will see a bench along the way on your right. Continue along the trail to #15. Turning to the left, walk to trail junction #2. Follow the trail through the woods to #3, #5 (go left, west), #6, and #7. Approximate walking time to #7 is 30 minutes. At #7 turn right (east) and follow the trail loop back to #6. This section has a moderate climb. At #6 (which is 4-way) turn left and follow the trail east to #8, #9, and #10. Time to #10 is approximately 55 minutes. Continue on to junction #11. At #11 there is a alternative route to the right that is a gentler climb to #12, compared to the more direct "sledding hill". From #12 continue straight ahead (southwest) to the parking lot Northeast corner.

