

Loop7 – Sand Hills Loop

What to Expect: The most striking aspect of the landscape in this Loop is that it is so diverse: there are shinnery oak mottes, tablelands, the extensive wooded area and springs within Boiling Springs State Park, two sandy-bottomed, wide rivers, and the extensive sand hills covered with mixed-grass prairie and sand sagebrush. Unique in these sand hills are the shinnery oak mottes, which to the human eye, resemble round gazebos scattered throughout the prairie. Center trees in the mottes reach heights of 10 to 15 feet and their offspring radiate from the center becoming progressively shorter and more closely spaced which effectively eliminates all other plants in the mottes. Although small, these oaks produce heavy crops of acorns and the density of the mottes provide much needed shelter just as gazebos provide shelter for people. **American Pronghorn, mule and white-tailed deer, Northern Bobwhite, scissor-tailed flycatchers and Cassin's sparrows** occur in this diverse landscape. The endangered **least tern** nests along the Canadian River and the imperiled **lesser prairie chicken** can still be heard booming in early spring.

Lodging: [Lodging in Woodward](#); [RV parks in Woodward](#); Cabins/camping: [Boiling Springs State Park](#) (info above) **Arnett:** [Circle C Motel](#) & RV Park: 580.885.7551.

One-Day Outings: Fill up your gas tank and pack a picnic lunch (grocery stores in Woodward and Shattuck) or eat lunch at local cafes in Gage, Shattuck, and Arnett.

[Ellis County Wildlife Management Area \(7-2\)](#) is a great place to start your day in the sand hills surrounding Lake Vincent. Enjoy the drive around the Lake or enjoy walking the many little paths that surround the Lake. Exit the south entrance and follow signs to Hwy 283. Turn south (right) and travel approx. 10 miles to enter [Packsaddle Wildlife Management Area \(7-3\)](#) to experience the shinnery oak motte landscape. There are many areas to walk-in.

[Boiling Springs State Park \(7-1\)](#) is an unexpected landscape for the Great Plains...deciduous woodland abounds primarily because it is in the floodplain of the North Canadian River but also because of its many freshwater springs that seep and “boil” up from the ground. After lunch, stop by the Plains Indians and Pioneer Museum in Woodward to learn about the importance of wildlife culturally and historically.

Birding Route: Start your birding at [Ellis County Wildlife Management Area \(7-2\)](#) in the sand hills surrounding Lake Vincent. Enjoy the drive around the Lake or enjoy walking the many little paths that surround the Lake. Exit the south entrance and follow signs to State Hwy 283. Turn south (right) and travel approx. 10 miles to enter [Packsaddle Wildlife Management Area \(7-3\)](#) to experience the shinnery oak motte landscape. There are many areas to walk-in. Return to State Hwy 283, turn right (north) and travel about 17 miles to the intersection at State Hwy 60. Turn left (west) and travel 1 mile into the town of Arnett and turn right (north) onto State Hwy 46. Travel 12.5 miles to the intersection of State Hwy 15 in the town of Gage. Turn right (east) onto State Hwy 15

and travel 0.8 miles to **Gage Lake (7-4)** for some wetland birding opportunities and a good place to picnic or try the local cafes in Arnett, Shattuck and Gage. **[Boiling Springs State Park \(7-1\)](#)** has 5 easy walking trails in this densely wooded area. If limited on time consider walking either the River Trail or Scout Trail. Great place to observe both eastern and western bird species in one location!

Off the Beaten Trail: Both of these scenic routes should only be driven during good weather. Wet conditions make these roads very slippery. A high-clearance vehicle is strongly recommended.

Canadian River Scenic Route (7-5): From the junction of State Hwy 283 and State Hwy 60 (6 miles west of Arnett), go south on N1750 Rd. for 5.5 miles and turn right (west) onto EW066 Rd. Travel 1 mile and then take the curve left (south) and travel 1 mile and then take the curve right onto E0670 Rd. Continue and take the curve to the left onto NS173. This county road will become a gravel road). Travel this scenic route for approx. 15 miles which includes crossing over the Canadian River. Follow the winding road along the back edge on the Antelope Hills until E0810 Rd. Turn left (east) and travel into the town of Durham. Continue east on E0810 Rd until the intersection of N1740 Rd. Turn left (north) to drive the 24.5 mile **Antelope Hills Scenic Route (7-6)** directly through the tablelands and leisurely look for roadrunners, prairie dog towns, and the American pronghorn. This route will continue north until the route turns east on E0720 Rd and then eventually south on N1780 Rd which will intersect with State Hwy 33.

Guest Ranches: Knowles Ranch (7-7) Sagebrush, shinnery oak mottes, sand hills, beaver ponds, mixed-grass prairie can all be explored on this ranch where the Lesser Prairie Chicken males can be observed on their booming grounds. 580.885.7952, cknowles@pdi.net.