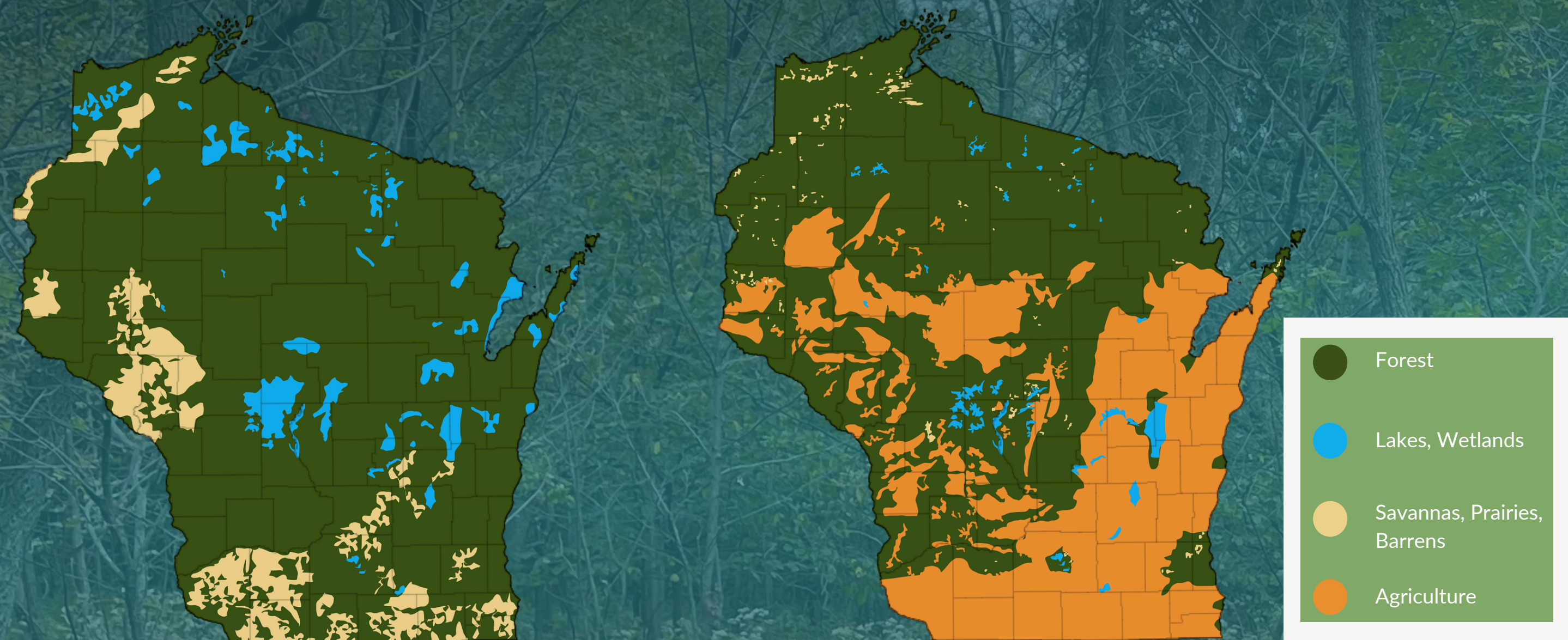


TWO ROADS DIVERGED IN THE WOODS



Wisconsin Land Use Pre-Colonization

Wisconsin Land Use 2018

In modern times, Wisconsin is a busy state: hundreds of towns and villages speckle the land, farms span millions of acres, and cities like Madison and Milwaukee continue to stretch outwards further and further every year. Before this, before European-Americans began to settle and develop the land's resources, approximately 22 to 30 million acres of forest covered the state. Today, 16 million acres remain.

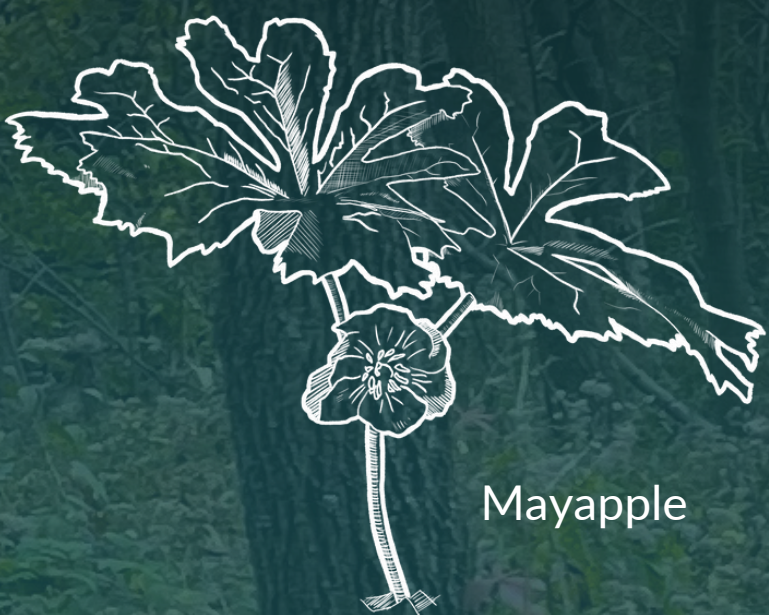
As you travel along this path, you will experience the natural state of the Driftless Region similar to it's pre-settlement condition. Southwest Wisconsin is known for its vast prairies and oak savannas that span across the hills and valleys. Many organizations, Cave of the Mounds included, have continued the efforts of early conservationists in order to restore and preserve the natural ecosystems.

Flora of the Forest

Although only a handful of plants are listed here, Cave of the Mounds is host to many thousands of different species throughout the park. See how many you can spot!

Great Blue Lobelia
Ferns - various
Snakeroot Aster
Jewel Weed
Joe Pye Weed
Mayapple
Trout Lily

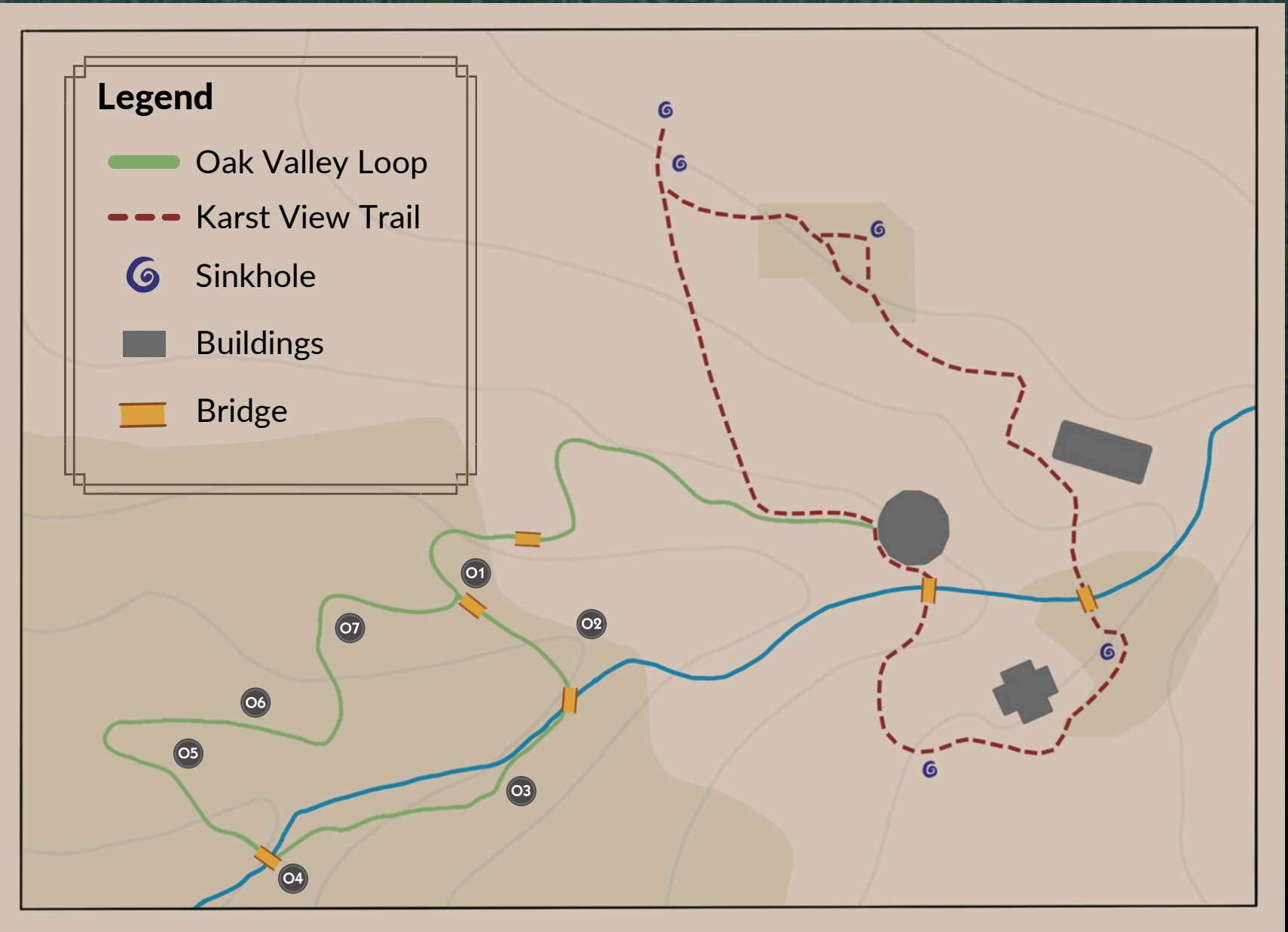
Bur Oak, Red Oak, & White Oak Trees
Black Cherry Tree
Walnut Tree



Mayapple



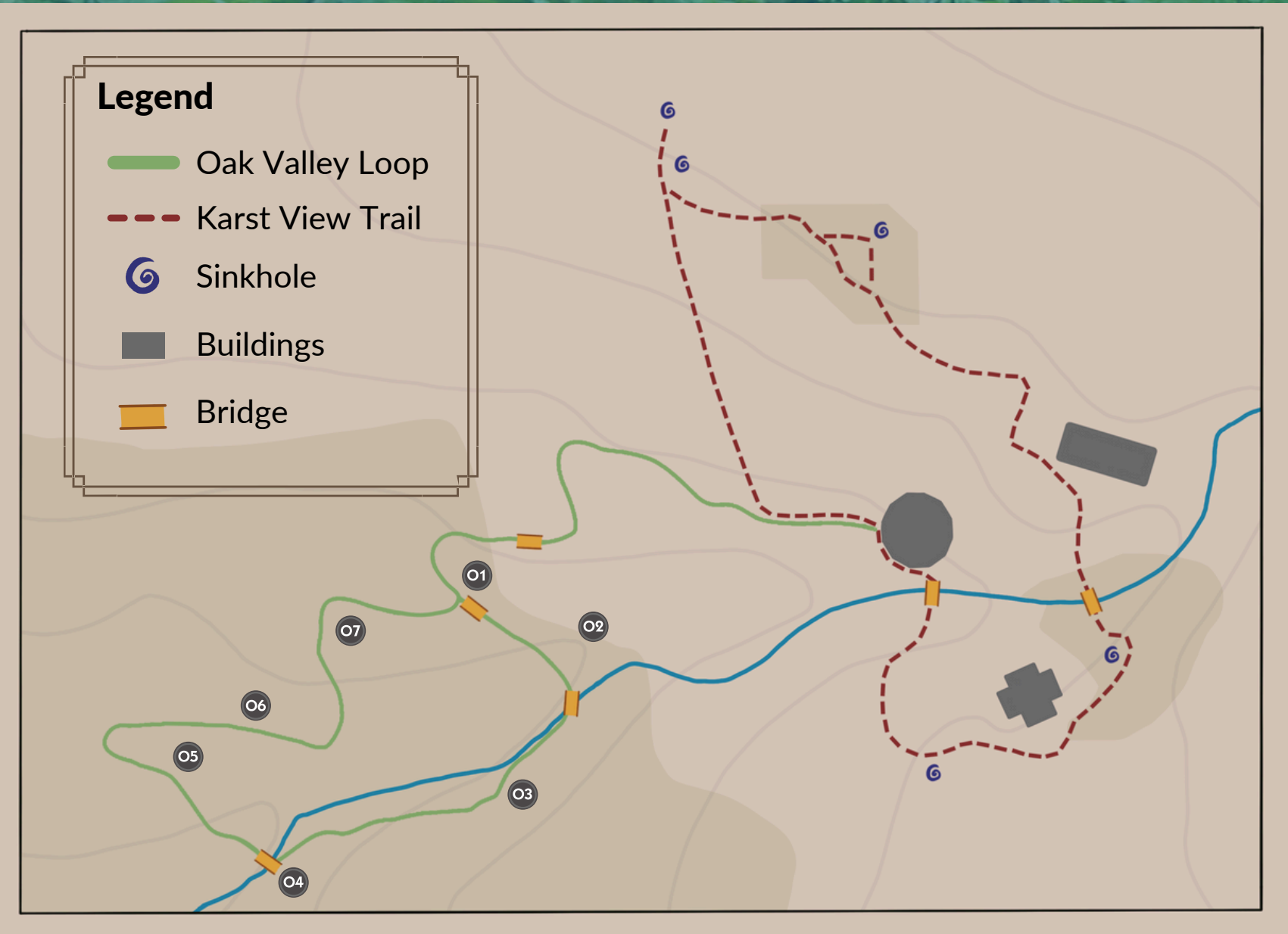
Common Lady Fern



Want to learn more?

CIRCLE OF LIFE

In every corner of the world, ecosystems are going through natural cycles of death and rebirth.



Within the forest ecosystem, nothing is wasted. This tree fell many years ago and has now become a home and a food source for the different species of the woods. It will slowly decay and rot away, providing significant nutrients to the soil and creating more space for new plants to grow and thrive while acting as a home to the various animals that call the woodland home.

If A Tree Falls In the Forest

Around 350 million years ago, trees evolved from the first land plants. When these trees died, they fell where they stood and did not decompose. This is because nothing that could decompose them had evolved yet, which meant that they simply sat for hundreds and thousands of years. Often times, they were buried under dirt and sediments which pressurized and preserved them, turning them into coal. Interestingly, much of our coal today comes from these un-decayed trees.



Large swamps were filled with tall trees and a variety of plants.

As the trees died, they piled up beneath the water and began to compress from the weight.

Over time, the pressure and heat compressed the plants into coal.

In many cases, slow growing trees like oaks will be pushed out by faster growing trees like maple and birch. This phenomenon makes it hard for these sturdy trees to grow, so many conservationists will take extra care to remove the faster-growing species so that other plants can thrive.

Want to learn more?



A SUDDEN DISAPPEARANCE

In Karst landscapes, seemingly unmovable land features will disappear into the ground without a trace. Chert Creek is one such feature. Following along its path into the woods, this waterway suddenly flows downward into unknown reaches of the Earth, an effect best seen during the wetter months when more water is flowing along the stream bed. Attempts to follow the stream to its underground location have thus far been unsuccessful.

Disappearing streams will often flow into hollow cavities beneath the surface: caves. The land which contains Cave of the Mounds is dotted with some other separate caves that are much smaller than our main cavern. These caves have been protected over the millennia by the strong layer of chert rock that sits atop the more fragile limestone; it is for this protective layer that Chert Creek is named.

Fauna of the Forest

Although only a few species are listed here, Cave of the Mounds is host to many different species throughout the park. See how many you can spot!

White-Tailed Deer
Gray Squirrel
Chipmunk
Red Fox

Pileated Woodpecker
Black-Capped Chickadee
Red-Tailed Hawk
Cardinal
Blue Jay



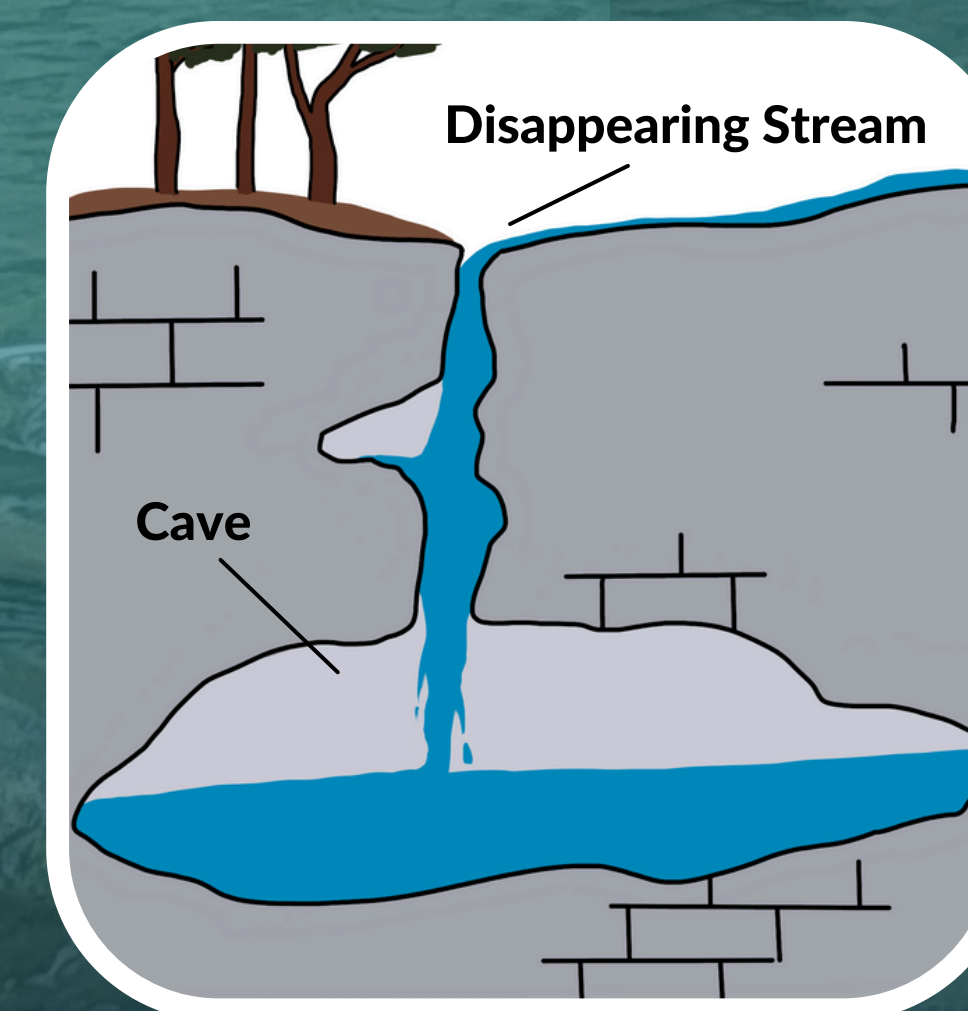
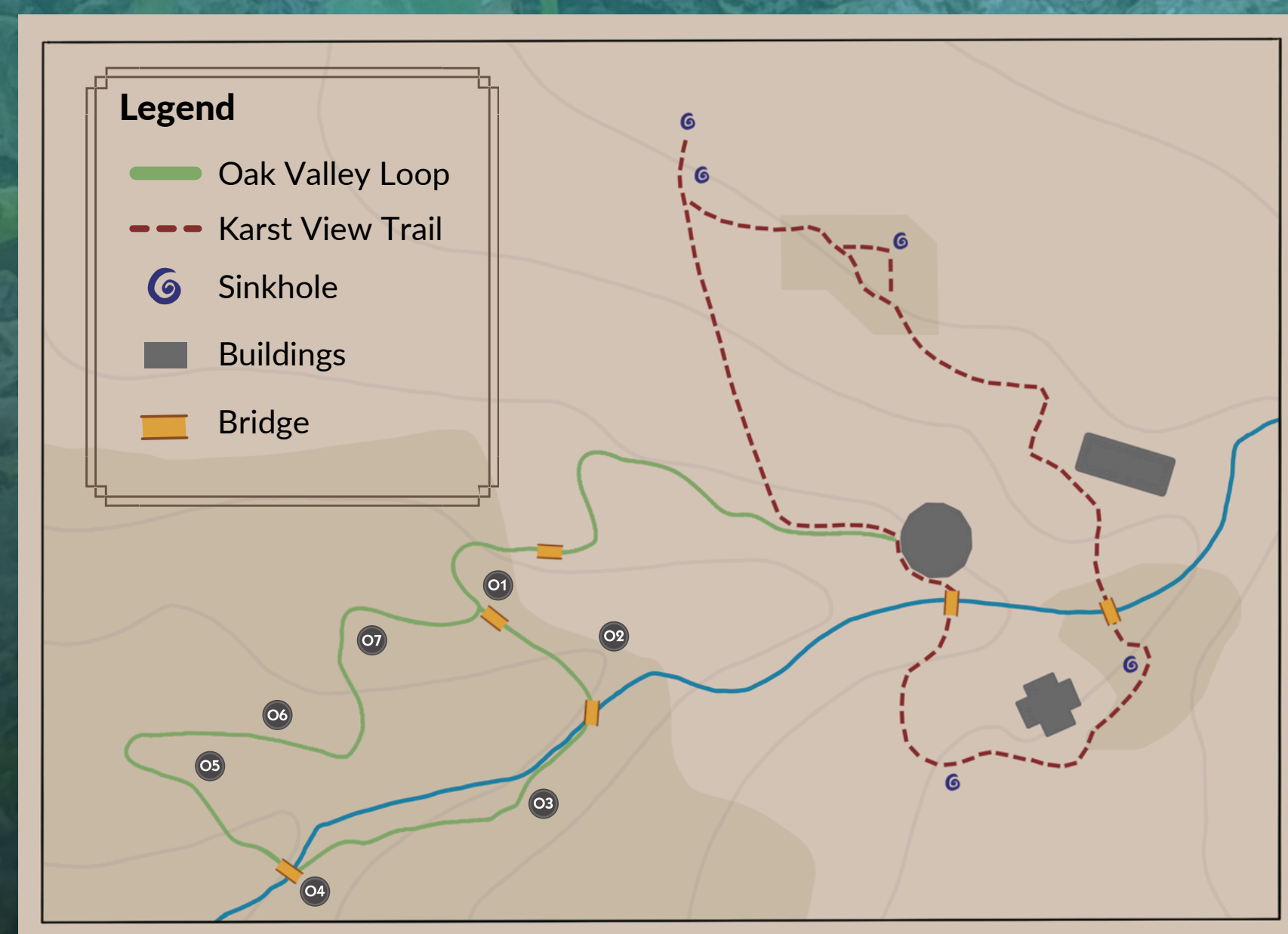
White-Tailed Deer



Black-Capped Chickadee



Pileated Woodpecker



Want to learn more?

A SPECIAL PLACE, PROTECTED FOREVER

Conservation is among the most important things that we can do as stewards of the land. Various flora, such as oak and maple trees, joe pye weed, and crested wood ferns, as well as fauna, such as white-tailed deer, bobcats, and red foxes, call this lowland savanna home. As you travel along the path, be sure to keep an eye out for these various animals and plants.

The Groundswell Conservancy, a local conservation group, has partnered with Cave of the Mounds to permanently protect this land. In 2004, Cave of the Mounds established a conservation easement in order to protect this 26 acres of land from future development and preserve it as a unique educational opportunity for years to come. As green spaces become more scarce due to the progression of cities and towns, it is important that we take the proper steps to create spaces in which nature can thrive.

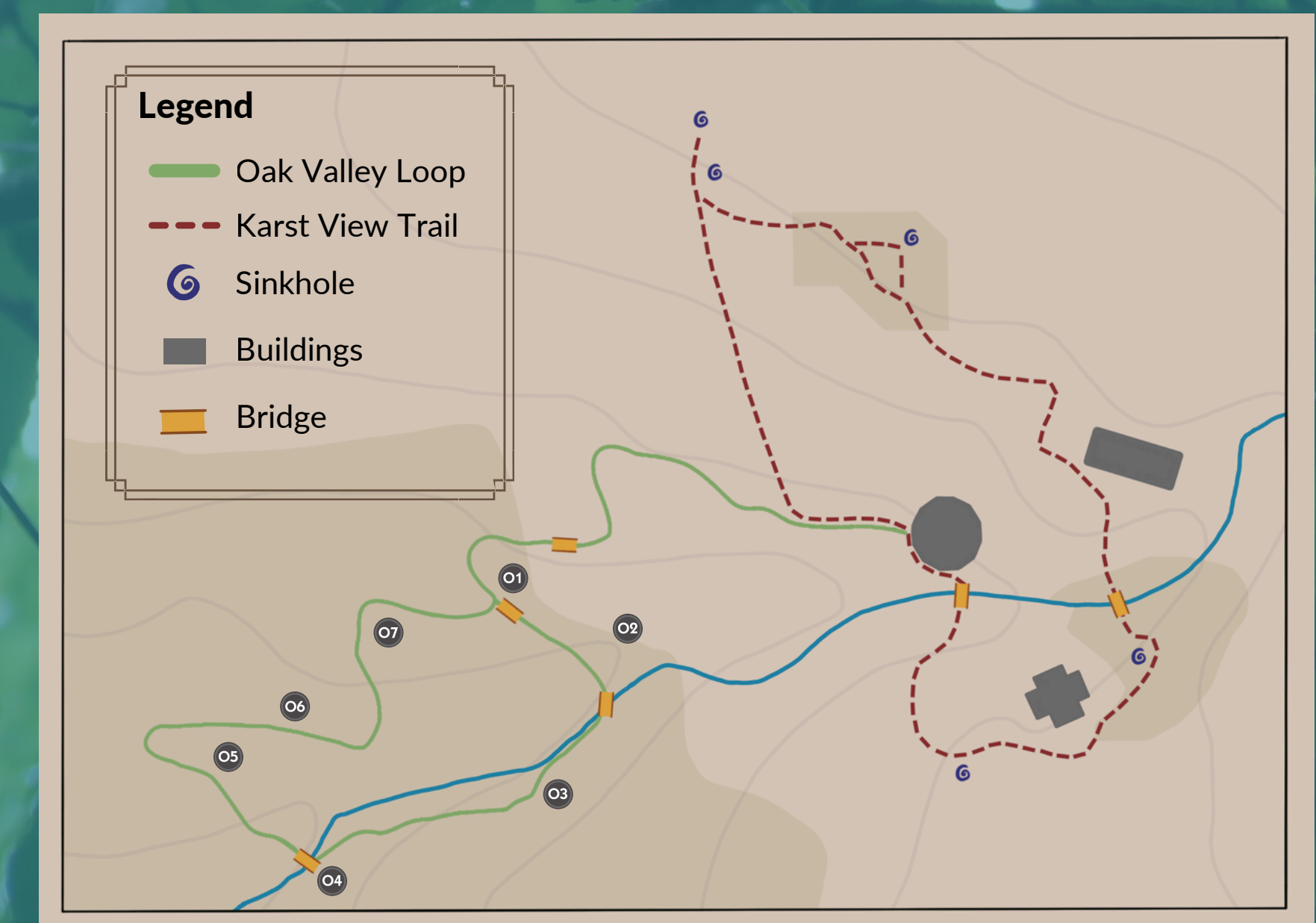
Ongoing Efforts

Since it began in 1983, the Groundswell Conservancy has protected over 13,000 acres of land across the southern part of Wisconsin, and they add more each year. Every parcel of land is preserved for recreational, educational, or conservational purposes and generally represent unique or endangered ecosystems such as prairies, wetlands, and savannahs.

There are many opportunities across the country that give volunteers firsthand experience with conservation and to take the steps necessary to protect the land around them both for nature and future generations.



GROUNDWELL
CONSERVANCY



Want to learn more?



Oak Valley Loop Trail



CAVE OF THE MOUNDS®
National Natural Landmark

"HE WHO OWNS A VETERAN BURR OAK... OWNS A HISTORICAL LIBRARY, AND A RESERVED SEAT IN THE THEATER OF EVOLUTION." *Aldo Leopold, 1949*

The Rings of Time: Aging Trees

As trees age, they grow an increasing number of rings, seen here in this cross-section. While more accurate measurements have since been invented, a good general rule of thumb is still that each ring represents a year of the trees life.

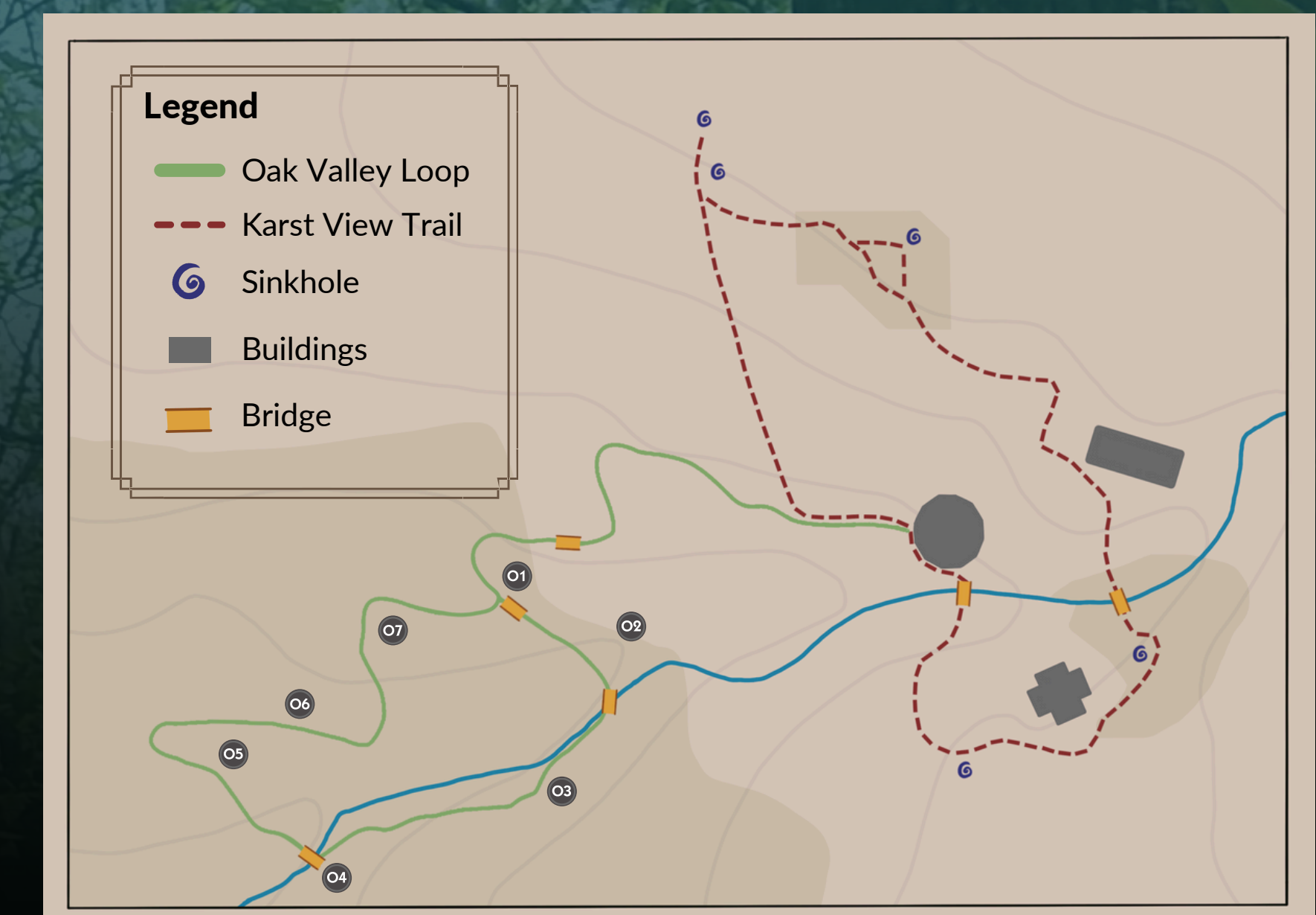
Many of the oak trees around you are over 200 years old. The oldest known oak tree in the United States was the Basking Ridge White Oak in New Jersey, which was 619 years old at the time of its death. The oldest known living tree in the world is Methuselah, a Great Basin Bristlecone Pine residing in California that has been calculated to 4,853 years old.

The next time you see a fallen tree, see how many rings you can count!

Some of the oaks in this wood are over 200 years old; these trees reside all along the trail and are an important part of the forest ecosystem in southern Wisconsin. They provide shelter and food for a whole host of birds and mammals, but they are slowly disappearing from our woodlands.

A slow-growing tree, oaks are beaten out by faster growing trees such as maple and birch. Thus, oak regeneration is an important management task for maintaining the native oak populations. Here at Cave of the Mounds, we have planted over 100 new oak trees in our effort to provide the next majestic oaks for future generations to marvel at and enjoy.

As stewards of the land, it is our ultimate goal to preserve spaces in which the natural state of Wisconsin can be allowed to flourish. This oak savanna is a unique biome that has prevailed for centuries, and its continued survival depends on the pursuit of the conservation of these majestic and iconic trees.



Want to learn more?

07

Oak Valley Loop Trail



CAVE OF THE MOUNDS®
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