

I am familiar with the best examples of natural vegetation but have only experienced the culture as an outsider. From my experiences in 1997-98 [while completing the Stearns County Biological Survey], I encountered fairly progressive folks who generally cared about the natural landscape. Most were interested in the survey MCBS was conducting and several were quite knowledgeable about some of the animals and plants were searching for. Of course there were some notable exceptions—those who were there to exploit the hills for profit without regard for the Hills themselves.

One thing I'd like to mention: there is a long tradition of science, namely biology, study in the Avon Hills. Some of the earliest settlers in central Minnesota were the monks of St. Johns. Plant and animal records from the late 1800's and early 1900's have provided valuable insights into the original flora and fauna of the region. Some of the species noted, such as the State-Threatened ram's-head lady's-slipper orchid (*Cypripedium arietinum*), are no longer known from the area. Museum collections at St. Johns of extirpated species are today invaluable to the scientific community. In the past 75-100 years a number of biologists from St. Johns University and from St. Cloud State University have spent significant time in the Avon Hills and contributed to the understanding of the natural landscape and its flora and fauna. A list of these folks with their contributions to the understanding of the Hills should be gathered and displayed at St. John's Arboretum. I'm sure other notable individuals from other educational disciplines would be worthy of recognition as well.

The number of students who came to appreciate the natural world through contacts and experience in the Hills is maybe one of the most important facets of this discussion thread. Students from all three major universities in the area have been led through different parts of the Avon Hills for decades. What many have taken away from those experiences is a healthier respect and more realistic picture of nature. The future of the Avon Hills and other undeveloped landscapes lies with those who will come after us. Teaching them to respect and appreciate these places is as important as anything we can do.

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