

Exploring the Flora of Hagerman Fossil Beds National Monument, With optional trip to Box Canyon State Park

The Hagerman Fossil Beds National Monument is primarily known for its exceptional collection of Pliocene fossils representing a cross-section of an entire paleontological ecosystem. But the vegetation of the monument today is full of beautiful and interesting plants worthy of attention. Between 2.5 and 3.5 million years ago, when fossils formed beneath 600 feet of sand, silt, and clay floodplain deposits at Hagerman, the environment was a wetland and riparian area surrounded by a grassland savanna around the margins of ancient Lake Idaho.



Fast-forward to today. The Snake River has carved a scenic, deep canyon exposing over 500 feet of sedimentary bluffs, subsequently eroded into dramatic desert badlands. The river still supports a riparian area of cottonwood, willow, and russian olive trees. The bluffs rise quickly and support a contrasting desert-like flora of scattered Indian rice grass, saltbrush, golden spikes of prince's plume, and other wildflowers uniquely adapted to dry sands and alkaline soils. Atop the bluffs are irrigated farm fields and relicts of the former sagebrush-steppe vegetation. We will explore this fascinating ecological transition, while highlighting the influences of landslides, springs, agriculture, historic livestock grazing, and exotic species invasion on the vegetation of today. If we are lucky, we may spot some of Idaho's rare plants, such as giant helleborine and Packard's cowpie buckwheat, and endemic species such as the Owyhee mourning milkvetch and Torrey's mentzelia.



OPTIONAL – overnight stay at *Miracle Hot Springs* Saturday night. Besides a gorgeous swimming pool and hot tubs of natural spring water, Miracle Hot Springs offers a selection of overnight accommodations ranging from tent and RV camping and both furnished and unfurnished domes. The resort is located 9 miles South of Hagerman on Hwy 30, west across the Snake River of Box Canyon State Park (see map, following). Look for the large sign on the West side of the road. Both public and private pools are available. *You are responsible for making your own reservations for accommodations* (19073A Hwy. 30 - PO Box 588 – Buhl, ID 83316, www.mhsprings.com, (208) 543-6002).

There are also motels and restaurants available in Hagerman.

OPTIONAL – *Box Canyon* harbors a crystalline high-volume spring gushing from the basaltic canyon walls. The aquatic vegetation here is unique to the Snake River Canyon.

We will depart from Miracle Hot Springs parking lot for Box Canyon State Park at 9:30 a.m. and return to Boise Sunday afternoon.



DEPARTURE: 9:00 a.m., Saturday May 15, from MK Nature Center Parking Lot, 600 S. Walnut (on the south side of the Idaho Department of Fish and Game parking lot). Carpooling options will be available.

To pre-register for this field trip, contact Chris Murphy at 208-761-5022.

