



Prairie Crossing: Creating an American Conservation Community

John Scott Watson

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Carved out of century-old farmland near Chicago, the Prairie Crossing development is a novel experiment in urban public policy that preserves 69 percent of the land as open space. The for-profit project has set out to do nothing less than use access to nature as a means to challenge America's failed culture of suburban sprawl. The first comprehensive look at an American conservation community, *Prairie Crossing* goes beyond windmills and nest boxes to examine an effort to connect adults to the land while creating a healthy and humane setting for raising a new generation attuned to nature. John Scott Watson places *Prairie Crossing* within the wider context of suburban planning, revealing how two first-time developers implemented a visionary new land ethic that saved green space by building on it. The remarkable achievements include a high rate of resident civic participation, the reestablishment of a thriving prairie ecosystem, the reintroduction of endangered and threatened species, and improved water and air quality. Yet, as Watson shows, considerations like economic uncertainty, lack of racial and class diversity, and politics have challenged, and continue to challenge, *Prairie Crossing* and its residents.

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