

Five Mile Prairie



Five Mile Prairie - Days of Yore

Located in the northwest corner of the City, Five Mile Prairie sits atop a 400-foot high, 3400-acre granite and lava mesa. A southern portion of the prairie is within the borders of the City of Spokane; the remainder of the prairie lies within unincorporated Spokane County to the north. Circular in outline, basalt cliffs almost totally surround Five Mile Prairie. It rises abruptly on the north, east, and west, but slopes gently on the south.



The first known inhabitants of the prairie were the Siwash Indian Tribe, ancestrally connected to the Spokane Indian Tribe. They named the prairie Billymeechum, “home of the tall grass,” after their chief. It is unknown when the tribe first came to the prairie, but the earliest records of their activities date back to the year 1010. Pictographs on the lava rock cliffs are thought to depict a battle between the Siwash and traveling Norsemen. Still visible today, the pictographs are protected and enjoyed by residents, visitors, and historians.



The J. F. Strong House, built in 1879, is the oldest inhabited house on Five Mile Prairie. Mr. Strong was the first settler to build on the prairie, but by the end of the year, six other families had settled nearby. In 1908, the name of the Prairie was changed to Five Mile, signifying the distance to Spokane Falls in Downtown Spokane.



The settlers planted orchards of fruit trees, vegetables, berries, wheat, oats, and barley on a series of 160-acre homesteads and accompanying farms, earning Five Mile Prairie the distinction as the “agricultural gem of Spokane.” In the late 1880s, an apple packing plant was built, which is now the historic grange on the prairie. In 1927, a serious freeze killed off most of the orchards, though a few apple and plum trees can still be found here and there on the prairie. During the Great Depression, many residents became truck farmers, selling their crops in downtown Spokane.

In 1901, the original Five Mile Prairie Schoolhouse was built as a one-room building for fourteen students and one teacher. By 1912 the building proved too small and was replaced by a three-story brick building. The Five Mile Schoolhouse that stands today was built in 1939 as a federal Works Progress Administration project. The building was used as a storage facility for many years and opened again in 2006 as an educational resource center for the Mead School District, which serves Five Mile Prairie students.



Life in Five Mile Prairie - Today

Today Five Mile Prairie is largely a residential area. This neighborhood still offers “country living,” while close to the City. The change in elevation and distance to the area’s broad mesa creates a sense of separation and distinction from the rest of Spokane. The north and west slopes of the five mile mesa are still wild and forested. Homes on the rim of the plateau afford spectacular views across the city. The neighborhood has visible connections to its past with many remaining farmsteads, contrasting and intermixing with new suburban subdivisions on level and rolling terrain. During the transition from rural to urban development, challenges do exist with gaps in urban infrastructure, connections, and amenities. A combination of families, retirees, and working professionals choose to live here. Subdivisions offer mostly mid-sized single family homes, while others have larger lots and homes. Presently, no neighborhood commercial businesses are located here, which requires residents to travel almost a mile south for shopping and weekly needs. Mead School District serves the neighborhood, with Prairie View Elementary and Five Mile Prairie School located in the community. Many have chosen to live here because of the schools. Residents love the outdoors here and are seen walking, biking, and enjoying the park and open spaces.



Five Mile Prairie - Treasures

- Historic, remodeled Five Mile Schoolhouse (listed on historic register). It is now used for home school program, neighborhood meetings, yoga classes, etc.
- Community Grange (also listed on historic register), used for weddings, birthday parties, craft shows, etc.
- Sky Prairie Park, 24 acres. Great for dog walking, jogging, soccer, playground, picnics, wildlife viewing, cross-country skiing and sledding in winter.
- Community Garden at Horizon Church



Five Mile Prairie - Natural & Built Identity

Five Mile Prairie is in transition from a rural, formerly agricultural area into an urban residential community on the north edge of Spokane. Sharp contrasts are still seen in the process. Many areas still have open fields, cultivation, native grasses, farms, and farm buildings. Others contain pockets and expanses of new housing. Developments consist of newer residential subdivisions, especially in the north portion of the neighborhood. Some subdivisions have been built out, but most are continuing to be developed with new housing. Extensive stands of mature pine trees remain in the valleys, which have not been cultivated over the years. Wildlife habitat remains the area, mostly in the undeveloped waterways, along steeper slopes, and the preserved





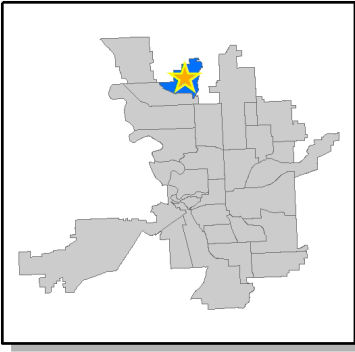
acreage of Sky Prairie Park. Deer and many species of birds are frequently seen. Unlike many neighborhoods in Spokane, many residents here can view the sunrise and sunset from the open, plateau setting. Significant Five Mile landmarks include the rural water tower, Five Mile Schoolhouse, and remaining family farmsteads. Five mile road is the major entrance into the area, which has recently been rebuilt and improved to the south.

Five Mile Prairie - Annual Events or Activities

- Neighborhood “Prairie Days” every September.
- Multiple neighborhood get-togethers in Northview Estates

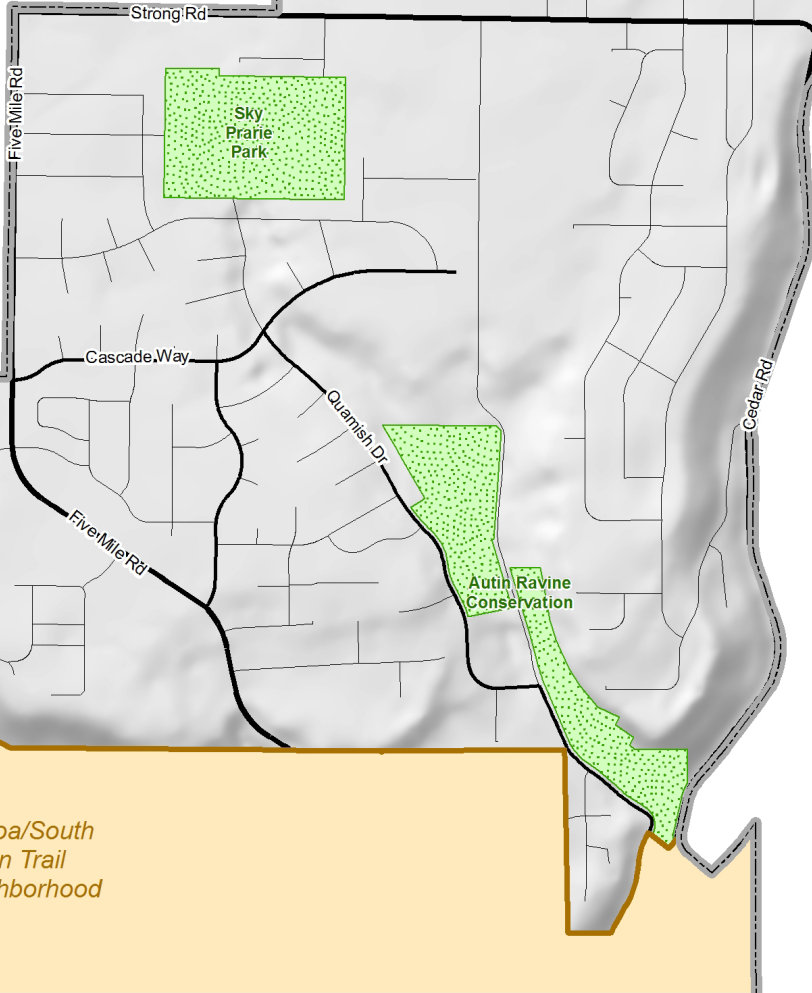


Five Mile Prairie Neighborhood



0 0.1 0.2 0.4 Miles

*Unincorporated
Spokane County*



*Balboa/South
Indian Trail
Neighborhood*

SOURCES

Caroline Woodell – “Five Mile History,” May 2, 2014 “Geologic Origin and History of Five Mile Prairie,” Cynthia L Johnson, from the Five-Mile Prairie Planning Project, 1972.

“Homesteader House Built in 1879 Sits Atop Five Mile Prairie,” Spokesman-Review, Stephanie Pettit, April 28, 2011.

