



BASS LAKE FEN & LUNCH CREEK SEDGE MEADOW

Property Owner: WDNR
 Recognitions & Designations: WI State Natural Area, WI Wildlife Action Plan Reference Site, The Nature Conservancy Priority Conservation Area, WI Bird Conservation Initiative Important Bird Area

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BASS LAKE & LUNCH CREEK WETLAND TYPES

Thomas Meyer

Fen, sedge meadow, shrub carr, coniferous swamp

ECOLOGY & SIGNIFICANCE

This Wetland Gem comprises more than 600 acres at two highly diverse sites southwest of Wautoma in Waushara County. Bass Lake features a small calcareous fen on its northeast shore that is fed by many small springs and supports more than 125 species of plants. The nearby floodplain of Lunch Creek supports a large complex of open wetland communities, including one of the most diverse sedge meadows in the state with 115 plant species. The Lunch Creek site is nearly free of exotic species and also exhibits a rare patterning with dramatically different plant communities alternating in adjacent high and low (wetter) areas. These wetlands provide excellent habitat for waterfowl and other migratory birds and are important to water quality and fisheries in the Fox River downstream.

FLORA & FAUNA

Bass Lake Fen supports an incredible diversity of plants, many of which are adapted to alkaline conditions common in habitats fed by calcium-rich groundwater. Several rare species grow here including false asphodel, common bog arrowgrass and slender bog arrowgrass. The fen features several small, shallow ponds with marl bottoms and species like needle spikerush, small bladderwort, grass-leaved pondweed and Smith's bulrush. The fen is

bordered by sedge meadow to the east, tamarack swamp to the north, and shrub carr to the south. The Lunch Creek floodplain is dominated by sedge meadow and fen communities that support a diversity of plants including uncommon species like fringed gentian, Kalm's lobelia, grass-of-Parnassus and the rare wax-leaf meadow-rue. Much of the meadow is dominated by wiregrass and bluejoint grass; other species include marsh milkweed, springcress, marsh thistle, boneset, swamp loosestrife, swamp lousewort, prairie blazing star and mountain mint. An aerial view of the site reveals a rare patterning characterized by lower/wetter areas dominated by wiregrass sedge alternating with higher areas dominated by flowering sedge meadow species.

The diverse and high quality wetlands at this site provide important stopover habitat for waterfowl and other migratory birds. Large numbers of sandhill cranes (>5,000) roost here in October and early November. The meadow provides excellent habitat for many species of grassland and wetland birds such as the rare northern harrier.

THREATS

Runoff from adjacent agricultural lands has created disturbance on the edge of the site. A narrow strip of invasive reed canary grass has been documented along the Lunch Creek channel; monitoring and control will be necessary to prevent its spread into the site's native plant communities. Deer browsing pressure threatens the regeneration of the site's tamarack trees.

ACCESS

Visit the Wisconsin State Natural Areas Program website: dnr.wi.gov/org/land/er/sna.

Sources:

Wisconsin State Natural Areas Program (WDNR)
 Wisconsin's Strategy for Wildlife Species of Greatest Conservation Need (WDNR)
 The Prairie-Forest Border: An Ecoregional Plan (TNC)
 Wisconsin Important Bird Areas (WBCI)



Sandhill cranes — Brian Hansen