



CHIWAUKEE PRAIRIE WETLAND TYPES

Low prairie, fen, sedge meadow, shrub carr

Thomas Meyer



# CHIWAUKEE PRAIRIE

**Property Owners:** WDNR, The Nature Conservancy, University of Wisconsin-Parkside, Village of Pleasant Prairie  
**Recognitions & Designations:** Ramsar Convention Wetland of International Importance, WI State Natural Area, WI Land Legacy Place, WI Coastal Wetland Inventory Primary Site, WI Wildlife Action Plan Reference Site, The Nature Conservancy Priority Conservation Area, Chicago Wilderness Biodiversity Recovery Plan Site, National Park

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## ECOLOGY & SIGNIFICANCE

Chiwaukee Prairie, located in the southeast corner of the state along Lake Michigan and the Illinois state line, is one of Wisconsin's largest prairie complexes, the state's only lakeplain prairie complex, and the most intact coastal wetland in southeastern Wisconsin. The site is characterized by gently undulating ridge and swale topography created by the historical recession of water levels in glacial Lake Michigan. The resulting mosaic of microhabitats and plant communities at this site includes low prairie and sedge meadow with pockets of fen and shrub carr habitat in low areas and dry-mesic prairie on the sandy ridges. The protected area is exceptionally diverse and supports a number of rare and sensitive plants and animals. Chiwaukee is known for its spectacular wildflowers, with spring, fall and summer each offering a different suite of colors and textures.

## FLORA & FAUNA

Chiwaukee Prairie boasts more than 400 species of vascular plants, including 24 sedges. The site supports at least 26 rare plant species, ten of which are listed as endangered or threatened. Rare plants include smooth phlox, chestnut sedge, low nut-rush, Ohio goldenrod, false asphodel, common bog arrowgrass, slender bog arrowgrass, lesser fringed gentian and marsh blazing star.



Henslow's sparrow — Scott Franke

Chiwaukee Prairie supports a diversity of birds during the breeding season, including more than 75 species of grassland and wetland birds. Species include Henslow's sparrow, blue-gray gnatcatcher, sedge wren, marsh wren and Baltimore oriole. More than 50 species of moths have also been observed at Chiwaukee. Amphibians using the site include eastern American toad, spring peeper and northern leopard frog. Rare animals include silphium borer moth and Franklin's ground squirrel.

## THREATS

Suburban development and associated alterations are the foremost threats to wetlands of Chiwaukee Prairie. Though the southern half of the site is contiguous, the northern half is fragmented by roads and scattered homes. Additional land acquisition to provide a buffer against the impacts of development is a challenge because the area is subdivided into hundreds of small residential lots. Regional groundwater drawdowns are of increasing concern for the site's groundwater fed wetlands. The lack of fire and resulting encroachment of woody vegetation is also of concern. Preventing the spread of invasive species and shrubs, managing stormwater runoff, and maintaining the site's unique hydrology are just a few of the concerns critical to the protection of valuable wetland habitats at Chiwaukee Prairie.

## ACCESS

Chiwaukee Prairie is open year-round with public parking and self-guided trails. For details, visit the State Natural Areas Program website [dnr.wi.gov/org/land/er/sna](http://dnr.wi.gov/org/land/er/sna).

### Sources:

- Wisconsin State Natural Areas Program (WDNR)
- Wisconsin Land Legacy Report (WDNR)
- Coastal Wetlands of Wisconsin's Great Lakes (WDNR)
- Wisconsin's Strategy for Wildlife Species of Greatest Conservation Need (WDNR)
- Great Lakes Ecoregional Plan (TNC)



Northern leopard frog — David Schwaegler