



CREX MEADOWS & RICE LAKE WETLAND TYPES

Brynda Hatch

Sedge meadow, marsh, open bog, shrub carr, floodplain forest

BURNETT COUNTY



# CREX MEADOWS & RICE LAKE

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

Funding for this project provided by The McKnight Foundation, which seeks to improve the quality of life for present and future generations through grantmaking, coalition-building and encouragement of strategic policy reform.

## ECOLOGY & SIGNIFICANCE

This vast Wetland Gem comprises thousands of acres of wetlands within Crex Meadows State Wildlife Area and surrounding Rice Lake near the Minnesota border in northwest Wisconsin. These wetlands are part of the remnants of Glacial Lake Grantsburg. Sedge meadow and marsh are the dominant wetland types; several other wetland types, flowages, and high quality uplands of brush prairie, oak savanna, and oak woodland create a mosaic of habitats that supports a tremendous abundance and diversity of wildlife. Crex Meadows takes its name from the species *Carex stricta*, a common sedge at the site. Animal life includes more than 270 species of birds, nearly every mammal found in the state, and a variety of reptiles, amphibians and invertebrates. As one of the Midwest's premier wildlife viewing areas, this Wetland Gem attracts hundreds of thousands of birdwatchers, naturalists, hunters and other outdoor explorers each year.

## FLORA & FAUNA

The site's extensive northern sedge meadows are dominated by wire-leaved sedges and rushes. Key species include woollyfruit sedge, cordroot sedge, mud sedge, beaked sedge, cottongrass and various rushes. Bog areas include a few stands of tamarack and open bog with leatherleaf, bog birch and sphagnum moss. Shrub areas support speckled alder, bog birch and willows. Other plants include bluejoint grass, round-leaved sundew,

marsh cinquefoil, bog St. John's wort, and steeplebush. Extensive diking for wildlife management purposes has resulted in the creation of 6,000 acres of marshes with cattail, pickerel weed, pondweeds, bulrushes, bladderwort, water lily, arrowhead, wild rice and other marsh plants.

Bird life is unusually diverse and includes a number of rare or uncommon species such as sharp-tailed sparrow, Le Conte's sparrow, yellow rail, Wilson's phalarope, American bittern, northern harrier, osprey, bald eagle, red-necked grebe, black tern, common tern, Caspian tern, sharp-tailed grouse, and great egret. This is also the original release site for the Wisconsin trumpeter swan recovery program and today boasts a healthy population of trumpeter swans. Other birds include sedge wren, bobolink, American bittern, common yellowthroat, golden-winged warbler, sandhill crane, Canada and snow geese, blue-winged teal, ring-necked duck and hooded merganser. Annual drawdowns of some wetland areas provide stopover habitat for migratory shorebirds like marbled godwit, Hudsonian godwit, stilt sandpiper, short-billed dowitcher, greater yellowlegs and lesser yellowlegs. Besides the many birds, the site supports a variety of other animals including black bear, badger, otter, and other rare species like timber wolf, Blanding's turtle, and the federally endangered Karner blue butterfly.

## THREATS

Crex Meadows is intensively managed to maximize wildlife potential. The site's marshes depend on careful water level management and sedge meadows require controlled burns to prevent the encroachment of shrubs and trees. Heavy recreational use may impact these wetlands. Invasive species are also of concern.

## ACCESS

Recreational opportunities abound at this site. The Crex Meadows Wildlife Education and Visitors Center is a great place to start your visit. For details, visit the Friends of Crex website: [www.crexmeadows.org](http://www.crexmeadows.org).

## Sources:

- Wisconsin State Natural Areas Program (WDNR)
- Wisconsin Land Legacy Report (WDNR)
- Wisconsin's Strategy for Wildlife Species of Greatest Conservation Need (WDNR)
- The Superior Mixed Forest Ecoregion: A Conservation Plan (TNC)
- Wisconsin Important Bird Areas (WBCI)



Trumpeter swan — Scott Franke