



EMPIRE SWAMP WETLAND TYPES

Robert DuBois

Coniferous bog, lowland hardwood swamp, open bog, sedge meadow, alder thicket, fen, marsh

DOUGLAS COUNTY



ECOLOGY & SIGNIFICANCE

Empire Swamp is a vast, intact peatland in Douglas County that forms the headwaters of the Tamarack River, part of the Upper St. Croix River basin. This relatively flat area features a complex of high quality coniferous bog, lowland hardwood swamp, sedge meadow, and a variety of other wetland types. Part of one of the largest roadless blocks in the state, the Swamp has an unusually wild quality. These wetlands support abundant and diverse wildlife, including numerous rare species.

FLORA & FAUNA

Coniferous bog dominated by black spruce and tamarack and lowland hardwood swamp dominated by black ash form the core of this site. Open bog, sedge meadow, alder thicket, fen and marsh habitats are also present. Common plants include black chokeberry, bunchberry, huckleberry, bluejoint grass, fowl manna grass, marsh marigold, spring cress, three-leaved goldthread, sensitive fern, royal fern, gaywings, American starflower and marsh blue violet. The site supports at least nine rare plant species.

Because of its size and undisturbed character, Empire Swamp provides important habitat for a variety of wildlife. Bird diversity is exceptional with 19 warbler species present including the highest known density of golden-winged warbler in the state as well as Nashville warbler, black-and-white warbler and Canada warbler. Other birds include merlin, American bittern, northern harrier, great gray owl, black-billed cuckoo, yellow-bellied sapsucker, yellow-bellied flycatcher, northern raven, gray jay, golden-crowned kinglet, veery, hermit thrush, northern waterthrush and Lincoln's sparrow. Timber wolf and moose are some of the uncommon mammals recorded here, and the state endangered American marten is thought to be colonizing the area. The site supports numerous rare animal species including 11 birds and 5 butterflies.

THREATS

Increased motorized recreation or road construction in the area could significantly degrade the unusually wild character of this sensitive area. Heavy deer browsing pressure threatens the regeneration of the site's conifer trees. Future invasion by the emerald ash borer beetle threatens the site's ash stands.

ACCESS

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



Golden-winged warbler— Brian Hansen

EMPIRE SWAMP

Property Owner: Douglas County
Recognitions & Designations: WI State Natural Area, WI Land Legacy Place, WI Wildlife Action Plan Reference Site, The Nature Conservancy Priority Conservation Area

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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)