



KAKAGON-BAD RIVER SLOUGHS WETLAND TYPES

T. Cline

Marsh, sedge meadow, alder thicket, shrub carr, fen, coniferous swamp, coniferous bog, floodplain forest, interdunal wetland

ASHLAND COUNTY



KAKAGON-BAD RIVER SLOUGHS

Property Owner: Bad River Band of Lake Superior Chippewa
Recognitions & Designations: Ramsar Convention Wetland of International Importance WI Land Legacy Place, WI Coastal Wetland Inventory Primary Site, The Nature Conservancy Priority Conservation Area, National Park Service National Natural Landmark

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ECOLOGY & SIGNIFICANCE

At the mouths of the Kakagon and Bad Rivers along Lake Superior in Ashland County lie some of the most extensive and highest quality coastal wetlands in the Great Lakes. These rivers and other streams that flow into the sloughs cut through a lacustrine clay plain deposited during the last glaciation. The associated wetland complex, including an intricate arrangement of sloughs and coastal lagoons, comprises more than 16,000 acres of dynamic and diverse wetland habitats that support many species of rare plants and animals. The complex is sheltered from Lake Superior wave action by a long coastal barrier spit. This vast wetland complex is an important spawning and nursery area for many fish species as well as critical stopover habitat for migratory birds. These wetlands also have cultural significance – the site supports the largest natural wild rice bed in the Great Lakes basin and members of the Bad River Band have harvested wild rice here for centuries. The Kakagon-Bad River Sloughs are wetlands with regional, national, and international significance.

FLORA & FAUNA

The river corridor leading to the sloughs is enclosed by steep clay banks and includes sinuous meanders, oxbow lakes, floodplain forest and coniferous swamp habitats that support many rare plants and animals. As it flows north to Lake Superior, the river spreads out into a diverse wetland complex including fen habitat and coniferous swamp characterized by stands of tamarack, white cedar and

black ash. In the downstream reaches of the rivers, a series of coastal lagoons support extensive marshes with many submergent and floating-leaved aquatic plants. Common plants in this coastal wetland complex include red osier dogwood, cranberry, bluejoint grass, tussock sedge, lake sedge, bur-reed, spikerushes and bulrushes.

Kakagon-Bad River Sloughs is outstanding migratory stopover habitat in both fall and spring; these diverse wetlands host tens of thousands of passerines, raptors, shorebirds and waterbirds. Species that use the site for breeding habitat include yellow rail, Virginia rail, northern harrier, sedge wren, Le Conte's sparrow, northern waterthrush, Blackburnian warbler and golden-winged warbler. The forested river corridors flowing into the sloughs are particularly important for breeding neotropical migrants such as ovenbird, Canada warbler, Nashville warbler, and mourning warbler. The sloughs also provide spawning and nursery habitat for a rich assemblage of native fishes and sport fishes including lake sturgeon, walleye and yellow perch.

THREATS

The exceptional health of these wetlands is owed to the stewardship and protection provided by the Bad River Band. Despite this protection, the sloughs are still vulnerable to external threats, most notably mining in the Penokee Hills at the top of the watershed, which could irreparably alter hydrology, water quality, and wildlife habitat. Other watershed threats include logging, agriculture, and invasive species. 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. Declining Lake Superior water levels have altered these and other coastal wetlands in recent years and may continue to do so if this pattern continues with global climate change.

ACCESS

This site is located on the Bad River Reservation and is not open to public access. All requests for visitation must go through the tribal offices in Odanah (715-682-7111).

Sources:

- Coastal Wetlands of Wisconsin's Great Lakes (WDNR)
- Priority Wetland Sites of Wisconsin's Lake Superior Basin (WDNR)
- Wisconsin Land Legacy Report (WDNR)
- Wisconsin's Strategy for Wildlife Species of Greatest Conservation Need (WDNR)
- Great Lakes Ecoregional Plan (TNC)
- Wisconsin Important Bird Areas (WBCI)
- Bad River Band of Lake Superior Chippewa Natural Resources Department



Wild rice harvest — Bad River Band