



LOWER WISCONSIN RIVER & WYALUSING WETLAND TYPES

David Schwaegler

Floodplain forest, marsh, sedge meadow, shrub carr, low prairie

CRAWFORD/DANE/
GRANT/SOWA/RICHLAND/
SAUK COUNTY



LOWER WISCONSIN RIVER & WYALUSING STATE PARK

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

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Wisconsin
Wetlands
ASSOCIATION

wisconsinwetlands.org

ECOLOGY & SIGNIFICANCE

This Wetland Gem comprises floodplain wetlands of the Lower Wisconsin River as it flows unimpeded by dams for its last 100 miles from Sauk City to its confluence with the Mississippi River at Wyalusing State Park. This wild and meandering river corridor features extensive public lands including numerous State Natural Areas; more than 79,000 acres of land in this corridor are targeted for protection through the Lower Wisconsin State Riverway. Wetland habitats include extensive floodplain forest, marsh, sedge meadow, shrub carr and low prairie. These floodplain wetlands are critical to maintaining a healthy river and support a variety of rare and sensitive species. This site has tremendous wildlife value and is a popular destination for paddling as well as hunting, fishing, birdwatching and hiking.

FLORA & FAUNA

High quality floodplain forests of different composition are found throughout this corridor. Silver maple is the dominant canopy tree in many areas, with cottonwood, American elm, green ash, river birch, hackberry and bitternut hickory trees also present. Other areas are dominated by swamp white

oak with basswood. The shrub layer of these forests includes button bush, winterberry, elderberry and prickly ash and the ground layer includes cardinal flower, wood nettle, ostrich fern, royal fern, false nettle, groundnut, green dragon, false dragon head and various sedges. Avoca Prairie, an example of open wetlands in the river corridor, features low prairie with more than 200 plant species including rattlesnake master, Michigan lily, prairie blazing star, big bluestem, prairie cordgrass, Indian grass, various sedges, sweetflag, yellow water buttercup, and two rare species – tall nutrush and prairie Indian plantain.

The extensive floodplain forests of the Lower Wisconsin support a diversity of birds, including numerous rare and uncommon species such as red-shouldered hawk, northern harrier, yellow-crowned night heron, Acadian flycatcher, Louisiana waterthrush, and cerulean, Kentucky and prothonotary warblers. Other more common birds include pileated woodpecker, blue-gray gnatcatcher, brown creeper, yellow-bellied sapsucker and hooded merganser. The corridor also provides habitat for many amphibians and reptiles, including the state threatened Blanding's turtle.

THREATS

Increasing development in the watershed and upstream dam management threaten this high quality riverine system. Heavy recreational use may create impacts. Invasive plants are also of concern at this site. Future invasion by the emerald ash borer beetle threatens the site's ash trees.

ACCESS

Wyalusing State Park's canoe trail offers a unique way to see these riverine wetlands. The Park also provides miles of hiking trails, campsites and other recreational opportunities. For details, visit website: www.dnr.state.wi.us/org/land/parks/specific/wyalusing.

Sources:

Wisconsin State Natural Areas Program (WDNR)
Wisconsin Land Legacy Report (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)



Prothonotary warbler— Scott Franke