



MILWAUKEE RIVER FLOODPLAIN FOREST WETLAND TYPES

Thomas Meyer

Floodplain forest, lowland hardwood swamp, coniferous swamp, coniferous bog, shrub carr, sedge meadow, spring run

WASHINGTON/
FOND DU LAC COUNTY



MILWAUKEE RIVER FLOODPLAIN FOREST

Property Owner: WDNR

Recognitions & Designations: WI State Natural Area, WI Wildlife Action Plan Reference Site, The Nature Conservancy Priority Conservation Area

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ECOLOGY & SIGNIFICANCE

This Wetland Gem includes nearly 600 acres of diverse wetlands protected in two State Natural Areas: Milwaukee River Tamaracks Lowlands and Milwaukee River and Swamp. Located along the East Branch of the Milwaukee River within the Kettle Moraine State Forest Northern Unit, the site includes the highest quality example of floodplain forest in the region. Several spring runs are supported by groundwater connections at this site. This Wetland Gem is important for its wildlife habitat values as well as its water quality and flood attenuation functions within the rapidly urbanizing Milwaukee River basin.

FLORA & FAUNA

The Milwaukee River Tamarack Lowlands State Natural Area comprises a large wetland complex on both sides of the river with lowland hardwood swamp, coniferous swamp, coniferous bog, sedge meadow and shrub carr. Several miles downstream, the Milwaukee River Floodplain Forest features floodplain forest, lowland hardwood forest and shrub carr habitats. Large silver maple and green ash dominate the canopy of this high quality floodplain forest, which also includes hackberry, black ash and bur oak. Underneath the canopy, herbaceous plants like bedstraw, sensitive fern, water parsnip and green dragon grow. The rare plant American gromwell is also present. Dogwoods and some invasive plants have taken advantage of gaps in the forest canopy.

This floodplain forest supports healthy riverine habitat and associated fish populations including three state threatened species; longear sunfish, pugnose shiner and greater redbreast. The state threatened swamp metalmark and the rare black dash butterflies are also found in these wetlands. Many bird species use these forested wetlands,

including blue-gray gnatcatcher, brown creeper, wood thrush and great horned owl.

THREATS

Watershed development may impact the quality of riverine and floodplain habitat at this site. Intense recreational use and the spread of invasive species, including reed canary grass and glossy buckthorn, are also of concern. 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.

Sources:

Wisconsin State Natural Areas Program (WDNR)
Wisconsin's Strategy for Wildlife Species of Greatest Conservation Need (WDNR)
The Prairie-Forest Border: An Ecoregional Plan (TNC)



Wood thrush — Scott Franke