



NEMADJI FLOODPLAIN FOREST WETLAND TYPES

Eric Epstein

Floodplain forest, alder thicket, marsh, sedge meadow

DOUGLAS COUNTY



NEMADJI FLOODPLAIN FOREST

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

Funding for this project provided by the Wisconsin Coastal Management Program and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Office of Ocean and Coastal Resource Management under the Coastal Zone Management Act, Grant #NA07NOS4190064.

ECOLOGY & SIGNIFICANCE

The Nemadji Floodplain Forest is located along the lower stretches of the Nemadji River before it empties into Lake Superior's Allouez Bay. The floodplain is enclosed by steep, clay bluffs that provide a nice buffer between the river corridor and nearby developed areas. While the corridor is largely forested, marsh, sedge meadow and alder thicket vegetation grows in the river's characteristic meanders and abandoned oxbows. Floodplain forests are rare along Wisconsin's rivers flowing into Lake Superior. This site is particularly important because of its unusual species composition, which may be unique to the Superior Coastal Plain. While not an old-growth forest, the site hosts many large trees and has not been disturbed in recent years. These wetlands are also important from a water quality perspective as the Nemadji River flows into Lake Superior near the Superior municipal water system intakes.

FLORA & FAUNA

Dominant canopy trees at the site include black ash, green ash, basswood, red maple, silver maple,

balsam poplar, American elm and bur oak. The canopy is unusual because it is sprinkled with conifers including white spruce, white cedar, white pine and balsam fir. A rich herb layer thrives in the forest's alluvial soils and is characterized by species more similar to those found under southern maple-basswood forests. A diversity of spring ephemerals, including sessile-leaved bellwort, downy yellow violet, tall meadow-rue, spring beauty, bloodroot, yellow trout lily, wild ginger, Dutchman's breeches, cut-leaved toothwort, blue cohosh, wild leek, and American starflower grow under the forest canopy.

Resident birds of the Nemadji Floodplain Forest include common raven, Nashville warbler, northern waterthrush, ovenbird, red-eyed vireo, hermit thrush, wood thrush and rose-breasted grosbeak. Similar habitats upstream also support veery, mourning warbler and broad-winged hawk. The state-threatened wood turtle has been documented in the Nemadji Floodplain Forest.

THREATS

The Nemadji River corridor still suffers from the legacy of past logging events. In particular, ongoing slumping of the river's steep banks contributes significant quantities of sediment to Allouez Bay. Some exotic plants are present, but they are localized to disturbed levees and road crossings. Surrounding uplands include a mixture of small farms, woodlots and residential areas – watershed protection efforts are needed to ensure the long-term health of this river corridor. Future invasion by the emerald ash borer beetle threatens the site's ash stands.

ACCESS

This site is best reached by canoe via the Nemadji River. See the State Natural Areas Program website dnr.wi.gov/org/land/er/sna for details.

Sources:

- Wisconsin State Natural Areas Program (WDNR)
- Coastal Wetlands of Wisconsin's Great Lakes (WDNR)
- Wisconsin Land Legacy Report (WDNR)
- Wisconsin's Strategy for Wildlife Species of Greatest Conservation Need (WDNR)
- Superior Mixed Forest Ecoregion: A Conservation Plan (TNC) Douglas County Natural Areas



Wood turtle — Jerry DeBoer