



Joy Wolf

RENAK-POLAK WOODS WETLAND TYPES

Lowland hardwood swamp, shrub carr, ephemeral pond

RACINE COUNTY



RENAK-POLAK WOODS

Property Owners: University of Wisconsin-Parkside  
 Recognitions & Designations: Wisconsin State Natural Area, WI  
 Wildlife Action Plan Reference Site

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ECOLOGY & SIGNIFICANCE

Renak-Polak Woods, located on the east side of the Root River in northeastern Racine County, is relatively small in land area (<100 acres), but protects the best remaining example of lowland hardwood swamp in the Southeast Coastal Region. An intermittent stream fed by groundwater springs originates on the site and flows through the forest, supporting the swamp. Historical use of the site involved light logging, but much of the forest at this site today is considered “near-climax” growth. Once owned by The Nature Conservancy, the site is now owned and managed by the University of Wisconsin-Parkside and is frequently used as a field site by Parkside classes. This State Natural Area has thus become a valuable site for research and education.

FLORA & FAUNA

Described as having a “deep woods feeling,” Renak-Polak Woods has many large trees, particularly red oak, sugar maple and white ash. Forest dominants include sugar maple, basswood and beech. Shrubs have taken advantage of canopy openings caused by elm mortality and have filled these gaps. The woods at this site feature a diverse understory with many spring ephemeral wildflowers including wild leek, hepatica, spring beauty, trout lily, Dutchman’s breeches, bloodroot, toothwort, wild Geranium, red and large-flowered trilliums, woodland phlox and false rue anemone.



False rue anemone — Heather Patti

Breeding bird surveys have documented a diverse community of birds using these wetlands including American bittern, wood duck, sora, American woodcock, marsh wren, yellow warbler, common yellowthroat and swamp sparrow.

THREATS

Most of the threats to these wetlands stem from the fact that it is a small patch of protected land within a human-dominated landscape. The site abuts one privately-owned tract of land protected by a conservation easement. However, much of the surrounding land is agricultural, and suburban development is an increasing threat. Invasive species like garlic mustard threaten the upland buffer surrounding the lowland hardwood swamp areas. Future invasion by the emerald ash borer beetle threatens the site’s ash stands. Polluted runoff and regional groundwater drawdowns are just two of the external pressures that the wetlands of this protected natural area face.

ACCESS

Contact the UW-Parkside Department of Biological Sciences: [www.uwp.edu/departments/biological.sciences](http://www.uwp.edu/departments/biological.sciences).



Sora juvenile — Dennis Malueg

Sources:

Wisconsin State Natural Areas Program (WDNR)  
 Wisconsin’s Strategy for Wildlife Species of Greatest Conservation Need (WDNR)  
 The Places We Save. The Nature Conservancy. 1997  
 Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission