

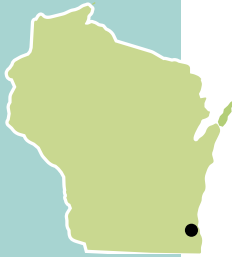


ROOT RIVER RIVERINE FOREST WETLAND TYPES

Emmet Judzewicz

Floodplain forest, lowland hardwood swamp, ephemeral pond

MILWAUKEE/
RACINE COUNTY



**ROOT RIVER
RIVERINE FOREST**

Property Owners: Milwaukee County, Racine County
Recognitions & Designations: WI Land Legacy Place, WI Coastal Wetland Inventory Primary Site, Lake Michigan Shorelands Alliance Priority Conservation Site

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ECOLOGY & SIGNIFICANCE

The Root River Riverine Forest is an extensive riparian forest corridor located in southern Milwaukee County, along the Racine County border, that includes nearly 500 acres of forested wetlands. Stands of both lowland hardwood swamp and floodplain forest are present with vegetation that varies based on local microtopography. The Root River Riverine Forest is unique and valuable in part because it is one of few remaining forested blocks of significant size and high quality condition in this region. As such, the site provides important habitat for a diversity of plant and animal species, including the potential for a number of rare species. This forest and the wetlands within serve as an important buffer to the Root River, storing and filtering runoff from developed and agricultural areas in upland areas of the watershed. Protection of these wetlands is thus critical to the health of the Root River, an important recreational resource.

FLORA & FAUNA

The floodplain forest canopy includes silver maple, green ash and American elm; underneath this canopy are many

herbaceous plant species, including nettles, clearweed, sedges and waterleaf. The most intact stand of lowland hardwood swamp on the site has a diverse canopy including sugar maple, beech, basswood, red oak and white ash and an extremely rich groundlayer, including eight rare species of plants. American gromwell, bluestem goldenrod, and heart-leaved skullcap are just a few of the rare species that have been observed on site in recent years.

Forested wetlands at this site provide important stopover habitat for migrating birds and also support numerous resident bird species. While there has not been an extensive inventory of fauna at this site, rare bird species that are known to use these wetland types in the Root River Basin include cerulean warbler, Acadian flycatcher, prothonotary warbler and red-shouldered hawk. Temporary ponds created during spring floods likely provide important breeding grounds for amphibians and reptiles including eastern gray tree frog, spring peeper, wood frog, blue-spotted salamander, painted turtle and snapping turtle. This corridor also provides valuable habitat and for a number of mammals including white-tailed deer, mink, raccoon, opossum, muskrat and beaver.

THREATS

The Root River watershed is highly altered by urban development and agricultural land uses. While wetlands at this site can help to limit the amount of runoff and pollution – such as sediment, fertilizers, pesticides and engine fluids – that flow into the river, the health of these riverine wetlands can be degraded in the process. Continued development in the watershed is one of the most serious threats to the long-term health of this site. Future invasion by the emerald ash borer beetle threatens the site’s ash trees.

ACCESS

Visit the Milwaukee County Parks website: www.countyparks.com.

Sources:

Coastal Wetlands of Wisconsin's Great Lakes (WDNR)
Wisconsin Land Legacy Report (WDNR)
The State of the Root-Pike River Basin (WDNR)



Snapping turtle— Gary Shackelford