



SAND BAY WETLAND TYPES

Coniferous bog, open bog, fen, sedge meadow, alder thicket

National Park Service, Eric Epstein

BAYFIELD COUNTY



SAND BAY

Property Owners: National Park Service, Red Cliff Band of Lake Superior Chippewa
Recognitions & Designations: WI Land Legacy Place, WI Coastal Wetland Inventory Primary Site

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

Sand Bay is a coastal estuary situated where the mouth of the Sand River is drowned by Lake Superior in Bayfield County. Outcroppings of sandstone cliffs at each end of the bay provide shelter from the lake. The wetland complex at Sand Bay, characterized by deep and fertile accumulations of organic matter, is organized around a central lagoon and a branching inlet pattern that is typical of drowned river mouths. This site supports a diversity of plants and animals including many rare species. Sand Bay is protected as part of the Apostle Islands National Lakeshore and most of the watershed is forested and undeveloped, contributing to its status as one the least disturbed coastal estuaries in the Great Lakes.

FLORA & FAUNA

Most of this site is open bog habitat composed of sphagnum mosses, ericaceous shrubs, sedges and insectivorous plants. Common plants include leatherleaf, bog rosemary, pitcher plant, woolly sedge, mud sedge, white beakrush, small cranberry and scattered sapling-sized tamarack. A fen mat adjacent to the sandspit is dominated by woolly sedge; other plants in this mat include livid sedge, sooty beakrush, intermediate sundew, water horsetail, bog arrowgrass and intermediate bladderwort. Buckbean and sweet gale are common throughout both

the fen and open bog habitats. The coniferous bog habitat at this site is composed of small tamaracks over a dense layer of speckled alder with an understory of leatherleaf, lake sedge, water horsetail, dwarf raspberry and marsh cinquefoil. Rare plants at the site include swamp pink, autumnal water-starwort, livid sedge, sparse-flowered sedge, crinkled hairgrass, Robbins' spikerush, marsh willowherb, downy willowherb, broad-leaved twayblade, large roundleaf orchid and brown beakrush.

As a high quality coastal estuary, Sand Bay provides important spawning habitat for many fish species as well as critical habitat for many birds during the spring and fall migrations. Several rare birds, evening grosbeak, yellow-bellied flycatcher, Connecticut warbler, gray jay and Tennessee warbler, and two rare butterflies, bog fritillary and bog copper, have been documented at the site.

THREATS

This site currently faces few threats, but minimizing disturbances and monitoring for invasive species are necessary to ensure that this site will continue to support many rare species. Heavy deer browsing pressure threatens the regeneration of the site's conifer trees. Declining Lake Superior water levels have altered these and other coastal wetlands in recent years and may continue to do so if this pattern continues with global climate change.

ACCESS

A National Park Service visitor's center and boat launch are available at Little Sand Bay just east of this site. Visit the Apostle Islands National Lakeshore website for details: www.nps.gov/apis/. The forested sandspit on the west side of this site is owned the Red Cliff Reservation and is not open to public access. All requests for visitation must go through the Red Cliff tribal offices located in Red Cliff, WI. Contact information is available online at www.redcliff-nsn.gov.



Bog fritillary — Mike Reese

Sources:
 Coastal Wetlands of Wisconsin's Great Lakes (WDNR)
 Priority Wetland Sites of Wisconsin's Lake Superior Basin (WDNR)
 Wisconsin Land Legacy Report (WDNR)