

WETLAND GEMS



UPPER MISSISSIPPI & TREMPLEAU RIVER WETLAND TYPES

John Sullivan

Floodplain forest, marsh, shrub carr

PIERCE/PEPIN/BUFFALO/
TREMPLEAU/LA CROSSE/
VERNON/CRAWFORD/
GRANT COUNTY



UPPER MISSISSIPPI RIVER & TREMPLEAU RIVER REFUGES

Property Owner: USFWS

Recognitions & Designations: Ramsar Convention Wetland of International Importance, WI State Natural Area, WI Land Legacy Place, The Nature Conservancy Priority Conservation Area, WI Bird Conservation Initiative Important Bird Area

Funding for this project provided by The McKnight Foundation, which seeks to improve the quality of life for present and future generations through grantmaking, coalition-building and encouragement of strategic policy reform.

ECOLOGY & SIGNIFICANCE

This vast riverine Wetland Gem is a multi-state site comprising more than 246,000 acres of floodplain in Wisconsin, Minnesota, Illinois and Iowa alongside more than 260 miles of the Upper Mississippi River. The corridor's complex structure of islands, braided channels, oxbows and sloughs includes more than 51,000 acres of floodplain forest and 48,000 acres of marsh. Wildlife habitat values are what this site is best known for. These refuges protect a significant portion of the Mississippi Flyway, which is used during migration by 40% of waterfowl in the U.S. Other wildlife includes about 300 species of birds, 31 species of reptiles and 14 species of amphibians. Humans also flock to this natural treasure; more than 3.7 million visitors explore these refuges annually and enjoy recreational offerings like hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, boating and camping.

FLORA & FAUNA

More than 600 species of plants are found at this site. The canopy of floodplain forest areas is characterized by swamp white oak, silver maple, cottonwood, river birch, American elm, and black ash. The diverse groundlayer in these forests includes several flowering plants such as bloodroot, trillium, skunk cabbage and cardinal flower. Marsh habitats of the refuges feature various species of pondweeds and duckweeds, American lotus, water lily, broad-leaved arrowhead, common bur-reed, cattail, common horsetail, spikerush, several species of bulrushes, pickerel weed and wild rice. Numerous

species of sedges grow here, including tussock sedge, woolly sedge, beaked sedge, bottlebrush sedge, lake sedge, meadow sedge and nut sedge. Common shrubs on the refuges include buttonbush, dogwoods, willows and alder.

Hundreds of thousands of waterfowl, songbirds, and raptors use these refuges as stopovers and migratory corridors. Waterfowl species include trumpeter swan, tundra swan, snow goose, wood duck, American black duck, blue-winged teal, northern shoveler, canvasback, redhead, ring-necked duck, greater and lesser scaup, common goldeneye, hooded merganser and ruddy duck. Reptiles and amphibians found at the site include map turtle, painted turtle, spiny softshell turtle, the state threatened Blanding's turtle, blue-spotted salamander, green frog, northern leopard frog, pickerel frog and the state endangered Blanchard's cricket frog.

THREATS

Invasive species like reed canary grass, purple loosestrife, buckthorn, Phragmites (common reed grass), and Eurasian milfoil are key threats. Polluted runoff from various watershed land uses has degraded water quality in this river system and associated wetlands; sediment and nutrients are of primary concern. Operation of locks and dams upstream has seriously altered natural hydrologic patterns in this system.

ACCESS

Visit the refuge websites at www.fws.gov/midwest.



Cardinal flower — John Sullivan



Blue-spotted salamander — Jerry DeBoer

Sources:
Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge Comprehensive Conservation Plan (USFWS)
Wisconsin State Natural Areas Program (WDNR)
Wisconsin Land Legacy Report (WDNR)
Wisconsin Important Bird Areas (WBCI)