WHAT ARE WETLAND GEMS?

Wetland Gems are high quality habitats that represent the wetland riches—marshes, swamps, bogs, and more—that historically made up nearly a quarter of Wisconsin’s landscape. Critically important to Wisconsin’s biodiversity, these natural treasures also provide our communities with valuable functions and services as well as recreational and educational opportunities. They are landscapes that both preserve the past and inspire for the future.

Wisconsin Wetlands Association’s list of 100 Wisconsin Wetland Gems includes 93 sites selected for their ecological value. These sites are distributed throughout the state and include examples of all of Wisconsin’s wetland community types.

We have dubbed an additional seven “Workhorse Wetland Gems®” sites that illustrate how wetlands deliver priceless services such as flood attenuation, water quality protection, and fish and wildlife habitat. Look inside for more on these gems. The purpose of this project was to identify sites that were selected, ideas for community and citizen involvement, a visitor’s guide and a list and map of the Wisconsin Wetland Gems sites.

Visit our website for more information on this project: www.wisconsinwetlands.org/learn/about-wetlands/explore/.
WHY PUBLISH A WETLANDS® LIST?

Historically, wetlands were not recognized and valued as natural resources, but were instead generally considered worthless swamps and obstructions to progress. West European settlement in the early 1800s, nearly half of Wisconsin's original 10 million acres of wetlands have been drained or filled to make way for land uses like agriculture, forestry, and urban and suburban development. A large portion of the 5 million remaining acres have been altered and degraded, which only heightens the value of the high quality wetland treasures that Wisconsin’s Wetland Gems® effectively provide examples of our state’s wetland heritage. The misunderstanding and underutilization of wetlands continues to be a key obstacle to wetland protection, conservation, and restoration efforts. Our purpose in promoting Wetland Gems® is to increase appreciation for these precious resources. Our vision is that the awareness of Wetland Gems® will consider taking all of Wisconsin’s wetlands as natural treasures and that the historic and ongoing loss of wetland acres will be reversed.

HOW WERE WETLAND GEMS® SITES SELECTED?

The Wetland Gems® list builds upon the results of extensive conservation planning efforts that identified critical habitat, threats, and conservation actions to protect the state's natural community, species, and special places. These include The Nature Conservancy’s Ecological Atlas, the Wisconsin Important Bird Areas Project, and the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources’ Land Legacy Report, Wildlife Action Plan, State Natural Areas Program, and Coastal Wetlands Assessment Report.

After reviewing the above conservation plans, we worked with experts to select 93 sites that collectively represent the diversity of wetland community types present in each geographic region (see map, back cover). Our goal was to include high-quality representatives of each wetland community type found in each region. Whenever possible, we chose Wetland Gems® that contained multiple wetland and upland community types, evidencing fully functioning ecological systems.

WORKHORSE WETLAND GEMS®

The seven Workhorse Wetland Gems® illustrate the functional values described in the Wisconsin Wetland Assessment Methodology including wildlife habitat, fishery habitat, flood/floodplain attenuation, water quality protection, shoreline protection, groundwater recharge, and recreation/education. Wisconsin Wetland Gems were selected with input from our partners and natural resource experts. This list builds upon the results of extensive conservation planning that identified critical habitats, threats, and conservation actions to protect the long-term productivity of Wisconsin’s wetlands in their communities and regions.

Celebrate & Raise Awareness of Wisconsin’s Wetland Gems®

Annually, February 2 is World Wetlands Day and May is American Wetlands Month. Use these designations as opportunities to draw community and media attention to a regional Gem site. Write a letter to the editor or pitch a story to your local newspaper. Federal Tips & Changes: Plan an outing to visit a Gem site with family and friends. Make it a community event by getting local assistance to locate field trip and outing members of your community to join you. WWAs can help you find a qualified expert for your field trip.

Volunteer Stewardship of Wisconsin’s Wetland Gem Sites

Working With Site Owners: Talk to one property owner to learn about their needs for volunteer help with on-the-ground stewardship projects such as habitat restoration and invasive species control projects.

Citizen Monitoring: Spend time in a beautiful wetland setting while learning for birds and fungi surveying for native plants. Or, checking for invasive plants WWA provides a list of opportunities at http://dnr.wi.gov/topic/wetlands/monitor.html

Plan for Promotion of Wisconsin’s Wetland Gem Sites

Friends Groups: Organize a friends group for your Wetland Gem® by bringing together others in your community who are interested in conservation.

Preventing External Threats:

Do not transport plants, animals, or anything else in your car. Please pick up any trash you find.

Prevent transporting invasive plant seeds by cleaning boots or old tennis shoes that you don’t mind getting wet and muddy. Be aware that lime disease is present in parts of the state. Prevent tick bites by wearing clothes that cover your skin and checking your skin and clothing for ticks when you get home. Bring water, field guides, and a sense of wonder.

Avoid nest areas and other areas where wildlife is present. Please pick up any trash you find.

IN YOUR REGION:

Volunteer Stewardship:

Citizen Monitoring:

Preventing External Threats:

Do not bring invaders with you!

Prevent transporting invasive plant seeds by cleaning boots or old tennis shoes that you don’t mind getting wet and muddy. Be aware that lime disease is present in parts of the state. Prevent tick bites by wearing clothes that cover your skin and checking your skin and clothing for ticks when you get home. Bring water, field guides, and a sense of wonder.

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