



WHITE RIVER MARSH WETLAND TYPES

Eric Epstein

Sedge meadow, low prairie, marsh, coniferous swamp, floodplain forest, alder thicket, shrub carr

GREEN LAKE/
MARQUETTE COUNTY



ECOLOGY & SIGNIFICANCE

This vast riverine Wetland Gem site comprises more than 4,300 acres of diverse, high quality wetlands along the meandering White River as it flows from the Marquette-Green Lake County border into the Fox River within the White River Marsh State Wildlife Area, as well as the last segment of the Puchyan River as it flows into the White River. The site includes three State Natural Areas – White River Sedge Meadow, White River Prairie/Tamaracks, and Puchyan Prairie. This site includes the largest sedge meadow in the region, the largest tamarack swamp in the region, and the least disturbed low prairie remaining in the state. Puchyan Prairie puts on a beautiful spring display with more than 130 native wildflower species. These wetlands play an important role in the quality of the White and Fox Rivers downstream and support abundant wildlife, including an impressive diversity of birds and butterflies and a number of rare species.

FLORA & FAUNA

The northern, upstream end of the White River portion of this site features extensive coniferous swamp with a tamarack canopy. The subcanopy of paper birch, red maple and American elm overlies a shrub layer of alder, willow, dogwood, holly and poison sumac. The wet peat soils are hummocky with sphagnum moss and a variety of herbaceous plants including tussock sedge, lake sedge, sawgrass, marsh marigold, cinnamon fern, royal fern, marsh fern, fowl manna grass, yellow bluebead lily and three-leaved goldthread. An intact continuum of marsh to prairie to sedge meadow

characterizes the expansive wetlands in the southern, downstream portion of this site. Low prairie habitat along the White and Puchyan Rivers features a great diversity of native species including big bluestem, bluejoint grass, prairie cordgrass, sweetgrass, cottongrass, shrubby cinquefoil, boneset, prairie blazing star, shooting star, Michigan lily, wild bergamot, swamp milkweed, swamp saxifrage, northern bedstraw, hoary vervain, Indian paintbrush, white wild indigo, and bird's foot violet. Marsh habitat along the river is characterized by cattails, bulrushes and sedges.

These wetlands provide important stopover habitat for thousands of migratory birds during the spring and fall. Species using the site include northern waterthrush, sedge wren, marsh wren, grasshopper sparrow, swamp sparrow, yellow-billed cuckoo, prothonotary warbler, black-throated green warbler, American redstart, veery, blue-winged teal, mallard, wood duck, sedge wren, common yellowthroat, great blue heron and sandhill crane. Rare and unusual birds include yellow-headed blackbird, black tern, king rail, least bittern, American bittern, Henslow's sparrow, Le Conte's sparrow, cerulean warbler, Nashville warbler, red-shouldered hawk and northern harrier. Other rare animals include the state threatened Blanding's turtle, the black dash butterfly, and the state endangered poweshiek skipperling butterfly.

THREATS

Runoff from agriculture and other watershed land uses threatens water quality and habitat at this site. Ditching and other hydrologic alterations have been made to wetlands adjacent to the northern part of the site. Reed canary grass has been documented in some areas; monitoring and control will be necessary to prevent the spread of this and other invasive plant species. Heavy deer browsing pressure threatens the regeneration of the site's conifer trees.

ACCESS

Visit the Wisconsin State Natural Areas Program website: dnr.wi.gov/org/land/er/sna.

Sources:

- Wisconsin State Natural Areas Program (WDNR)
- Wisconsin Natural Heritage Inventory Program (WDNR)
- Wisconsin Land Legacy Report (WDNR)
- Wisconsin's Strategy for Wildlife Species of Greatest Conservation Need (WDNR)
- The Prairie-Forest Border: An Ecoregional Plan (TNC)

WHITE RIVER MARSH

Property Owner: WDNR

Recognitions & Designations: WI State Natural Area, WI Land Legacy Place, WI Wildlife Action Plan Reference Site, The Nature Conservancy Priority Conservation Area, WI Bird Conservation Initiative Important Bird Area

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Yellow-headed blackbird — Brian Hansen