

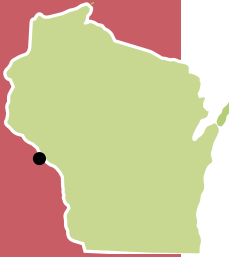


WHITMAN BOTTOMS WETLAND TYPES

Floodplain forest, marsh

John Schlesselman

BUFFALO COUNTY



WHITMAN BOTTOMS

Property Owner: WDNR

Recognitions & Designations: WI State Natural Area, WI Wildlife Action Plan Reference Site

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

Whitman Bottoms, a state-owned portion of the Upper Mississippi River corridor within the Whitman Dam State Wildlife Area in Buffalo County, comprises six miles of sloughs and backwaters stretching north from Merrick Park. Indian Creek meanders through this Wetland Gem, which features the best floodplain forest in the region and extensive marshes. Like other backwater areas of the Upper Mississippi River, Whitman Bottoms provides excellent bird habitat, including one of the state's largest heron rookeries and excellent stopover habitat for migratory birds.

FLORA & FAUNA

The mature floodplain forests at Whitman Bottoms have canopies dominated by silver maple and river birch. Other tree species include swamp white oak, American elm, green ash, and prickly ash. Wood nettle and various vines like grape, common moonseed, woodbine and wild yam, dominate the understory. Marsh habitats of the refuges feature various species of pondweeds, water lily, broad-leaved arrowhead, pickerel weed, common bur-reed, cattail, common

horsetail, spikerush and various species of bulrushes.

Wildlife abounds in this productive riverine wetland complex. More than 500 nests have been established here, making this one of the state's largest heron and egret rookeries. Many species of lowland forest birds, such as black-billed cuckoos, woodpeckers and prothonotary warblers, thrive here. Bald and golden eagles have been documented at the site. Thousands of waterfowl, including tundra swan, canvasback, ring-necked duck and scaup, use these wetlands each fall and spring as stopover habitat during migration. These wetlands also support a healthy fishery in Indian Creek with more than 60 species.

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. Invasive species are also of concern; future invasion by the emerald ash borer beetle threatens the site's ash trees.

ACCESS

Visitors can access the site by canoe or by walking on the levees. For details, visit the Wisconsin State Natural Areas Program website: dnr.wi.gov/org/land/er/sna.



Great blue heron — Brian Hansen

Sources:

Wisconsin State Natural Areas Program (WDNR)
Great Wisconsin Birding & Nature Trail (WBCI)
Wisconsin's Strategy for Wildlife Species of Greatest Conservation Need (WDNR)