



**CHEROKEE MARSH WETLAND TYPES**

Marsh, fen, sedge meadow, low prairie, shrub carr

Mario Quintano

DANE COUNTY



**ECOLOGY & SIGNIFICANCE**

This urban Wetland Gem is the largest remaining wetland in Dane County and a highly significant wetland within the Yahara River watershed. More than 2000 acres at Cherokee Marsh, along both the east and west sides of the river, are protected by city, county and state agency property owners. This extensive wetland complex is characterized by steep side slopes and large flat expanses hosting marsh, fen, shrub carr, sedge meadow, and one of the largest low prairies in the region. Cherokee Marsh not only serves as excellent wildlife habitat, but also provides services like water quality protection and flood attenuation to the City of Madison downstream. The City has intensive and ongoing marsh restoration efforts that are helping to bring back hundreds of lost acres. The site also provides recreational and educational opportunities to many Madison area residents; the site is used by thousands of students each year for environmental education.

**FLORA & FAUNA**

Cherokee Marsh hosts a diversity of plant communities. Fen habitat characterizes the northern portion of the site; further south are areas of shrub carr characterized by bog birch, willows and dogwood. Large shoreline

areas of marsh habitat extend out into the river channel. Common herbaceous plants at the site include cattails, common bur-reed, river bulrush, softstem bulrush, hardstem bulrush, sago pondweed, coontail, pickerel weed and a variety of sedges and rushes. The site supports some relic tamarack trees and several rare plant species, including tufted bulrush, small yellow ladyslipper, white ladyslipper and glade mallow.

Many mammals, amphibians, reptiles and birds use Cherokee Marsh. A wide diversity of birds nest in or migrate through the area, including northern harrier, short-eared owl, great horned owl, American egret, great blue heron, green heron, sandhill crane, marsh wren, sedge wren, swamp sparrow, belted kingfisher, and many species of ducks. Rare and unusual animals using the site include Henslow's sparrow, American bittern, least bittern, Blanding's turtle, and mulberry wing and smokey-eyed brown butterflies. These wetlands also provide critical spawning habitat for northern pike and also help to support healthy populations of many other fish species in the Yahara River.

**THREATS**

Invasive species such as reed canary grass, glossy buckthorn and common carp threaten the persistence of native plants. Hydrology has been altered by lake water level management that is higher than historical levels as well as historical ditching in the southern portion of the site. Recreational use of the site may impact sensitive wetland plants.

**ACCESS**

A trail, boardwalk and boat launch provide access to various portions of this site. For details, visit the City of Madison Parks website: [www.cityofmadison.com/parks/chokeee.html](http://www.cityofmadison.com/parks/chokeee.html). The Friends of Cherokee Marsh website also provides information on access: [www.cherokeemarsh.org](http://www.cherokeemarsh.org).



Pickerel weed — John Sullivan

**CHEROKEE MARSH**

Property Owners: City of Madison, Dane County, WDNR  
 Recognitions & Designations: WI State Natural Area, WI Land Legacy Place, WI Wildlife Action Plan Reference Site

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