

WETLAND GEMS



OUTER ISLAND SAND SPIT & LAGOON WETLAND TYPES

National Park Service

Fen, open bog, seasonally flooded basin, interdunal wetland

ASHLAND COUNTY



OUTER ISLAND SAND SPIT & LAGOON

Property Owner: National Park Service
 Recognitions & Designations: WI State Natural Area, WI Coastal Wetland Inventory Primary Site, WI Bird Conservation Initiative Important Bird Area

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Wisconsin Wetlands Association
 wisconsinwetlands.org

ECOLOGY & SIGNIFICANCE

Outer Island is the northernmost of the 22 islands that make up the Apostle Island National Lakeshore, and it is one of the four islands that make up the Apostle Islands Sandscapes State Natural Area. This Wetland Gem is located on the southernmost point of the island where a 1½-mile long sandspit encloses a large lagoon surrounded by peatlands. A sandspit is a long, narrow piece of land created by current-deposited sands that extend outward from the tip of land or at the mouth of a bay. Outer Island Sand Spit is one of the largest sandspits in the Apostle Islands and provides an excellent example of how this landform can create conditions, particularly shelter from wave action, that allow for the development of wetland habitat. All wetlands at the site are undisturbed and high quality; the fen habitat at this site is particularly diverse.

FLORA & FAUNA

The southern end of the lagoon is a diverse fen mat composed primarily of woolly sedge, twig rush, beakrushes, buckbean and sweet gale. At the northern end, the mat is boggy and dominated by sphagnum mosses. Ericaceous shrubs such as leatherleaf, bog rosemary and small cranberry are common as are wire-leaved sedges and pitcher plants. At least five rare plants species have been documented at this site, including brown beakrush, Robbins' spikerush, northeastern bladderwort, shore sedge and swamp pink.



Leatherleaf — Kate Redmond

This site is used extensively by migratory birds in the spring and fall. The Apostle Islands in general host tens of thousands of migrating passerines and raptors, and provide important nesting habitat for colonial waterbirds and a variety of breeding songbirds. Loons, grebes and cormorants congregate in the waters off of Outer Island Sand Spit. Rare birds documented at the site include merlin, red-breasted merganser and Swainson's thrush.

THREATS

This site is well protected, but should be monitored for invasive species and impacts of human use. Declining Lake Superior water levels have altered these and other coastal wetlands in recent years and may continue to do so if this pattern continues with global climate change.

ACCESS

Outer Island, like all of the Apostle Islands, is only accessible by boat. See www.nps.gov/apis/playourvisit/ for details on travel to the island, camping and foot trails that can be used to view wetlands at this site.



Tennessee warbler — Scott Franke

Sources:

- Coastal Wetlands of Wisconsin's Great Lakes (WDNR)
- Priority Wetland Sites of Wisconsin's Lake Superior Basin (WDNR)
- Wisconsin Important Bird Areas (WBCI)
- Wisconsin State Natural Areas Program (WDNR)