



RUSH LAKE WETLAND TYPES

Marsh, sedge meadow, low prairie, shrub carr

WDNR

WINNEBAGO/
FOND DU LAC COUNTY



RUSH LAKE

Property Owners: WDNR, The Nature Conservancy
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

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

Rush Lake, a 3,000-acre shallow, hardwater, seepage lake with a relatively undeveloped shoreline, is the largest prairie pothole east of the Mississippi River. Much of this highly productive lake is covered by marsh vegetation. Water levels, which are less than 2 feet deep over the majority of the area, are managed by a small dam at the lake's outlet to Waukau Creek in the northeast corner. Sedge meadow, low prairie and shrub carr habitats surround the lake. The lake and surrounding landscape inspired a number of paintings by Wisconsin wildlife artist Owen Gromme. Rush Lake is best known for its rich wildlife, particularly the tremendous populations of migratory and breeding birds that use these wetlands each year. This site is considered one of the most important wetlands for waterfowl and other wetland dependent birds in Wisconsin.

FLORA & FAUNA

Marsh vegetation across the lake is dominated by hardstem bulrush and other rushes, for which the lake was named. Other marsh plants include water lilies, pondweeds and muskgrass. Cattails are abundant around the edge

of the lake. Sedge meadow habitat is characterized by tussock and other sedges, bluejoint grass, joe-pye weed, marsh fern, turtlehead, marsh pea, swamp lousewort and northern bog aster. Shrubby areas include dogwood, willow and dwarf birch.

Many thousands of migratory waterfowl and other water birds use the wetlands of Rush Lake as stopover habitat during migration. This Wetland Gem also supports significant breeding populations of many rare and uncommon birds, including black tern, Forster's tern, black-crowned night-heron, and the state's largest breeding population of red-necked grebe. Other birds found at the site include least bittern, American bittern, yellow-headed blackbird, American coot, common moorhen, marsh wren, pied-billed grebe and swamp sparrow as well as many duck species like redhead, mallard, scaup, widgeon, blue-winged teal, American black duck and ruddy duck.

THREATS

For the past few decades, the lake has suffered from declining productivity, particularly bulrush vegetation, due to artificially stable high water levels. Water quality decline caused by non-native carp invasion, nutrient and sediment runoff from watershed agriculture, and lead contamination from lead shot deposition resulting from decades of intense waterfowl hunting are also problems. WDNR, USFWS, Ducks Unlimited and other partners have made significant investments to restore the quality of waterfowl habitat on the lake.

ACCESS

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

Sources:

- Wisconsin State Natural Areas 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)
- Wisconsin Important Bird Areas (WBCI)



Red-necked grebe — Scott Franke