



SUGAR RIVER FLOODPLAIN FOREST WETLAND TYPES

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Floodplain forest, low prairie, sedge meadow, shrub carr

ROCK/GREEN
COUNTY



SUGAR RIVER
FLOODPLAIN FOREST

Property Owner: WDNR
Recognitions & Designations: WI State Natural Area, WI Land Legacy Place

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

This riverine Wetland Gem comprises wetlands along the Sugar River corridor from Brodhead to the Illinois state line and includes two State Natural Areas – Avon Bottoms and Swenson Wet Prairie. The meandering river corridor features habitat complexity – oxbows, sloughs and potholes – that supports a diversity of wetland plants and animals. These riverine wetlands are important to quality of the Sugar River and also provide excellent recreational opportunities in close proximity to several population centers in southern Wisconsin.

FLORA & FAUNA

Extensive floodplain forest flanks this section of meandering Sugar River. The canopy is dominated by silver maple, swamp white oak and green ash, but includes a number of other species such as shagbark hickory, hackberry, cottonwood, bitternut hickory, bur oak, American elm, basswood, sycamore and black willow. The understory is dominated by buttonbush and dogwood shrubs; wild cucumber, river grape, woodbine, poison ivy and common moonseed vines; and many herbaceous plants species at their northern range limit such as wild chervil and obovate beak grain. Near the Sugar River's confluence with Taylor Creek, the floodplain opens up into a wetland complex of low prairie, sedge meadow and shrub carr habitat. Sedge meadow species include various sedges, bluejoint grass, big bluestem, little bluestem, Indian grass, swamp milkweed, white wild indigo, shooting star, blueflag iris, pale-spike lobelia, cardinal flower, prairie blazing star, cup plant, Culver's root, golden alexander and Michigan lily. The site supports two state threatened plants – prairie Indian plantain and round-fruited St. John's wort.

Many bird species use these floodplain wetlands including blue-gray gnatcatcher,

tufted titmouse, blue-winged teal, green-winged teal and wood duck. Rare birds include yellow-throated warbler, cerulean warbler, prothonotary warbler, Bell's vireo, yellow-breasted chat and yellow-crowned night heron. The site also supports a number of reptiles, amphibians and invertebrates including painted turtle, Blanchard's cricket frog, and the riverine clubtail and russet-tipped clubtail dragonflies.

THREATS

Runoff from watershed agriculture and residential development threatens the health of these riverine wetlands. Invasive species are also of concern. Future invasion by the emerald ash borer beetle threatens the site's ash 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 Land Legacy Report (WDNR)



Painted turtle — Gary Shackelford