



VAN LOON BOTTOMS WETLAND TYPES

U.S. Fish &amp; Wildlife Service

Floodplain forest, marsh, shrub carr, low prairie

LA CROSSE COUNTY



## VAN LOON BOTTOMS

Property Owner: WDNR

**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 &amp; SIGNIFICANCE

This riverine Wetland Gem, located within the Van Loon State Wildlife Area in La Crosse County, features a high quality wetland complex in the delta of the Black River where it meets the Mississippi River just upstream of Lake Onalaska. Extensive and mature floodplain forests flank the many channels, sloughs and oxbow lakes of the delta in this a state-owned portion of the Upper Mississippi River corridor. Shallow marshes are common; pockets of shrub carr and low prairie are also present. Wetland habitats of the delta are critical to supporting a healthy, diverse warmwater fishery with high quality fishing opportunities. Other recreational activities popular at the site include hunting, canoeing, hiking, bird watching and wildlife viewing.

## FLORA &amp; FAUNA

The canopy of the site's floodplain forests is dominated by large silver maple, swamp white oak and green ash. Other tree species include river birch, cottonwood, yellowbud hickory, American elm, basswood and black ash. Shrubs grow densely underneath the canopy and include prickly ash, elderberry, buttonbush, common winterberry and nannyberry. Herbaceous groundlayer species include cut-leaved coneflower, Virginia wild rye,

Virginia waterleaf, wild ginger, wood nettle, sensitive fern, meadow-rue and calico aster. Willows dominate pockets of shrub carr, and marsh habitats contain an assortment of emergent aquatic plants.

Van Loon Bottoms provides excellent habitat for birds, amphibians, reptiles and mammals. Thousands of waterfowl and waterbirds use these wetlands as stopover habitat during migration each year. Rare and uncommon bird species include red-shouldered hawk, cerulean warbler, and prothonotary warbler. Other species include pileated woodpecker, red-headed woodpecker, wood duck, green heron, yellow-crowned night-heron, eastern wood-pewee, yellow-throated vireo, blue gray gnatcatcher, ovenbird, American redstart, Acadian flycatcher, blue-winged warbler, field sparrow and indigo bunting. A population of the state threatened wood turtle once thrived here, but has declined in recent years.

## THREATS

Polluted runoff from agricultural areas of the watershed threatens water quality in the Black River and associated wetlands. Dams upstream have altered natural hydrologic patterns in the river delta. Invasive species are also of concern; future invasion by the emerald ash borer beetle threatens the site's ash trees. Powerline development would pose a significant threat to the migratory birds and forested wetland communities of the site.

## ACCESS

Visit the Wisconsin State Natural Areas Program website: [dnr.wi.gov/org/land/er/sna](http://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)



Tundra swans — David Schwaegler