

SOUTHEAST COASTAL - 6

WETLAND GEMS



MILWAUKEE COUNTY

WARNIMONT BLUFF FENS

Property Owner: Milwaukee County
Recognitions & Designations: WI State Natural Area, WI Coastal
Wetland Inventory Primary Site, WI Wildlife Action Plan Reference Site

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Emmett Judziewicz

ECOLOGY & SIGNIFICANCE

Warnimont Bluff Fens, protected within parklands owned by Milwaukee County, is a Wetland Gem site located south of the city of Milwaukee on the coast of Lake Michigan. The site features highly unusual calcareous fen wetlands positioned 100 feet above the lake on clay bluffs. Calcium-rich springs seep from and flow down the bluffs, creating small wet ravines where fen vegetation thrives. Warnimont Bluff Fens are believed to be the only natural community of this type in the state. Though the land area is quite small, this site provides habitat and refuge for a number of uncommon and rare plants and animals in a landscape that is largely urbanized.

FLORA & FAUNA

Open, moist areas on the bluff are dominated by fen vegetation, including grass-of-Parnassus, swamp lousewort, Kalm's lobelia, soapberry, elk sedge, brittleleaf sedge, field horsetail, variegated horsetail and

numerous rushes. White cedar also grows at the site, which is the southern limit of its range in Wisconsin. The site supports a number of rare plant species including Ohio goldenrod, slender bog arrowgrass, lesser fringed gentian, and one of few thriving populations of the state threatened false asphodel.

The site also supports several rare animal species including the prairie crayfish and rare reptiles. The steep eroding bluffs at the site provide habitat for burrowing birds such as the belted kingfisher and bank swallow.

THREATS

Proximity to a heavily urbanized area – the city of Milwaukee and the extensive and growing suburban zone surrounding it – poses significant challenges for the protection of these sensitive fens. Heavy recreational use of Warnimont Park, the spread of invasive plants including Phragmites (common reed grass), hydrologic alterations, and bluff erosion are just a few of the threats resulting from the adjacent urban areas.

ACCESS

Public access is limited to research and education due to the sensitive nature of these plant communities. Contact Milwaukee County Parks for permission: www.countyparks.com.



Prairie crayfish — Gary Casper

Sources:

Wisconsin State Natural Areas Program (WDNR)
Coastal Wetlands of Wisconsin's Great Lakes (WDNR)
Milwaukee County Parks