



WOLF RIVER BOTTOMS WETLAND TYPES

Eric Epstein

Floodplain forest, lowland hardwood swamp, marsh, sedge meadow, shrub carr, coniferous bog

SHAWANO/WAUPACA/
OUTAGAMIE COUNTY



WOLF RIVER 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

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ECOLOGY & SIGNIFICANCE

This Wetland Gem features one of the last large, continuous and intact floodplain corridors in the Midwest. The state owns approximately 30,000 acres of river corridor and associated wetlands in the Lower Wolf River watershed that are protected and managed through a suite of State Wildlife Areas, Fisheries Areas and Natural Areas. Here the Wolf River meanders through extensive and high quality floodplain forests and open wetlands. The topography of the forest floor is complex and uneven in spots due to past flooding and associated erosion and deposition. More than 40% of all the state's native plant species are found in the Wolf River Bottoms and approximately 60% of the state's breeding bird species nest here. In addition to its ecological value, the Wolf River Bottoms provides many excellent recreational opportunities including fishing, hunting, wildlife watching and boating.

FLORA & FAUNA

This Wetland Gem includes significant stands of mature floodplain forest, some of which have old-growth characteristics. The canopy is dominated by silver maple and swamp white oak; other tree species include red elm, black ash, green ash, basswood, bur oak, hackberry, cottonwood, willows and red maple. The understory is rich with species like sensitive fern, jumpseed, wood nettle, cardinal flower, Canadian honeysuckle, moneywort,

northern bugleweed, tall coneflower, woodland phlox, carrion flower, bristly greenbrier and many species of sedges and grasses. Lowland hardwood swamps at the site are dominated by red maple, elms and ashes and sedge meadows are dominated by tussock sedge and Canada bluejoint grass. Riverine marshes are extensive and feature some areas dominated by cattail, bulrush, bur-reed and arrowhead and others dominated by wild rice. Rare plants include handsome sedge, northern bog sedge, leafy white orchis, large roundleaf orchid, common bog arrowgrass and marsh valerian.

Spring flooding of backwater sloughs and other floodplain habitats provides critical spawning habitat for many fish species, including walleye, lake sturgeon, northern pike, bass and perch. Many mammals use the site, including white-tailed deer, snowshoe hare, beaver, mink, muskrat, otter, red fox, bear, coyote, skunk, woodchuck, badger and bobcat. Characteristic birds of the site include American redstart, pileated woodpecker, barred owl, wood duck, American woodcock, bald eagle, osprey, sandhill crane, American bittern, black tern and herons. The state threatened Blanding's turtle has been documented at the site as have many rare aquatic species including fish, mussels and invertebrates.

THREATS

While the state owns substantial tracts of land in the Lower Wolf River corridor, most of the corridor is still privately owned. Some of these private lands have been subjected to poor forestry and agricultural practices, contributing sediment and other pollution to the river. Heavy deer browsing pressure threatens the regeneration of the site's conifer trees. Invasive species, particularly reed canary grass, warrant monitoring and management. Future invasion by the emerald ash borer beetle threatens the site's ash trees.

ACCESS

For details, visit the the Wolf River Bottoms and Mukwa Bottomland Forest pages of the State Natural Areas Program website: dnr.wi.gov/org/land/er/sna.

Sources:

- WI State Natural Areas Program (WDNR)
- WI Land Legacy Report (WDNR)
- WI Strategy for Wildlife Species of Greatest Conservation Need (WDNR)
- The Prairie-Forest Border: An Ecoregional Plan (TNC)



Walleye — Eric Engbretson