



The Driftless Area is a unique unglaciated landscape. The land in this part of the state is ancient compared with 10,000 years of ice-free land in the rest of the state. Rare species are numerous owing to the diversity and quality of habitats.

Driftless Area Important Natural Features—
 Large River Systems, Southern Forests, Prairie and Savanna, Springs, Cliffs and Talus Slopes, Relict Conifers, Bog Relicts, and Dendritic Landforms.

Ecology & Significance

- Wisconsin Responsibility – High
 - Irreplaceable Features – Mod High
 - Diversity of Natural Features – Mod High
 - Rare Species – Several
 - Conservation Concern Species – Mod High
 - Vulnerability to a Warming Climate – Mod Low
 - Conservation Status – Minute
- This site has promising conservation opportunities.

The Morgan Coulee project is unique biologically when compared with any other similar size area in the state. The rapid transition from a thin soiled dry prairie through narrow ecotones (oak savanna, oak woodland, dry forest) to the most plant diverse maple basswood forest is unknown anywhere else in the state. Morgan Coulee probably has more plant species per square mile than any other square mile in the state. In addition, the fractured dolomite over a thick sandstone provides the recharge and filtering of ground water essential for numerous high quality springs that feed the trout-rich Rush River.

Flora and Fauna

Morgan Coulee Prairie extends for over a half-mile along a steep, south-facing bluff in a coulee opening onto the Rush River valley. The large expanse of relatively undisturbed dry prairie is broken up with scattered islands of bur oak savanna dominated by open grown, gnarly oaks and shallow wooded draws. Limestone outcrops are scattered about the area and support a community of lichens and ferns. Dominant grasses include big and little blue-stem, side-oats and hairy grama, Indian grass, needle grass, prairie dropseed, and several muhly grasses.



Photo courtesy Wikipedia.com

Rich remnants of southern mesic forest grow on the north facing slopes. Sugar maple, American elm, basswood, red oak, red elm, and ironwood dominate the canopy. Shrubs include American bladdernut, eastern leatherwood, hazelnut, and alternate-leaved dogwood. The herb layer is quite diverse and contains a significant population of the state-threatened snow trillium (*Trillium nivale*). Scenic sculptured coves are present on the steep slopes. Bulbet bladder fern, brittle bladder fern, and slender cliff brake grow among the outcrops here.



Photo courtesy Wisconsin DNR



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