



Coastal Plain Marshes

Marquette County

450 Acres

The coastal plain marsh develops on sandy lake or pond shores, sometimes with the sandy waterbody margins partially covered by localized, discontinuous layers of shallow peat or muck. Only five quality coastal plain marshes are known.

The Central Sand Hills Landscape features glacial moraines and outwash sands. Rare species are numerous owing to the diversity and quality of habitats.

Ecology & Significance

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

The distribution of this community is limited to a few sites within the sandy beds or margins of extinct glacial lakes. The unusual distributions of the coastal plain plants have long been recognized by Wisconsin botanists. Most of the information on this natural community comes from farther east; Michigan, Indiana, Ontario, and New York. Wisconsin is at the westernmost extent of the natural communities' range.

There are only five known coastal plain marsh communities known from the state with two being protected. These remaining sites are under threat. They have water and there is a tremendous demand for any real estate with water in southern Wisconsin. Lax dredging laws, also permit landowners to dredge areas deep enough to hold a few fish.



Photo courtesy Wisconsin DNR

Flora and Fauna

The vegetation often demonstrates strong zonation, with water depth the determinant factor. The deeper, more permanent waters support aquatic plants such as watershield, pondweeds, and bladderworts. The in-shore shallows and pond margins are often dominated by diverse combinations of plants including grasses, sedges, Cyperus, spike-rush, fimbry, umbrella sedge, beak sedge, nut-rush, and bull-rush, as well as forbs like milkworts, toothcup, meadow-beauty, lance-leaved violet, yellow-eyed grass, and several of the small St. John's worts. The uppermost, seldom-inundated margins of the wetland are typically vegetated with more robust perennials, such as grass-leaved goldenrod, Canada bluejoint grass, hardhack, meadowsweet, boneset, Joe-Pye weed, and asters.



Photo courtesy Wikipedia.com

The shallow basin usually freeze out in winter leaving them fish less. And without fish, the aquatic invertebrate populations reach extraordinary levels. In most coastal plains marshes, dragonflies are the top predatory and show exceptional diversity—fish reduce dragonfly diversity. Another artifact of high invertebrate numbers are high numbers of invertebrate predators, especially Saw-whet Owls (see above).



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