



**Red Banks Alvar**  
**Brown County**  
**2600 Acres**

The Great Lakes ecosystems are of global importance. Even though the lakes themselves have been changed over the years, many of the shoreland communities have not. Rare species are numerous owing to the diversity and quality of habitats.

Great Lakes: Important Natural Features — Ridge and Swale, Level Bedrock Communities, Estuaries, Beaches and Dunes, Green Bay Marshes, Boreal Clay Plain Forests, Sandscapes, Red Clay Wetlands and Apostles Islands.

### Ecology & Significance

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

An **alvar** is a biological environment perched on a limestone plain with thin or no soil and, as a result, sparse grassland vegetation. Easily flooded in the spring, and affected by drought in midsummer, alvars support a distinctive group of prairie-like plants. Most alvars occur either in northern Europe or around the Great Lakes in North America. This stressed habitat supports a community of rare plants and animals, including species more commonly found on prairies or oak savannas.

Red Banks is Wisconsin’s only alvar of significance. Areas of open grass and sedge changes to oak woodland, and on the northern part is the steep Niagara escarpment.

### Flora and Fauna

In many aspects, the thin-soiled, sparsely vegetated landscape resembles a dry oak savanna dominated by open grown bur oak and white oak. However, the trees are not especially large owing to the harsh growing conditions. But looks can be deceiving, as some of the oaks are very old. In many areas the shrub and sapling layer is dense with red cedar, common juniper, and snowberry. Rare plants include cream gentian, Crawe's sedge, and Richardson's sedge. Butterfly collections in the early 1980s documented at least 20 species within the oak savanna community.



*Photo courtesy Wikipedia.com*

An unusual blend of boreal, southern and prairie species, relicts of the post-glacial environment and the warmer, dryer period that followed, characterize alvar ecosystems. Red Banks Alvar contains one of the most diverse land snail communities known in the Midwest and is one of the most important areas in Wisconsin for snails. Colonies of 25 different groups of these glacial relicts can be found from the base to the top of the escarpment. Of interest are the number of rare and glacial relict snail taxa that are present including the cherrystone drop and the Midwest Pleistocene vertigo snail.



*Photo courtesy Wisconsin DNR*

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