



Cal DeWitt

WAUBESA WETLAND TYPES  
Sedge meadow, fen, marsh, shrub carr

DANE COUNTY



WAUBESA WETLANDS

Property Owners: The Nature Conservancy, WDNR  
 Recognitions & Designations: WI State Natural Area, WI Land Legacy Place, WI Wildlife Action Plan Reference Site

Funding for this project provided by The McKnight Foundation, which seeks to improve the quality of life for present and future generations through grantmaking, coalition-building and encouragement of strategic policy reform.

ECOLOGY & SIGNIFICANCE

This Wetland Gem, located just south of Madison along the southwest shoreline of Lake Waubesa, is one of the more diverse wetland complexes remaining in southern Wisconsin. Waubesa Wetlands comprises more than 500 acres of relatively high quality sedge meadow, fen, marsh and shrub carr habitats. The site is characterized by deep peat deposits and numerous springs, which provide these wetlands with a continuous source of clean, cool and mineral-rich groundwater. Two streams, Murphy's Creek and Swan Creek, meander through the site and empty into the lake. These wetlands are important to water quality in the lake and the larger Yahara River system. The proximity of this site to Madison means that it is heavily used for research, education and recreation.

FLORA & FAUNA

The majority of the site is sedge meadow habitat with species diversity that is created by varying hydrology across the site. Species include bluejoint grass, tussock sedge, sawgrass sedge, cattails and common bur-reed.

A floating mat of cattails and sedges lines the lakeshore and marsh plants line the streams. Calcareous fen areas feature a diversity of plants including grass-of-parnassus, Riddell's goldenrod, northern bog aster, sage willow and the rare lesser fringed gentian. Other abundant wetland plants at the site include common lake sedge, tussock sedge, woollyfruit sedge, swamp loosestrife, American water horehound and numerous asters.

This Wetland Gem provides habitat for many species of waterfowl and other migrating birds including sandhill crane, green heron, marsh wren, sedge wren, blue-winged teal, green-winged teal, American coot, blue-gray gnatcatcher, common yellowthroat, great blue heron and willow flycatcher. Rare and unusual birds include least bittern, American bittern and black tern. This area also provides important spawning habitat for many Lake Waubesa fishes. The site could provide good spawning habitat for northern pike, but lake level drawdowns reduce the availability and accessibility of the flooded mats of grasses and sedges that pike need to lay their eggs.

THREATS

Runoff from watershed agriculture and residential development has degraded water quality and habitat at this site. Spring flow has also been diminished because of alterations to watershed hydrology. Invasive species, particularly reed canary grass, are of great concern. The lack of fire and resulting encroachment of woody vegetation is also of concern.

ACCESS

This site is best enjoyed by canoe. For details, visit the Wisconsin State Natural Areas Program website: [dnr.wi.gov/org/land/er/sna](http://dnr.wi.gov/org/land/er/sna).



Willow flycatcher — Scott Franke

Sources:

Wisconsin State Natural Areas Program (WDNR)  
 Wisconsin Land Legacy Report (WDNR)  
 Wisconsin's Strategy for Wildlife Species of Greatest Conservation Need (WDNR)