

The Des Plaines River Lowlands



**A Kenosha/Racine Land Trust
Conservation Project**

Project Overview

The Kenosha/Racine Land Trust's first project in the Watershed is the acquisition, restoration and preservation of approximately 450 acres of Upper Des Plaines River floodplain in the Village of Pleasant Prairie. This land has been identified by Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission as the Des Plaines River Lowlands, a natural area of significance that should be in protective ownership. Containing xeric oak woods, mesic and wet-mesic prairie, fresh (wet) meadow, and riverine forest, this extensive wetland and upland complex is significant because of its crucial role in reducing flooding downstream as well as creating open space and wildlife habitat communities.

The project land borders a 425-acre parcel of land once owned by WISPARK, which was donated to The Nature Conservancy in 1989, and then to the Village of Pleasant Prairie in 2001. WISPARK sponsored one of the Midwest's earliest wetland mitigation projects on that parcel in the early 1990s. The land contains emergent aquatic, wet prairie, wet-mesic prairie, and dry-mesic forest habitat, and is now part of Prairie Springs Park in the Village of Pleasant Prairie.

The Land Trust's 450-acre project will connect existing public and private conservation areas to create an environmental corridor of approximately 2,000 acres. In wetland areas with fluctuating water levels, this is an optimum size for preserving biodiversity. (Marion Farrior, "The Thousand Acre Difference," *Wisconsin Wetlands* June 2000.)

Rare, threatened or endangered species have been identified in this area, including the great egret (state threatened), red-shouldered hawk (state threatened), Blanding's turtle (state threatened, candidate for federal listing), purple milkweed (state endangered) and prairie white-fringed orchid (state endangered, federal threatened). In spring and fall this area is a significant stopover site for waterfowl in the central migratory flyway. The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources has identified a total of 216 bird species that use this landscape for migrating, wintering, foraging, and breeding. The land is highly visible from Interstate 94 and presents the first landscape to greet visitors entering Wisconsin from the south. It has significant economic value as the state's "front door" for the travel/tourism industry. The Land Trust is currently working with the Village of Pleasant Prairie and private landowners to make the conservation of this landscape a reality. If you would like to donate to this project, please send a check to Kenosha/Racine Land Trust, PO Box 085153, Racine, WI 53408, and write "UDPRW" in the memo.