

Michigan Nature Association Timberland Swamp Nature Sanctuary



Timberland Swamp: At a Glance

Location: Oakland County

Size: 245 acres

History: 11 different acquisitions
from 1967-1978

About MNA:

The Michigan Nature Association is a nonprofit conservation organization working to protect Michigan's rare, threatened and endangered species by protecting the lands and waters they need to survive.

Established in 1952, MNA's members, donors, and volunteers have built a remarkable network of more than 170 nature sanctuaries across the state – the largest network of natural areas established and maintained by a nonprofit conservation organization in Michigan.



Michigan Nature Association

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Photo: Jeff Ganley

Timberland Swamp Nature Sanctuary is the Michigan Nature Association's largest sanctuary in southeast Michigan. Carved out by retreating glaciers roughly 13,000 years ago, the current basin is the headwater for the Huron, Shiawassee, and Clinton Rivers.

Known as Huron Swamp on topographical maps, this 245-acre area has remained largely undisturbed since the surrounding land was farmed in the early 19th century. From the mid-1800s until the MNA's acquisition, the swamp provided timber for local settlers and farmers, with former logging trails still evident into the early 1990s. The sanctuary is adjacent to Indian Springs Metropark, and together they protect more than 2,000 acres of sensitive habitat and green space.

Visitors can get a firsthand look at the hardwood swamp and second-growth hardwood forest on the two-mile loop trail. The path is often swampy and wet, so it's recommended to bring proper footwear and stay on the trail. Despite recent impacts to the understory due to a high deer population, numerous wildflowers, including trillium, maiden-hair fern, and wild geranium are present. Acadian flycatcher, scarlet tanager, and red-eyed vireo are found throughout the swamp in the spring and summer.

The habitats of swamp and forest provide an ideal environment for birds, mammals, and amphibians. The great blue heron, great horned owls, and several species of hawks call the canopy of Timberland Swamp home. Raccoons, muskrats, and opossum are several of the mammals present.

With its diverse habitat and incredible beauty, visitors will get a true glimpse into the past when they visit Timberland Swamp.

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Timberland Swamp is an example of a southern hardwood swamp natural community, which are typically found on poorly drained depressions on glacial lakeplains, end moraines, or perched dunes. Seasonally fluctuating water levels and a high water table result in water saturation and shallow root systems. As a result, tree blowdown caused by high winds results in a canopy gap disturbance regime. When individual trees fall, the resulting canopy gap is exposed to additional sunlight resulting in an explosion of shrub, sapling, and subcanopy vegetative growth. This creates an uneven age class for trees in the forest and increases the diversity of habitat found within.

As the defining natural community in the Timberland Swamp Nature Sanctuary, the hardwood swamp is essential to the ecology of the plants and animals found here. The swamp houses an impressive number of amphibians and reptiles reliant upon Michigan swamps. Multiple species of snakes, turtles, and salamanders live among the pure waters and swamp surroundings. The unpolluted woods and stream are also home to two different types of rare snails.

The pileated woodpecker (*Dryocopus pileatus*), the largest of America's woodpecker species, can be seen and heard throughout the sanctuary. Feeding on different types of insects in tree trunks, these stunning birds are recognized by their beautiful red crest and white showing on their wings when in flight. Evidence of the woodpecker's presence can also be observed by the presence of rectangular holes in tree trunks, where they use their beaks to search for insects.



Photo: Richard Cook



Photo: Dave Wendling

Planning Your Visit:

From late April to late May, wildflowers of many species are scattered throughout the sanctuary against a background of spring beauties and large white trillium.

Visitors in October are treated to a wonderland of fall color, perfect for hiking.

How to Get There:

Take I-75 1.5 miles west of Clarkston to the Dixie Highway exit (#93) and turn south onto Dixie Highway. Turn right (southwest) onto White Lake Road, then make another right (west) onto Andersonville Road. Continue on Andersonville Road until you reach Ware Road. Turn left (south) onto Ware Road and park in the lot near the end of Ware Road.



Trail Map