

THE SIXTEEN EXISTING FEDERAL WILDERNESS AREAS IN MICHIGAN

Beaver Basin Wilderness

The Beaver Basin Wilderness (11,740 acres) includes 13 miles of Lake Superior shoreline from Spray Falls to Sevenmile Creek. The Wilderness is roughly 3.5 miles deep and contains three lakes -- Trappers Lake, Beaver Lake, and Legion Lake -- and five cold streams -- Little Beaver Creek, Arsenault Creek, Sevenmile Creek, Lowney Creek, and Beaver Creek. These waters are home to many fish including brook trout, bass, pike, rock bass, and white sucker.

Old-growth cedar swamps have experienced healthy regeneration, and large areas of beech-maple provide habitat for numerous birds, mammals, and flowering plants. Some species in the Wilderness include black bear, gray wolf, American marten, bald eagle, and grouse. The area also includes unique geography carved by glacial movement in the past. Escarpments, glacial meltwater channels, and the beach ridges from former proglacial Lake Nipissing are all fine examples of glacial geology.

Big Island Lake Wilderness

Big Island Lake Wilderness (5,295 acres) consists of 23 lakes joined by short portages. Canoeing and fishing are popular, but regulations limit the types of lures one can use and the size of fish one can keep. Sandhill Cranes frequent the area's northern section. Woodland animals include black bears, pine martens, bobcats, and porcupines. The region was considerably logged between 1890 and the early 1930s. The growth mix now includes hardwoods in the uplands and hemlock, spruce, and balsam in the low wetlands.

Delirium Wilderness

The Delirium Wilderness (11,952 acres) has seen regeneration from historical human influence as swamp conifers, aspens, and white cedars have returned to the region, with red and jack pines growing in the drier areas. Two bodies of water are found in the area: Sylvester Pond and Delirium Pond. Overall, the character of the area can be described as swamp.

The headwaters of the Pine and Waiska Rivers in the swamp provide ideal habitat for waterfowl and small mammals. Black bears commonly roam through here. There are no established trails, so trekking the wetlands can be physically uncomfortable. The area is not frequented due to a thick forested swamp and biting insects.

Horseshoe Bay Wilderness

The Horseshoe Bay Wilderness (3,842 acres) is administered as a part of the St. Ignace Ranger District of the Hiawatha National Forest. The forests are mainly young and do not show evidence of early 20th century logging. Historically, Native Americans have used the bay for fishing. A sandy beach can be found along the southern portion of the area. The northern two-thirds vary from marshy to rocky depending on the character of the adjoining land. Low, cedar-covered ridges within the Wilderness are separated by narrow, shallow swamps. These ridges and swamps are the result of varying water levels along the former lakeshores.

Wildlife species are typical for a wetland: beavers, otters, mink, ducks, herons, and gulls. Eagles and ospreys nest in white pines along the shoreline. White-tailed deer, black bears, coyotes, and snowshoe hares may be seen at times.

Huron Islands Wilderness

The Huron Islands Wilderness (147 acres) makes up almost the entirety of the Huron National Wildlife Refuge. Created when President Theodore Roosevelt designated the small islands a national bird sanctuary to protect large colonies of nestling gulls. All eight of the islands, except in areas close to the lighthouse, are now managed as Wilderness by U.S. Fish and Wildlife. Of these islands, only Lighthouse Island is open to public access.

The Islands are granite outcrops which rise almost 120 feet above the Lake Superior waterline. In some areas the granite still shows grooves left by the grinding action of glaciers, while the thin soil layer in other areas supports a ground cover with red and white pines, balsam fir, and white birch. Wildlife is scarce during the winter months; only snowshoe hare, small mammals, and a few species of birds live on the Islands year-round. However, the Islands are critically important for colonial nesting birds and serve as a resting site for birds migrating across Lake Superior.

Isle Royale Wilderness

Isle Royale National Park consists of one large island surrounded by over 450 smaller islands encompassing a total area of 850 square miles. Most of the land area of the Park (132,018 acres) is designated Wilderness. Isle Royale Wilderness is also by far the State's largest Wilderness area. Isle Royale's unique ecosystem led to it being designated an International Biosphere Reserve in 1980. The ecological study of wolves on Isle Royale is the longest running large-mammal predator-prey study on earth.

Mackinac Wilderness

Near the end of the 1910s, Mackinac Wilderness Area (11,363 acres) had been severely logged, but a second-growth forest has reclaimed the land, and some trees have been standing for 60-80 years. Native wildlife native includes the bald eagle, osprey, sandhill crane, great blue heron, and snowshoe hare. Most visitors come for the most notable feature, the Carp River. The north branch of the Carp River, Taylor Creek and Spring Lake Creek flow into the portion of the Carp River within the Wilderness. Several stretches of minor river rapids are located near the center of the Wilderness.

McCormick Wilderness

McCormick Wilderness (16,925 acres) was originally owned by the family of Cyrus McCormick, inventor of the reaping machine. The family willed the land to the U.S. Forest Service which allowed it to recover from the logging era that ended in the early 1900s. Today, a mixture of northern hardwoods and lowland conifers can be found amongst small patches of white pine. Moose have been reintroduced here and are seen occasionally. Other animals include black bears, pine martens, and otters.

The Huron, Dead, Peshekee, and the Yellow Dog Rivers have part of their headwaters within the Wilderness area. Eighteen small lakes provide a home to small populations of trout, pike, and bass. The three-mile White Deer Lake Trail connects County Road 607 to White Deer Lake where the McCormick estate once stood. Unmaintained trails can be found occasionally, but the rest of the Wilderness is fairly rugged, isolated, unspoiled, and difficult to access.

Michigan Islands Wilderness

The Michigan Islands Wilderness (12 acres) consists of Pismire, Scarecrow, and Shoe Islands - three of the eight islands established as the Michigan Islands National Wildlife Refuge on Lakes Huron and Michigan. Scarecrow Island is the largest of the three Wilderness islands. Submerged limestone shoals located offshore protect a shoreline of predominantly rock. Several colonial bird species nest on these islands in significant numbers including great blue heron, black-crowned night-heron, herring gull, and ring-billed gull. Dead green ash trees are the main vegetation. The death of the ash has been blamed on the use by cormorants. Public visitation is prohibited in order to protect nesting birds.

Nordhouse Dunes Wilderness

With the Michigan Wilderness Act of 1987, the federal government declared the Nordhouse Dunes (3,271 acres) area of the Manistee National Forest as Wilderness. Most of the present dunes date back between 3,500 and 4,000 years. Unlike the vegetation at most dunes, Nordhouse Dunes are home to woody patches of juniper, stunted jack pine, small stands of northern hardwoods, and dune marshes with wetland species such as hemlock and larch. The Wilderness includes a trail system of about 14.5 miles.

Rock River Canyon Wilderness

Congress designated the Rock River Canyon Wilderness (4,722 acres) in 1987. Remote waterways, Rock River and Silver Creek, flow through canyons with depths of more than 150 feet. Second-growth northern hardwoods can be seen, alongside stumps from logging that stripped the area by the end of the 1930s. In spring, Rock River plunges 15 feet over Rock River Falls into a pool, and then pours into Ginpole Lake, a secluded 13-acre body of water bordered by canyon walls. The elevated waters offer anglers the opportunity to catch rainbow trout, brown trout, brook trout, and northern pike.

Round Island Wilderness

Round Island Wilderness (375 acres) is located in the Straits of Mackinac east of the Mackinac Bridge between Michigan's lower and upper peninsulas. The Island is only accessible by boat. The vegetation of the Island represents three distinct ecological communities: beach and marshy shore, conifer forest, and hardwood forest. All of Round Island has been designated Wilderness except one acre on the northern tip where a lighthouse stands. There has been no logging on the Island since the early 20th century. There are no docks, roads, or developed hiking trails on the Island. You may see whitetail deer, raccoon, red squirrel, fox, rabbit, and an occasional black bear on the Island.

Seney Wilderness

The Seney Wilderness (25,150 acres) is part of the 95,238 acre Seney National Wildlife Refuge. Much of the refuge is carefully managed to provide habitat for a diversity of wildlife. The western one-third of the Refuge, which encompasses the Wilderness Area, contains no roads or man-made structures. Here you may see bald eagle, gray wolf, moose, black bear, coyote, bobcat, marten, fisher, otter, beaver and many more unique wildlife species. In addition to waterfowl, birds in the Wilderness area include the yellow rail, sandhill crane, spruce grouse and a variety of songbirds.

Sleeping Bear Dunes Wilderness

Congress designated the Sleeping Bear Dunes Wilderness (32,556 acres) in 2014. Sleeping Bear Dunes was founded under the 1970 Establishment Act that set aside the Lakeshore for preservation of natural resources and for public use. These dunes are located atop the lofty points of glacial deposits and reach up to 400 feet above Lake Michigan. Hiking can take place on the Dunes Trail to Lake Michigan. While only a 3.5 miles round trip, the trail is all sand. The Lakeshore is long and narrow, but still contains several northern hardwood and conifer forest types, abandoned farm site meadows, wetlands, lakes, streams, bogs, and glacially-caused landforms.

Sturgeon River Gorge Wilderness

The scenic Sturgeon River flows through this Wilderness (16,744 acres), drops over a 20-foot outcrop of volcanic rock at Sturgeon Falls, and through a ravine that reaches 300 feet in depth and a mile in width. Views are possible from the eastern rim of the gorge. Aside from a few naturally exposed slopes, most of the land is forested with pine, hemlock, aspen, sugar maple, birch, and basswood. Animals found here include deer, bears, minks, otters, and foxes. Woodcocks and ruffed grouse are common, and bald eagles and ospreys can be seen nesting on occasion. Sturgeon River Campground offers nine sites on

the southeastern boundary. In spring and during peak runoff, kayaking and white-water canoeing are challenging, and only recommended for advanced paddlers.

Sylvania Wilderness

The Sylvania Wilderness (18,327 acres) is located on the divide between the drainages of Lake Superior and the Mississippi River. The Wilderness is highlighted by rolling hills covered in trees dating back as much as 400 years - ancient white pines, red pines, hemlocks, yellow birches, basswoods, and sugar maples. Sylvania contains 35 lakes, almost all of which are landlocked, filled by springs and precipitation. The forest provides habitat to a diverse set of wildlife including deer, bears, raccoons, skunks, beavers, and porcupines. These animals thrive in the forest along with a variety of woodland and water-dwelling birds.

Fishing regulations protect this unusual lake habitat. Only artificial lures may be used, and all bass must be released. Unlike most designated Wildernesses, Sylvania has 50 established campsites in 29 locations bordering its lakes. A well-maintained trail system provides access to the area. Sylvania draws about 25,000 visitors each year.