

# Michigan Nature Association Goose Creek Grasslands Nature Sanctuary



## Sanctuary at a Glance:

**Location:** Lenawee County

**Size:** 70.4 acres

**History:** The sanctuary was purchased in 1986.

## 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 from MNA archives*

Goose Creek Grasslands Nature Sanctuary includes an excellent example of prairie fen and wet prairie communities in one of Michigan's few grassland habitats. The prairie peninsula once extended from the more western tallgrass prairie region into Ohio, Indiana and southern Michigan. Since settlement, most of the historical prairie complexes were converted to agriculture and have been severely limited on the landscape over time, Goose Creek Grasslands remains.

The sanctuary lies enfolded in Michigan's Irish Hills, in a glacial trough which showcases deposits of raw gravel left behind by retreating glacial ice sheets. The hills make this area of southern Michigan a scenic part of the state, bisected by the historic Great Sauk Prairie Trail.

Goose Creek Grasslands Nature Sanctuary extends over three-quarters of a mile from southeast to northwest along the Goose Creek, and includes many diverse habitats. Saturated soil, wet prairie, marsh and fen habitats are all found within the sanctuary's boundaries, allowing for a wide range of plant and animal species to exist. Prairie fens are extremely delicate areas that form where groundwater flows back to the surface through alkaline soil. Because of its rarity and size, the fen of Goose Creek Grasslands is an extremely important remnant.

## A Great Place for Plant and Bird Enthusiasts

Over two hundred plant species have been identified at Goose Creek Grasslands, including seven types that are classified as rare. Sedges and rushes are found among many fen plants, including buckbean and pitcher plant. Aquatic plants,

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such as pickerel weed and pondweeds, take advantage of the wet prairie, along with various types of goldenrods and asters. Adding color to the landscape are Goose Creek's dozens of prairie flowers, including culver's root, Indian paintbrush, sunflowers and Joe-Pye weed.

Goose Creek Grasslands is also an excellent location for bird watching. Sound carries well across the flat landscape, and visitors may hear the calls of sandhill cranes, yellow warblers and willow flycatchers. Hawks are regularly observed in the skies, with eastern meadowlarks, common yellowthroat and red-wind blackbirds below.

## Protecting the Sanctuary

Hydrological processes and periodic fire play very important roles in the formation of the landscape at Goose Creek Grasslands Nature Sanctuary. Prescribed burns are carefully applied and rotated around the sanctuary, and are used to manage invasive species and woody encroachment while invigorating the fen and prairie communities.

Other maintenance techniques at Goose Creek Grasslands include cutting and treating shrubs with herbicide and broadcast spraying of invasive plants, which repeatedly emerge in the sanctuary's seedbank.



Photo: Matt Schultz



Photo: Carolyn Sundquist

## Planning Your Visit:

Goose Creek Nature Sanctuary is classified as a "B" class sanctuary by the Michigan Nature Association. This means that the sanctuary is open to MNA members and the public without restriction, but rare species or sensitive natural communities may be present and maps are recommended to assist visitors to the sanctuary.

The blooming flowers in the fen change from spring through fall, and a colorful range of prairie flowers are displayed in the summer.

## How to Get There:

Located in Lenawee County, off Cement City Highway across from Goose Lake.

From US-127: Go east on Vicary Road, turn south onto Cement City Highway.

From US-12: Turn north onto Cement City Highway. Park along the road near the boat dock at Goose Lake.



Sanctuary Map