

Michigan Nature Association Twin Waterfalls Nature Sanctuary



Sanctuary at a Glance:

Location: Alger County

Size: 15.45 acres

History: Acquired in three separate acquisitions beginning in 1987.

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 180 nature sanctuaries across the state – the largest network of natural areas established and maintained by a nonprofit conservation organization in Michigan.



Michigan Nature Association

2310 Science Parkway, Suite 100

Okemos, MI 48864

(866) 223-2231

www.michigannature.org

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Photo: Neil Weaver

MNA's 100th acquisition, Twin Waterfalls Nature Sanctuary, was acquired in 1986 after funds were raised to honor Rudy Olson, an MNA member and avid bird watcher from Calumet who served on the Detroit Audubon Society's Board of Directors for more than 18 years. Two additional parcels were later purchased and added to the sanctuary, which now totals 15.45 acres. A half-mile of trails lead visitors to the beautiful Memorial Falls (so named to commemorate the many friends of MNA that had passed away by that time) and Olson Falls. Heavier flows of water are common in the spring, and low water flow is typical during a dry summer season.

The sanctuary is home to a variety of plants such as the giant twisted stalk, which is a member of the lily family, and American milletgrass, a five-foot tall woodland grass distinguished by a foot-long panicle. In the large horizontal crevices along the sandstone cliffs, the slender cliff brake fern grows. This small fern is only found in six counties in the Upper Peninsula and in Alpena County in the Lower Peninsula, and it grows on moist, alkaline rocks where seepage through the rocks supplies constant moisture.

A grove of American beech trees grow at Twin Waterfalls Nature Sanctuary near the northern reach of their range in the Upper Peninsula. Beech drops, a tan-colored parasitic plant, are often overlooked on the trail. They grow 6-18 inches tall and anchor themselves to the roots of beech trees.

Despite its smaller size, Twin Waterfalls Nature Sanctuary captures both beautiful scenery and recognizes the contributions of many important MNA members.

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The Munising Formation

The vertical walls of both waterfall canyons are part of the Munising Formation, which consists of ancient sandstone about 550 million years old. The buff, rose-colored sandstone is soft rock easily eroded by ice and water due to its composition of small quartz particles that resemble beach sand. The upper rock capping the Munising Formation is made of harder dolomite sandstone, known as the Au Train Formation. This cap erodes at a slower rate than the surrounding rock, which results in the shelf over which the water drops.



Photo: Marilyn Keigley

Special Dedications

Both waterfalls at Twin Waterfalls Nature Sanctuary are dedicated to the many friends of MNA and the thoughtfulness of the donors who made the sanctuary possible. Also known as Tannery Falls, MNA has renamed and refers to this as Olson Falls, in honor of member Rudy Olson. Memorial Falls is named to honor more than a hundred past MNA members who had contributed to the association by the time of acquisition.



Photo: Mike Zajczenko

Planning Your Visit:

Each season offers something unique at Twin Waterfalls. In the summer, visitors will be surrounded by lush greenery. Fall brings a colorful collage of leaves. Frigid Michigan winters will cause the falls to freeze, forming large columns of ice. Spring is an especially interesting time to visit, as the streams are filled with melting snow and ice.

Getting There:

The sanctuary is in Alger County, south of Munising Falls. Please park on Cleveland Street to access the Nestor Street trailhead.

For additional information, contact the MNA office at (866) 223-2231.



Trail Map