

The Guide to the Guide

Historical Review

In 1941 the Federation of Women's Clubs of Huron County took control of 120 acres of land south of M-25 on Loosemore Rd. This 120 acres tract was subsequently named "Wilderness Arboretum" and has remained under the stewardship of the Women's Club

Although the property has been under the control of the Women's Club it is owned by the County, and in 1990 the county added another 160 acres to the already 120, giving the "Wilderness Arboretum" a total of 280 acres. The County went another step and established to: "Huron County Nature Center - Wilderness Arboretum" and named a 13 member Board of Directors to develop the Center. This board is represented by members of the Women's Club, Board of Commissioners, Educators and People from the Community.

The Dry Swale

The dry swale is, as the name implies, part of a swale composed of dry sandy soil that loses water quickly. Lack of water and a shallow topsoil layer are the reasons this area is not as diverse as other surveyed areas. The dry swale habitat is the prevalent habitat throughout the center.

The ridges of the dunes are the only areas that are even less diverse. The primary components of this habitat are huckleberry, blueberry, wintergreen, bracken fern, and large amounts of red oak. Also present are white oak, jack pine, large toothed aspen, and red maple. An interesting thing to note is the presence of bracken fern in the right hand survey areas, but not in the left. This occurs where the slope of the ground becomes slightly steeper. The explanation we give for this is that there is not enough water to support the bracken fern on the higher pads of the slope.

Bridge area at #13

The bridge area is made up of a variety of habitats the most interesting being the wetland that has developed between two sand ridges. As a low swale in a dunal community, the water level is partly dependent upon lake water level and partly upon local precipitation. This swale is actually a continuation of the much larger marsh area. The survey begins in a dry swale community, moves over a small ridge, across the small wet swale, and up into the hardwood area. This creates a very nice example of transitions between various habitats. The flora in the wet swale is shade tolerant due to the canopy provided by the trees in the surrounding habitats. This area supports a very diverse community of plant life. A good example of this diversity can be seen in the ferns found here. Cinnamon, royal, and bracken ferns are common. The rarer Boott's and lady ferns can also be found. The wettest parts of the section are covered by sweet flag, a sharp edged sedge like plant. Green ash, elderberry and winterberry are found here as well, all requiring the continually damp soil to prosper.

Hardwood Area (Old trail area)

The Hardwood area, as implied by its name, contains large amounts of hardwood trees. This area is on a low ridge that keeps the ground relatively dry? but also keeps the trees close enough to the water table to support a large amount of hardwoods. There are four surveyed areas that are labeled hardwood: the fourth one is to the west of the marsh boardwalk and seems to be somewhat drier than the other three. There is noticeably less undergrowth in this area. In all areas, red maple is the dominant species of tree. Red oak is also very common. The dominant form of undergrowth would be maple leaf viburnum. Another important thing to note is the presence of poison ivy throughout the hardwood sections. One of the more interesting life forms of the arboretum, the indian pipe, is found in abundance in the hardwood areas. Also interesting is the abundance of various mushrooms, especially when water is readily available, such as after a rainfall.

Marsh Transition Area

The Marsh transition area contains the transition from a dry swale like area into the marsh boardwalk section. This is an important area because it gives a glimpse of differences and similarities between two habitats. Water availability is higher in the marsh transition than in other areas like the dry swale, but it is lower than in the marsh itself. This difference allows for the proliferation of dense thickets of willow buttonbush, red osier dogwood and winterberry. These thickets are so dense and block so much sunlight that little can grow beneath them. Only where the thicket growth is less dense can anything else grow. This area is less diverse than one might expect because of this. One of the more interesting species that grows in thicket clearings is the highly poisonous bulb bearing water hemlock. Mad dog skullcap, water parsnip, and marsh fern are also frequently found.

The Marsh Boardwalk Area

The marsh boardwalk area is part of a wetland created by a large interdunal depression. The amount of water in the marsh varies according to the amount of local rainfall. Flora in the marsh differs greatly from the rest of the nature center: At the edges of the marsh there are dense thickets of willow winterberry, red osier dogwood, and buttonbush. Towards the center of the marsh, these thickets appear in isolated clumps with a larger presence of sedges in their place. This area is one of the most interesting that have been surveyed simply because of the wetland flora that is present here. Although there are a number of similarities between this area and the bridge area, they are still quite distinct. The main difference between the two is size. The marsh area depression is much larger than the bridge area. This means that the ridge area is provided with a canopy from the surrounding trees causing it to be shady and cooler. The marsh is open, however, allowing for the large presence of sun loving plants.

Hardwood Swamp Area

The hardwood swamp area is part of the interdunal depression that makes up the

marsh area. However, it is slightly higher than the marsh and therefore doesn't have quite as much water available. This slight variation accounts for the large difference in flora found in the two areas. The main difference is the presence of trees throughout the area hence the name hardwood swamp. The survey actually begins before the boardwalk in the hardwood section and continues across to the dunal communities the other side. This is quite interesting because one can see the transition from hardwood to hardwood swamp to dry dune all in one survey. This is the most diverse natural area (fewest aliens brought in by humans) that was surveyed. The presence of three distinct communities is the reason for this. An interesting characteristic of this area is the variety of ferns and fern related plants found here. Royal fern, sensitive fern, bracken fern, and Boott's fern are all found in this area. Marsh and meadow horsetail were also identified.

The Overlook Area

The overlook area in the arboretum is composed of a high ridge (the highest point in the center) that plunges steeply to a low moist swale. No standing water was seen in this swale during the time of the survey, but the flora indicates a greater presence of water than on the slope. The survey begins at the top of the ridge and continues down the slope and across the boardwalk. The flora on the slope is similar to that found in the Dry Swale area. It changes abruptly at the bottom, however, where water availability is higher. The swale itself is quite open and free of brushy growth. This is unlike many of the other wet areas that have been surveyed. Most noticeable is the overwhelming presence of swamp dewberry. This running, strawberry like plant can be seen in profusion on both sides of the boardwalk. There is also a large amount of trailing arbutus in the area where the slope is ending and the bottom of the swale is beginning.

Handicapped Trail

The handicap accessible trail area in the arboretum is composed of a series of dune ridges and swales. The ridges are comparable to the dry ridges found throughout the area. However, the swales become noticeably wetter as one moves closer to the lake shore. The marsh overlook is in one of these wet swales. This marsh is significantly different than the other marsh boardwalk area. The most prominent difference is the abundance of common cattail in the handicap area and the lack of it in the other marsh boardwalk area. This may be because of greater water availability. There are other differences in flora as well. These can be noted by comparing the lists of flora for the two areas.

One other exemplary characteristic of this section is the large amount of alien species brought in with the gravel used to create the trail. The addition of these species makes this area the most diverse of any area surveyed. The most common invaders are chicory and spotted knapweed. Common plantain and English plantain can all be seen frequently. Other than the wet sections and the invaders, the flora found in this area is basically the same as that found in the area designated Dry Swale.

A List of Common Plants Found in the Center

It is our suggestion that YOU look these plants up in either Our resource books or books in your own libraries, or public libraries. Your own research will be more valuable to you as a guide than our telling you what each and every plant is.

It is our hope that you will enjoy this experience and grow deeper in your understanding of what we have here in the "Huron County Nature Center".

Red Maple
Red Oak
White Oak
White Birch
Jack Pine
Red Pine
Large Toothed Aspen
Blueberry
Bracken Fern
Blackberry
Cow-wheat
Huckleberry
Indian Cucumber-Root
Mapleleaf Viburnum
Pink Lady's Slipper
Starflower,
Serviceberry
Wild Lily-of-the-valley
Wild Sarsaparilla
Wintergreen
Witch Hazel

These are only a few of what is in the Center -- Keep your eyes open, and if you don't know what it is - say, "I don't know, but I will find out!" Then either research it yourself or let one of us know and we will help you out.

Enjoy your time out in the Center and we look forward to your help in the future.

Huron County Nature Center
Board of Directors