

# Dept. of Natural Resources: Celebrates 75 years Of State Natural Areas

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**MADISON, Wis.** – This year marks the 75th anniversary of the Wisconsin State Natural Areas Program, the oldest and largest of its kind in the country. The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR), in collaboration with over 60 partners, cares for nearly 700 sites that protect outstanding examples of Wisconsin’s native landscape of natural communities, significant geological formations and archeological sites.

The Wisconsin Legislature created the State Natural Areas Program in November 1951, to protect the best examples of Wisconsin’s native “natural communities” – distinct groupings of plants, animals, soils, geology and climate that include different types of grasslands, wetlands and forests. Since its founding, the program has also grown to protect other aspects of Wisconsin’s natural heritage, including significant geological features, archeological sites and critical habitat for some rare species.

State natural areas prioritize education, scientific research and the long-term protection of Wisconsin’s biological diversity for future generations due to their unique features.

Wisconsin has nearly 100 distinct natural communities. Many, including tall grass prairie, pine barrens and oak savanna, are considered globally rare. State natural areas protect the best examples of these declining communities.

More than 230 animal and plant species are listed as endangered or threatened in Wisconsin. Over 90% of those listed plant species and 75% of the listed wildlife

species are found within state natural areas.

[Parfrey's Glen](#) was designated as the first state natural area in 1952, and the program has since grown to include sites owned by the DNR as well as many partners, including other government agencies like the U.S. Forest Service, and land trusts like The Nature Conservancy and The Prairie Enthusiasts.

“State natural areas are priceless because they protect more than land – they preserve biodiversity, safeguard ecosystem services like clean air and water, and give people a place to connect with nature and our shared natural heritage,” said Sarah Herrick, DNR State Natural Area Program specialist.

Much has changed in the last 75 years, as these places experience new invasive species, a changing climate, encroaching development, and other stressors that threaten their ecology. However, the State Natural Areas Program continues to preserve and protect Wisconsin’s unique natural heritage for the people of the state.

## **Volunteer At Your Local State Natural Area**

Nearly all state natural areas are open to the public for hiking, hunting, bird-watching, nature study and photography, but most are largely undeveloped. Visitors are asked to enjoy these ecologically sensitive sites responsibly.

One of the best ways to connect with nature at these locations is through volunteering. Volunteers clear brush, collect seed, control invasive species and more. No experience is necessary, and training and equipment are provided on-site.

To get involved and receive notifications about upcoming workdays, sign up for email invites on the DNR’s [State Natural Areas Volunteer Program webpage](#).

The DNR’s work at state natural areas is made possible, in part, by donations to the Endangered Resources Fund. To make a donation, look for “endangered resources” in the “donations” section of your [Wisconsin income tax form](#). For tax year 2025, the Endangered Resources donation is the first line in the [Financial Donations section](#).