

Appendix F



Black River Marsh Boardwalk Labels

Welcome to the Black River Marsh Boardwalk

Follow this ¼-mile accessible boardwalk through a cattail marsh and along the Black River. This is one of the best areas in the park to see wildlife.

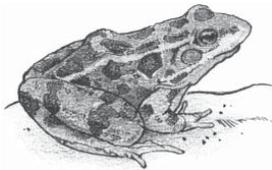
Along the Edge

The edge of a marsh is a dynamic place where land and water meet. Here, animals and plants from both the forest and wetland mix together

What is a marsh?

A **marsh** is a treeless wetland covered with grasses, sedges, cattails, or rushes. Plants in a marsh are called hydrophytes, which means “water loving.” They are specially adapted to live in wet soil.

When stalking prey, the **mink** slides forward on its belly like a snake. They eat many wetland animals, like frogs, muskrats, fish, crayfish, and turtles. Mink are powerful swimmers, using all four feet to propel themselves.



“Goonk!-gunk!-gunk!”

Listen for the call of a green frog that sounds like a plucked banjo string.

What’s that smell? Skunk cabbage produces a foul odor that attracts bees and plies that pollinate its flowers.

Frogs are masters of both land and water. If threatened, the green frog can hop onto shore or swim beneath the marsh.



A raccoon catches much of its food in and around water. Crayfish, minnows, and fish are on the menu. Although it prefers the shallow water, a raccoon is an agile swimmer.

Raccoon tracks look like tiny handprints. Look for tracks in the mud below. Has a raccoon been hunting here recently?



In the Cattails

You are surrounded by cattails, the most abundant plant in the Black River Marsh. Like trees in a forest, cattails provide food, cover and protection for many types of wildlife.

Male **red-winged blackbirds** arrive in early spring to stake out the best territories for nesting. They fly the perimeters of their claims, singing and displaying their red feather patches to chase away other males.

Marsh wrens are often heard but rarely seen. The small birds hunt near the base of cattails for insects.

Muskrats aren’t really rats at all. These rodents have webbed feet and hairless tails for swimming in water. A muskrat can stay underwater for nearly 20 minutes!

Muskrats build houses from cattails and other marsh plants. After the outside is finished, they dive underwater and dig out a chamber. If food is scarce, muskrats can eat the walls of their house!

These purple flowers look pretty, but they are invading the marsh. **Purple loosestrife** was introduced from Europe as a garden plant in the 1800s. It flourishes in marshes, suffocating out native plants like cattails and destroying wildlife habitat.

What are those bugs?

This marsh is part of an exciting effort to stop the purple loosestrife invasion. The DNR released thousands of European beetles and weevils to eat the loosestrife plants.

The Black River

The Black River flows through Kohler-Andrae State Park and empties into Lake Michigan north of the park. The deeper channel provides habitat for different types of wildlife.

A **great blue heron** walks stealthily through the marsh on long, thin legs, searching for small fish, frogs, or crayfish. When it finds food, it quickly stabs its head and neck below the water. Standing nearly 4 feet tall, it is the largest heron in the United States.





What's in a name? The name "Black River" comes from the nutrient-rich mud below the marsh that colors its waters.

Sandhill cranes have wingspans of over 6 feet! The loud trumpeting of sandhill cranes echoes like prehistoric birds. Once nearly extinct in Wisconsin, the cranes now return every spring to nest in the marsh.

The Black River moves so slowly that the water grows warm and loses oxygen. A few hardy fish thrive in these conditions.

The Black River winds north for nearly 15 miles, from Oostburg to Sheboygan.

Below the Surface

Life in a marsh starts beneath the water. Cattails and other plants grow from the rich muck. Flurries of underwater creatures eat the plants, and in turn are eaten by larger wildlife above the surface.

Watch for **painted turtles** basking on logs or sticking their long necks out of the water. They eat insects, snails, crayfish, tadpoles, frogs, duckweed, and lily pads.

Frogs start their lives as tadpoles. They eat small water plants. Over time, tadpoles grow legs, lose their tails, and climb out of the water as an adult frog.

What's that smell? Tiny bacteria break down dead plants and animals into muck. They produce methane gas, which gives the marsh its distinct smell.

Crayfish have strong pinchers that are used to capture food and defend against predators.

Water striders have special feet that allow them to skate on the surface film. They eat other insects, sensing vibrations and grabbing prey with their front legs.

Watch for groups of **whirligig beetles** zipping around in circles on the surface of the water. They have eyes that are divided in halves: The upper half focus above the water while the lower half watch beneath.

Dragonfly nymphs are fierce predators. Their lower lip is long and hinged. If a small fish or tadpole swims near, they shoot their lip out and capture the prey with sharp hooks.

