



Wisconsin, naturally

LITTLE BEAR HEMLOCKS STATE NATURAL AREA



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Notable: Despite fronting a busy state highway, visitors to Little Bear Hemlocks quickly find themselves in a distinctly quieter place after walking just a few yards into the dark, dense conifer forest. Road sounds are absorbed by a thick, cushiony layer of needle and leaf duff, ferns, fungi and mosses. Towering overhead are the feathery crowns of eastern hemlock trees, some more than 30 inches in diameter. White pine, yellow birch and sugar maple complete the canopy of this 59-acre natural area. In spring, hepatica, Virginia waterleaf, bunchberry, wood sorrel, bishop's cap and goldthread carpet the forest floor. Small, wet pockets, ringed with marsh marigolds, add micro-topographic interest and provide habitat for amphibians. Despite its relatively small size, the natural area protects a good example of what was once a much larger forested landscape that dominated north central Wisconsin before intensive settlement. It sits squarely in the middle of the "Forest Transition" ecological landscape that DNR scientists recognize as one of the most deforested and highly fragmented regions of Wisconsin. To the north lie more heavily wooded landscapes, while to the south are areas converted from prairie and savanna to agriculture. The site was designated State Natural Area #620 in 2010 after it was graciously donated to the people of Wisconsin by the Mead-Witter Foundation of Wisconsin Rapids.

How to get there: From the intersection of Highway G and Highway 10 in Junction City (Portage County), go east on Highway 10 2.4 miles, then north on Highway 34 1.1 miles to a parking area



west of the road. There are no trails in the natural area, but the understory is open and easy to walk through. Visit dnr.wi.gov and search "Little Bear Hemlocks" for a map and more information.

