



Wisconsin, naturally

PORTLAND MAPLES STATE NATURAL AREA

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Notable: Hugging a steep, north-facing slope deep in the “coulee region” of southwestern Wisconsin lies Portland Maples, a rich hardwood forest dominated by sugar maple, basswood, red oak and yellowbud hickory. “Coulee” is a colloquial term derived from a French word and used in Wisconsin — but rarely elsewhere — to describe the narrow, steep-walled valleys cut by erosional forces into level uplands, in this case the plateaus of the unglaciated Driftless Area. At Portland Maples, Rulland’s Creek drains Rulland’s Coulee, joining Coon Creek downstream before entering the Mississippi River. In autumn, the forest’s canopy glows a beautiful golden yellow as the leaves turn, but the natural area shines more brightly in May when the spring wildflower bloom is at its peak. Bishop’s cap, nodding trillium, bloodroot, red baneberry, goldenseal, wild leek and rattlesnake fern are among the denizens of the forest floor. Listen and look for birds here too: Acadian flycatcher, scarlet tanager and ovenbird are residents during the breeding season. Eureka Maple Woods State Natural Area is just to the south and worth a visit at the same time.

How to get there: Within DNR’s Coon Creek Fishery Area. From the intersection of Highways 33 and 27 in Cashton, go west on 33 0.9 mile, then continue west on October Avenue 0.7 mile, to County Highway PC where October Avenue becomes Oakdale Avenue. Continue west on Oakdale Avenue 2.8 miles, then go south on Oboe Avenue 0.2 mile. Park along the road and walk north up the hillside into the natural area. The best woods are on the north-facing slopes. There are no designated trails or other facilities on the property. Visit dnr.wi.gov and search “Portland Maples” for a map and more information.

