

Preserve Profile

Farm Trails North

by Sandi Alguire

Farm Trails North (FTN) is a fen owned by Citizens for Conservation. The 20-acre site in Lake Barrington is part of an extensive deep kettle wetland which extends a half mile west to the Fox River. Located at the southeast corner of Roberts and River Roads, it was donated to CFC as a gift from the developers of the Farm Trails Subdivision Mr. and Mrs. Robert Hagemann and Richard & Bonnie Johnson.

CFC's management of the fen has been ongoing since 1981, the same year that CFC contracted for a scientific study of the property and its flora and fauna. In 1990, the Illinois Natural Areas Inventory recognized Farm Trails North for its population of the state endangered small lady's slipper (*Cypripedium candidum*), bog bedstraw (*Galium labradoricum*) and beaked spike rush (*Eleocharis rostellata*). In 1993, it was officially dedicated as an Illinois Nature Preserve.

A fen is a wetland which is fed primarily by groundwater (rather than precipitation) and whose soil has a high mineral nutrient content. Unlike the acidic environment of bogs, fens are alkaline. Fens are usually covered with tall grasses, rushes, and sedges.

The 1981 study determined the dominant soil at FTN to be Houghton muck which is a poorly drained soil containing graminoid and cyperoid peat. Some of the native plant communities found there are graminoid (grassy) fen, sedge meadow, marsh, and wet prairie. The fen is dominated by sedges, but the preserve also has two prevalent prairie grasses—big bluestem (*Andropogon gerardi*) and Indian grass (*Sorghastrum nutans*).

Considering that fens are completely dependent on the consistent availability of good quality groundwater, FTN has experienced groundwater depletion and contamination from residential well use and septic system infiltration from the surrounding subdivisions along with surface water pollution from River Road runoff. Past grazing on the property along with invading glossy buckthorn and reed canary grass have taken their toll and threaten the quality of the peat land and its endangered plants.

CFC's long term objective is to upgrade the existing marsh, sedge meadow, prairie and wetlands. To help FTN continue as a rich member of the Fox River Savannas & Wetlands Macropreserve, CFC must finish removing brush and continue prescribed burns. Preserve neighbor and CFC life member Tom Liebman helped by burning the fen along with his own property in 2010.



Map courtesy of Dave Holman at Liberty Prairie Conservancy.

In addition, CFC's goal is to continue the fight against aggressive purple loosestrife and to control the reed canary grass. Efforts are in force to help the fen overcome these modern obstacles and continue to thrive in the future.

Farm Trails North Fen is open only to CFC-sponsored public walks since there are no trails.



Farm Trails North fen. Photo by Jim Bodkin.