

7. TURTLE BAR

You have just entered a sand pit. Sand was removed from here to fill swamps during the settling of Alpena. The wind blew across this barren pit for a long time but gradually sand dune willows took root. They stabilize the sand and soon other plants will appear. What will it look like five, ten, fifty years from now? The pit looks almost lifeless but look for signs of snapping turtle nests (crumpled white eggshells by a hole) and rabbits (droppings).

8. WILDFLOWER MEADOW

Climbing out of the pit, you arrive at the former location of the Sportsmen's Clubhouse. Members invited the public to enjoy walking, swimming, sledding and skiing on the island. People congregated and parked their cars here; the environment reflects this. The wildflowers here are not natives of Michigan but were introduced from Europe by the early settlers. They have no natural enemies to keep them in check and thrive in disturbed areas. Some, such as the daisy and the honeysuckle bush are popular but they compete with our native

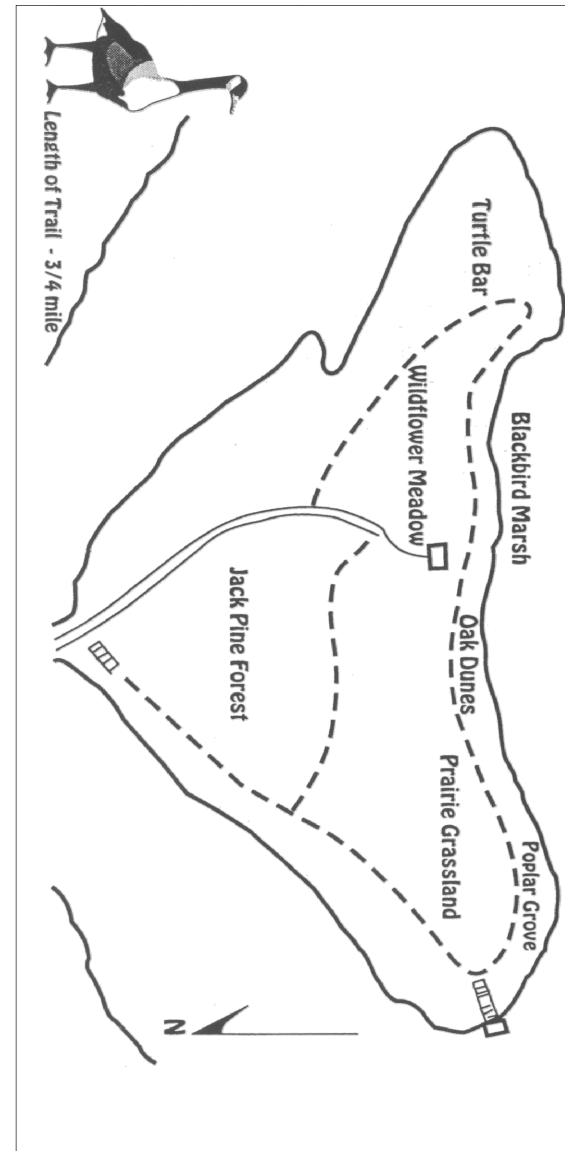
plants for space and will gradually replace them.

Turn around and look at the view. Which do you prefer: a house nestled among the trees or a building with no trees between it and the river? Nature can be a part of people's existence at home and at work.

We hope you have enjoyed your walk around the island and will visit often as it changes through the seasons and the years.



Drawings by Judy Pugh



City of Alpena
Wildlife Sanctuary Board
208 N. First Avenue
Alpena, MI 49707

Habitats of Island Park



Welcome to Island Park. As you hike the trail around the island you will encounter a variety of habitats. We hope this guide will aid in your enjoyment of the island.

City of Alpena
www.alpena.mi.us

1. JACK PINE FOREST

As you step onto the island, you enter a jack pine forest. Notice that the air is cooler? A conifer such as the jack pine with its year-round dense foliage makes the forest floor dark and acidic so not many plants grow there.



2. LONG RAPIDS TRAIL

As you move westward, the forest brightens with the addition of deciduous trees. It is quiet here except for bird song, the chatter of squirrels, and the wind in the treetops.

Early settlers who arrived in the 1850s were the first to make a significant change in the environment. Native Americans were transient to the area. Lumbermen cut the trees, then flooded the river to float the logs to the sawmills. What was once a peninsula probably became Oxbow Island, present day Island Park. The adjacent farmers and townspeople grazed their cows on the large islands. Hunting in the area was stopped in 1938. In 1935 the collection of small islands and meandering river branches between the Bagley Street Bridge and the Ninth Street Dam became a wildlife sanctuary.



3. POPLAR GROVE

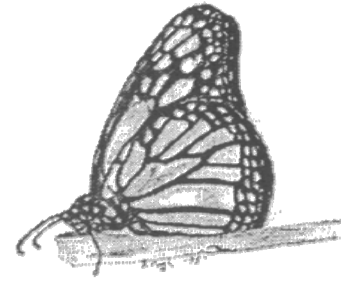
Leaving the forested area you enter a stand of poplar trees also called aspen or "popples." They like sunlight and move quickly by seed or root extension into areas opened by man or nature. Along with the jack pine, they are the first trees to reforest an open area. The pattern of growth from field to hardwood forest is called succession. Trees that follow the poplars will prefer partial sunlight. Look for white pine seedlings. Bracken fern and wildflowers such as the Canada anemone and longheaded thimbleweed also favor this environment.

The small clearing to the right is natural in the sense that it was created by the beaver in 1992. Poplars are a food source for beavers and used in the construction of their lodges.

4. PRAIRIE GRASSLAND

Walking eastward, you will see a scattering of poplars and jack pines on your left. Only lichen and two species of grass survive here. Why would other plants not grow here? Perhaps it is the lack of nutrients or water. Eventually nutrients will collect from decomposing grasses and animal material. There may be seeds already here waiting patiently for the right conditions to occur.

Shrubs that flourish in open spaces are the serviceberry, pine, and choke cherries. The berries from these plants provide food for birds who in turn add fertilizer to the ground and disperse the plants' seeds. Their fragrant blossoms attract many insects in the spring.

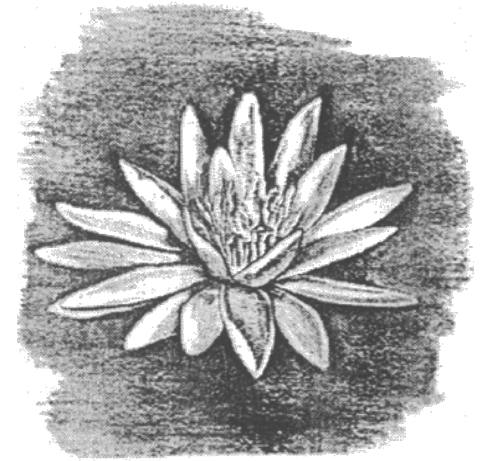


Although the island lies in the middle of the city, deer swim to the island to feed. Look under the apple tree to the left for signs of deer. Big and little bluestem grass are also excellent forage. This warm-weather grass grows in August and provides food for animals and insects when most grasses have died. Big bluestem was the dominant grass of the tall-grass Prairies which are almost gone now. You can still find patches of bluestem grasses around Alpena, but it is being replaced by other grasses whenever the roadsides are disturbed. Do you think there were ever prairies around Alpena?

5. OAK DUNES

Looking down the length of the south shore trail, you can see that the island is really a large sand dune. Many thousands of years ago this dune was part of the shore of Lake Algonquin. As the lake receded, the dune was covered by the dense forest found in much of inland Michigan. It takes many years to reforest a dune but no time at all to become a dune again. The south part of the island is subject to wind and rain erosion. Be careful to stay on the trail as it is difficult for plants to grow here. One plant especially adapted to these hot dry slopes is beach grass. It was planted here by volunteers in an effort to stop the erosion that was washing the island into the river. Would beach grass grow well in the forest?

As you walked along the south shore trail, you may have noticed a narrow strip of vegetation. Observe the contrast between the dry expanse of sand and beach grass and the numerous trees, shrubs, and wildflowers by the water. Water is the key word here. Ash, birch, red osier dogwood, willow, meadowsweet and the wildflowers turtlehead, boneset, and joe-pye weed like moist conditions. Seeds are dispersed by wind and animals. What other way could they arrive at the shore?



6. BLACKBIRD MARSH

At this point in the trail look to the right beyond the shore. You are looking at a marsh. Marshes are excellent habitats and breeding grounds for water birds such as ducks, geese, and swans. Osprey, great blue heron, and song birds utilize marshes for feeding and nesting. Beaver, muskrat, and spawning fish are also found here.

Notice how three different and distinct microhabitats occur in a very small area. Each has its own type of soil, moisture, and plants. Which habitat has the most plants? Which has the greatest variety? All three provide biodiversity (variety) and all are equally important.