Throughout the year, the trees at Coral Woods are a favorite for hiking and bird watching. In the spring months, the 1.2 mile Maple Loop trail is a short and easy trail for beginning skiers. For a longer trek, the 1.5 miles of trails are open for cross country skiing. Trails are not groomed but they are on relatively flat terrain, ideal for beginning skiers.

Bird watching is popular at Coral Woods during migrations, as well as during the summer months. The 1.2 mile Nature Loop trail from oaks, hickories, and sugar maples make this a favorite for their spectacular show of red, orange, and yellow leaves. In autumn the brilliant colors of the Sugar Maple Loop trail is another favorite. Visitors can hike through maples, oaks, and a grassy sloping field. The colorful leaves make this a favorite among tourists.

In the winter months when 4 inches of snow is present, head for those who wish to enjoy a quiet picnic lunch at Coral Woods. Picnic tables are located near the trail shelter can be made by calling the District's main office.

The Native Americans called it “Sisibaskwat” or “honey water.” It is a time in March when winter thaw makes it possible for sap to move up the trees. It wasn’t until 1976 that the Conservation District began protecting the remaining oak woodlands through a series of land acquisitions. The site opened to the public in 1988.

McHenry County Conservation District
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Special Programs

The Festival of the Sugar Maples is held over two weekends in late February and early March. The festival celebrates the cultural contributions that have been made in maple sugar production. Over 750 oak and hickory trees through donations from the public. A second 10-acre parcel was identified and planted with 40 trees are tapped for the event and free tours are offered. A second 10-acre parcel was identified and planted with 40 trees.

The Intersection of US Highway 20 and Coral Road was known as Coral Crossing and was the location of the post office and stagecoach stop. The stagecoach ran from Chicago to Galena from 1830–1851 until the Galena and Chicago Union Railroad began passenger service. It wasn’t until 1976 that the Conservation District began protecting the remaining oak woodlands through a series of land acquisitions. The site opened to the public in 1988.

The first European settlers, Elijah and Mary Humphrey Dunham, arrived in 1836 and settled in Coral Township. In 1823, historic records indicate that the Stephen H. Long Expedition visited “Wakesa”, the last recorded Native American village that existed in the area of present day Coral Woods. The village was inhabited by 60 Menomones and a few intermarried Potawatomis, who had built four bark covered lodges.

When the Native Americans returned to their village that spring, they found the white homes that had been salvaged for the Euro-American “shanties”. The woods were soon subdivided as other settlers arrived which included Ephraim Frink, Henry Osborn, Benjamin Hampden, William M. Jackson and Laugher Bache.

As the area continued to attract more people, the Frink and Walker Stagecoach established a route along the former Indian trails. Today that same trail is roughly US Highway 20. By 1872 most of Coral Woods was subdivided into smaller 2–4 acre timber lots that provided fuel and building material for settlers. Fields were cleared for livestock grazing and hay production, which further fragmented the woodlands. By 1872 most of Coral Woods was divided into smaller 2-4 acre timber lots that provided fuel and building material for settlers. Fields were cleared for livestock grazing and hay production, which further fragmented the woodlands.
Coral Woods Conservation Area

Preservation

Dominated by a core of century old red and white oaks, the environmental significance of Coral Woods is the protection of these diminishing oak woodlands. Coral Woods represents one of only eight oak groves which remain in McHenry County that contains 100 acres or more of continuous oak woodland. This 775-acre conservation area also boasts the county’s largest sugar maple grove where trees have stood for 80-100 years.

In autumn the brilliant colors of red, orange, and yellow leaves from oaks, hickories, and sugar maples make this a favorite fall hiking spot. In the spring, these woodlands are also noted for their spectacular show of spring wildflowers. Sharp-lobed hepatica, Jack-in-the-pulpit, blue phlox, and red trillium are not groomed but they are on relatively flat terrain, give way to wild geranium, hepatica, Jack-in-the-pulpit, and a grassy sloping field. The Native Americans called it “Sisibaskwat” or “Heart’s Delight,” the name derived from the native American custom to offer tobacco to the spirits of the land in gratitude for the foodstuffs that spring forth from the fields of the “Great Spirit.” When the Native Americans returned to their village during the warmer weather causes a tree’s sap to flow up the trunk and a few intermarried Potawatomis, who had built four bark covered lodges. The first European settlers, Elijah and Mary Humphrey Dunham, arrived in 1836 and settled in Coral Township.

Hiking

Coral Woods offers three trail systems. The Sugar Maple Loop trail is a short 0.4 mile walk off the parking lot. During the fall this trail displays an array of vibrant red, yellow, and orange colored leaves. For a longer trek, the 1.2 mile Nature Loop trail is known for its woodland wildflowers during the spring months. The 1.2 mile hiking/ski trail is another favorite. Visitors can hike through maples, oaks, and a grassy sloping field. Wildlife is active in these woods and visitors are sure to catch a glimpse of deer, numerous birds, and an occasional turtle enjoying the seclusion of an ephemeral pond.

Cross Country Skiing

In the winter months when 4 inches of snow is present, 1.5 miles of trails are open for cross country skiing. Trails are not groomed but they are on relatively flat terrain, ideal for beginning skiers.

Picnic Facilities

Picnic tables are located near the trail head for those who wish to enjoy a quiet picnic lunch surrounded by nature’s beauty. A picnic shelter with fireplace is located just off the Sugar Maple Loop trail and can accommodate up to 40 people. Reservations for the shelter can be made by calling the District’s main office.

Bird watching

Bird watching is popular at Coral Woods during migrations, as well as during the summer when many birds nest in the branches of the mature white oaks. Watch for the white-breasted nuthatch, northern flicker, red-eyed vireo, scarlet tanager, American goldfinch, indigo bunting, blue jay, robin, downy woodpecker, great crested flycatcher and cedar waxwing. The Festival of the Sugar Maples

The Native Americans called it “Sisibaskwat” or time of the melting snow. It is a time in March when the weather seesaws from cold winter nights to warm spring days. The warmer weather causes a tree’s sap to flow up the trunk and feed new leaf buds. This is also the time for the annual Festival of the Sugar Maples.

The Festival of the Sugar Maples is held over two weekends in late February and early March. The festival celebrates the cultural history of maple sugaring, teaches about the process of how sap is turned into maple syrup and demonstrates the improvements that have been made in maple sugar production. Over 40 trees are tapped for the event and free tours are given to local school groups and weekend visitors.

Special Programs

Planting for Tomorrow

Dedicated to preserving, restoring and managing this unique natural area, the Conservation District began a public outreach program to assist in the reforestation efforts of Coral Woods. Five acres were planted with over 750 oak and hickory trees through donations from the public. A second 10-acre parcel was identified and phase two of the reforestation efforts began in 2011. Each spring and fall, staff and donors work together to plant the donated 3’-5’ oak and hickory trees.

Coral Woods was once a 3,000 acre woodland. As the area was settled the woods were fragmented and cleared. The Planting for Tomorrow Program will help ensure that the acres that remain will exist for generations to come.
Maple Woodland - The heavy canopy of maple trees within a woodland community provide little light to the understory. The result is a lack of shrubs. However, numerous wildflowers and herbs provide ground cover that brightens the woodland floor in early spring before the leafed canopy returns. Groves of maples are typically found on flat or rolling terrain where there is a variety of moist soils that contain high levels of organic matter.

Traditionally, maple trees were valued for use as timber for fuel, furniture, flooring and cabinetmaking. However, maple trees are also known for their source of maple sugar. This important sweetener was first prepared by Native Americans and then became a staple used by colonists. It remained important until 1875 when maple forest stands were depleted and cane sugar gained precedence due to its lower manufacturing cost and higher saccharine content.

Oak Woodland - Bur, white, black, red and scarlet oak species are all found in oak woodlands. Characteristically, oak woodlands are more shaded than savannas and trees grow straighter as they compete for light. Trees on the steeper, more rugged topography may appear to be higher in density per acre because they were harder for settlers to get to and thus, survived logging and clearing.

Savanna - Savannas are open wooded areas where trees are widely scattered. Savannas are transitional communities between woodlands and grasslands and provide an array of food and shelter for numerous species of wildlife.

Glacial Moraine - When the glaciers retreated, they left behind piles of debris made up of crushed rock and sand, ranging in size from silt to large boulders, that created characteristic landforms.