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 are 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 become 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.
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.

The first European settlers, Elijah and Mary Humphrey Dunham, arrived in 1836 and settled in Coral Township. When the Native Americans returned to their village that spring, they found that the bark from their homes was 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 Laughar 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, although the stagecoach turned more to the south and west through present day Coral Woods. 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. 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. In the 1920's during prohibition, the remote "Wilcox" farm was disguised as a hog raising operation, although historic records refer to it as the hot spot for the manufacturing and distilling of alcohol where the spent mash was fed to over 180 hogs.

By the 1930’s the wooded areas were cleared and the manufacturing and harvesting of maple syrup began. Since 1979, the Conservation District hosted an annual Festival of the Sugar Maples. The Festival of the Sugar Maples is held over two weekends in late February and early March. It celebrates the history of maple syrup production, which further fragmented the woodlands. In 1823, the sugar groves in the county and there is evidence that it was used as a sugar grove dating back to Native American times.

Coral Woods was acquired in 1979 by the McHenry County Conservation District. The Conservation District protected and preserved the remaining oak woodlands through a series of land acquisitions. The site opened to the public in 1988.
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 the county's largest sugar maples make this a favorite hiking/ski trail is another favorite. Visitors can hike through maples, oaks, and a grassy sloping field. Wildlife is active in the these woodlands are also noted for their spectacular show of spring wildflowers. Sharp-lobed hepatica, jack-in-the-pulpit, wood anemone, spring beauty, toothwort, and bloodroot give way to wild geranium, ephemeral pond. of turning the sap from maple trees into delicious maple syrup. School tours are hosted weekdays for two weeks, while the general public is then welcomed on two special weekends. The warmer weather causes a tree’s sap to flow up the trunk to 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. Coral Woods is one of the few remaining sugar maples groves in the county and there is evidence that it was used as a sugar grove dating back to Native American times.

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, wood anemone, spring beauty, toothwort, and bloodroot give way to wild geranium, blue phlox, and red trillium.

Throughout the year, the trees at Coral Woods are attractive respite for numerous songbirds, owls, and woodpeckers. Scarlet tanagers, indigo buntings, numerous warblers, flickers, bluebirds, meadowlarks, great horned owls and screech owls, as well as downy and hairy woodpeckers claim these woods as their home. Nesting boxes are also strategically placed along the edge where prairie and woodland meet to encourage the re-population of bluebirds.

Chorus frogs, tiger salamanders, leopard frogs, and painted turtles can often be seen enjoying the springtime vernal ponds along the trail.

Hiking
Coral Woods offers three trail systems. The Sugar Maple Loop trail is a short 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 woodlands 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 fireplaced is located just off the Sugar Maple Loop trail. Reservations for large gatherings of 16 or more, or exclusive use of an area can be made by online at MCCDistrict.org and require one week advance notice.

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, robins, downy woodpecker, great-crested flycatcher and cedar waxwing.