Natural Communities

Springs and Seeps Where ground water flows to the soil surface, springs and seeps flow to form a saturated area where water percolates slowly through the soil. Water flowing from seeps provides habitat for aquatic species, plus food and a year-round water supply for many birds and mammals. The moist environment also supports a rich community of grasses and forage plants. Spring seeps are essential breeding areas for frogs, salamanders, and invertebrates such as crayfish and a variety of aquatic insects.

Woodlands Characterized as having an open structure, woodlands still provide plenty of shade that support shade tolerant wildflowers, and a defined shrub layer. Numerous oak species including bur, white, black, red and scarlet dominate the western areas of woodlands in McHenry County.

Sedge Meadows Typically characterized by a large expanse of wetland, either gradually sloping or filled with sedge hummocks, these open wetlands are permanently saturated and seasonally flooded. Soils are shallow organic muck, although mineral soils may be present. Sedges and grasses dominate, along with a rich mix of wetland wildflowers. Native plants such as wild geranium, Solomon’s seal, wild onion, Joe Pye weed, and sedges are more abundant beneath the trees in restored areas within Rush Creek. Sedge meadows also provide breeding and nesting habitat for birds and amphibians.
Dave Miller

A bur oak grove lies west of the lake. Within the woodlands, a variety of trees including shagbark hickory, aspen, black walnut, basswood, black cherry trees, and red, white, and bur oaks. The strong branches on these trees provide favorable nesting places for larger birds such as red-tailed hawks and great horned owls, while the hollows and holes in the trees provide habitat for smaller wildlife like horned owls, while the hollows and holes in the trees provide habitat for smaller wildlife like horned owls, screech owls and holes in the trees provide habitat for smaller wildlife like horned owls, screech owls, and holes in the trees provide habitat for smaller wildlife like horned owls, screech owls, tree swallows, and bluebirds. The strong branches on these trees also live here and their tracks can often be seen along the banks of the pond and creek.

Many shallow, ephemeral ponds exist along the trails. These seasonal wetlands provide crucial habitat for salamanders, Blanding’s turtles, American toads and chorus frogs during the spring and early summer months. Many shallow, ephemeral ponds exist along the trails. These seasonal wetlands provide crucial habitat for salamanders, Blanding’s turtles, American toads and chorus frogs during the spring and early summer months. Cross Country Skiing

Hiking

Rush Creek offers 2.5 miles of looped nature trails. A short interpretive loop meanders through 1.5 miles of woodland and wetland. A self-guided interpretive trail guide can be found at the visitor sign. The numbered posts on the trail correspond to the "natural narratives" found in the guide. A longer hiking loop travels further into the woodlands then rejoins with the shorter loop for a 2.75 mile trek.

Cross Country Skiing

In the winter months when 4 inches of snow is present, 2 miles of trails are groomed for cross country skiing. Trails are on relatively flat terrain, ideal for beginning skiers, while still providing scenic variety and longer lengths for the intermediate skier.

Horse Trails

The 5 miles of horse trails that transverse the beautiful woods and open prairie make Rush Creek a popular spot with equestrians. A separate horse trailer parking lot is available. Hitching posts, water and restroom facilities are also available. The horse trail may close at various times during the year due to wetter trail conditions; call the District’s Administrative Office, (815) 338-6223 or check the website, www.MCDistrict.org to confirm trail status.

Picnic Facilities

Picnic tables are located near the trailhead for those wanting to enjoy a quiet picnic lunch surrounded by nature’s beauty. A large shelter with grill can accommodate up to 80 people with access to water and restrooms. Reservations and payment for the shelter must be made online at least one week in advance.

Fishing

The 4-acre, man made pond at the north edge of the site underwent extensive restoration. A variety of forage fish like golden shiners and fathead minnows, as well as bluegill, channel catfish, bullheads, and largemouth bass were replenished to create a balanced fish community beneficial for both fish and fisherman alike. The pond is stocked annually with bluegill, channel catfish, bullheads, and largemouth bass. Catch and release practices are encouraged. No boats allowed.

Camping

Group camping is available for up to 80 people. The campground features fire rings, a water pump, and restroom facilities nearby. The campground is open April 1 to December 1 and can be reserved daily for up to a three-night stay. Reservations and payment must be made online at least one week in advance.

Bird watching

Bird watching is popular at Rush Creek during migrations, as well during the summer months when many birds, hawks and owls flutter through the branches, including the white-breasted nuthatch, northern flicker, red-eyed vireo, American Goldfinch, indigo bunting, blue jays, robins, downy woodpecker and cedar waxwing.