

# Michigan Nature Association Kernan Memorial Nature Sanctuary



## Sanctuary at a Glance:

**Location:** Huron County

**Size:** 45 acres

**History:** Acquired in 1990 from a bequest of the estate of William J. Kernan

## About MNA:

The Michigan Nature Association is a nonprofit conservation organization working to protect Michigan's rare, threatened and endangered species by protecting the lands and waters they need to survive.

Established in 1952, MNA's members, donors, and volunteers have built a remarkable network of more than 170 nature sanctuaries across the state – the largest network of natural areas established and maintained by a nonprofit conservation organization in Michigan.



## Michigan Nature Association

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Photo: Phillip Bergquist

Visitors to this secluded beach will feel they have taken a step back in time as they explore the beauty of this stretch of Lake Huron shoreline. Located on the eastern shore of Huron County in Michigan's thumb, the MNA obtained this 45-acre site in 1989 from a bequest of the estate of William J. Kernan. The property had previously been owned by the Kernan family since 1902.

Missed by early road construction and development, the Whiskey Harbor area has largely remained remote and is believed to have only been used for cattle-grazing many years ago. Most of the habitat surrounding Kernan Memorial has been classified as sensitive wetlands, and the shoreline has been declared an "Environmental Area" protected under the Great Lakes Shorelands Protection and Management Act. Visitors can walk directly down to the shore once they reach the end of Pochert Road, and there is a half-mile trail that runs west and north around the west border of Whiskey Harbor. The multi-colored peach cobbles and mud flats along the beach are unique among MNA sanctuaries. There is also an inland sand trail that leads to a hidden beach northwest of the long, rocky point.

The rocky shallow harbor discourages any nearshore boat activity, making this secluded area excellent for bird watching. Several species of gulls and ducks call the sanctuary home. November and early March are the best time to see migratory birds. Spotting shore birds such as black-bellied plovers and sanderlings is best in September and October.

Those who visit Kernan Memorial will experience a rich history and sense of solitude on the beautiful shorelines and beaches of Lake Huron.

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## Invasive species at Kernan Memorial

While native vegetative species and migrating waterfowl both thrive in Kernan Memorial, the invasive species *Phragmites* is currently crowding out the natural community, affecting both plant and animal life. This large grass grows in dense patches, disrupts the nutrient cycles, and alters species composition. Dense populations are also known to decrease native biodiversity and quality of wetland habitat. Controlling the spread of the plant can be difficult and usually requires annual treatment such as prescribed burns, herbicide application, or cutting and mowing.



Photo: MNA Archives

## Whiskey Harbor

Upon the donation of Kernan Memorial, the MNA inherited the dark history of “Whiskey Harbor” and its many stories of smuggling Canadian rum into the U.S. during Prohibition. Corn whiskey is thought to have been delivered to passing ships in the 1890s, and the harbor continued to be the center of much of the nearby bootlegging activity in the ‘30s. The remains of an old boat channel in the harbor that was likely dug out and used by the bootleggers can still be seen in aerial photographs just east of the sanctuary.



Photo: Jason Steel

## Planning Your Visit:

Native species like burr marigold are found among the rocks, and the beautiful cardinal flower and turtlehead can be seen blooming in the late summer months, bringing an array of color to the forest floor at Kernan Memorial.

## How To Get There

The Kernan Memorial Nature Sanctuary is located in Huron County, off of Pochert Rd.

For additional information, contact the MNA office at (866) 223-2231.



Sanctuary Map