

Michigan Nature Association Phillips Family Memorial Nature Sanctuary



Sanctuary at a Glance:

Location: Van Buren County

Size: 79 acres

History: Acquired in 1989, funded by the estate of William 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: Nick Gressick

Acquired by the MNA in 1989 and funded by the estate of William J. Kernan, Jr., the Phillips Family Memorial Nature Sanctuary is home to many rare and unusual plants. Coastal plain marsh communities are uncommon in Michigan, and Phillips Family Memorial Nature Sanctuary is one of three MNA sanctuaries protecting coastal plain marshes.

Many of the rare plants that grow here are known as coastal plain disjunct plants. These plants are separated by hundreds of miles from their main populations along the Atlantic and Gulf Coasts, where these plants are more common. It is believed that these species arrived in Michigan approximately 11,000 years ago as the last glaciation receded, and were deposited in southwest Michigan as a result of a drainage channel down the Hudson River connecting with the Atlantic coastal plain.

Disjunct plants that can be found at Phillips Family Memorial Nature Sanctuary include bald-rush, seedbox, and tall beak-rush—a few of the 40 different disjunct species that only grow in Michigan's coastal plains. Virginia meadow beauty is a striking special-concern species found in the sanctuary; it can be identified by its showy pink-purple petals and contrasting yellow anthers.

The disjunct plant species and coastal plain marsh community make Phillips Family Memorial Nature Sanctuary a must-see for those who want to experience a truly distinctive part of southwestern Michigan.

The Virginia meadow beauty

Typically found in high-quality natural areas, the Virginia meadow beauty (*Rhexia virginica*) adds striking color to the vegetative species in the marsh. The Virginia meadow beauty can be identified by its bright purple or deep pink flowers that produce eight stamens with orange-yellow anthers. The flowers have four wide-spreading petals that span up to one inch across. The blooming period lasts one to two months and occurs from mid-summer to early fall. Virginia meadow beauties thrive in wet depressions, sandy swamps, and soggy marshes, such as the habitat found at Phillips Family Memorial Nature Sanctuary.



Photo: MNA Archives

Hardwoods in the uplands

The forested uplands surrounding the coastal plain marsh provide an interesting mixture of disjunct species, remnants of historic oak barrens once located here, and the southern mesic forest they have become. Black gum, red maple, pin oak, and black cherry are just some of the hardwoods that inhabit the sanctuary. The walking trail is a welcome guide during high seasonal water periods, and benches provide rest stops to observe the scenery.



Photo: Matt Schultz

Planning Your Visit:

The Virginia meadow beauty brings beautiful color to Phillips Family Memorial Nature Sanctuary in the summer, while the upland forest provides a show of colors in the fall.

How To Get There

The sanctuary is located in Van Buren County at the intersection of C.R. 215/52nd St. and 84th Ave, behind the Hamilton Old Grange Hall.

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



Sanctuary Map