

PAW PAW PRAIRIE FEN PRESERVE

Globally rare prairie fens provide habitat for both wetland and prairie species, making them especially rich in biodiversity.



Golden grasses at Paw Paw Prairie Fen in September. © Jason Whalen/Big Foot Media

In 2003, the countryside at the site of the Paw Paw Prairie Fen Preserve was on its way to becoming a housing development. The construction company had removed acres of topsoil, laid out a road route and begun landscaping for a tree-lined subdivision when The Nature Conservancy (TNC) was alerted to rare wetland communities on site and began negotiations to purchase the land. By autumn, this swath of distinctive prairie fen had been protected permanently.

RESTORING THE ALTERED EARTH

Since the Paw Paw Preserve was established in 2004, TNC staff have worked to restore the fen by removing invasive species such as glossy buckthorn, reed canary grass, and spotted knapweed. TNC staff have also removed four acres of full-grown spruce trees, which were planted to line the main avenue of the housing development.

Prairie fens are dependent on fire for some plants' seeds to open and propagate. The Conservancy's trained burn crews use prescribed fire throughout the preserve to maintain these natural processes and reduce invasive species.

BIRDS ABIDE

It's no coincidence that the Paw Paw River watershed is also known as Michigan's "Wine Country." The temperate climate, fertile soil and nearby river create idyllic conditions not only for vineyards but also for birds.

Species abound across the 106 acres of the Paw Paw preserve. In spring, enjoy the return of migrant field sparrows and look for warbler species foraging in areas near water. During summer, nesting species include field sparrows, blue-winged warblers, alder and willow flycatchers, indigo buntings, sedge wrens, common yellowthroats, Henslow's sparrows and more. In August and September, you'll spy songbirds migrating south to escape the frigid conditions to come.



Prescribed burn at Paw Paw. © Kim Steinberger/TNC



Marsh blazing star. © Jason Whalen



Indigo bunting. © John Absher



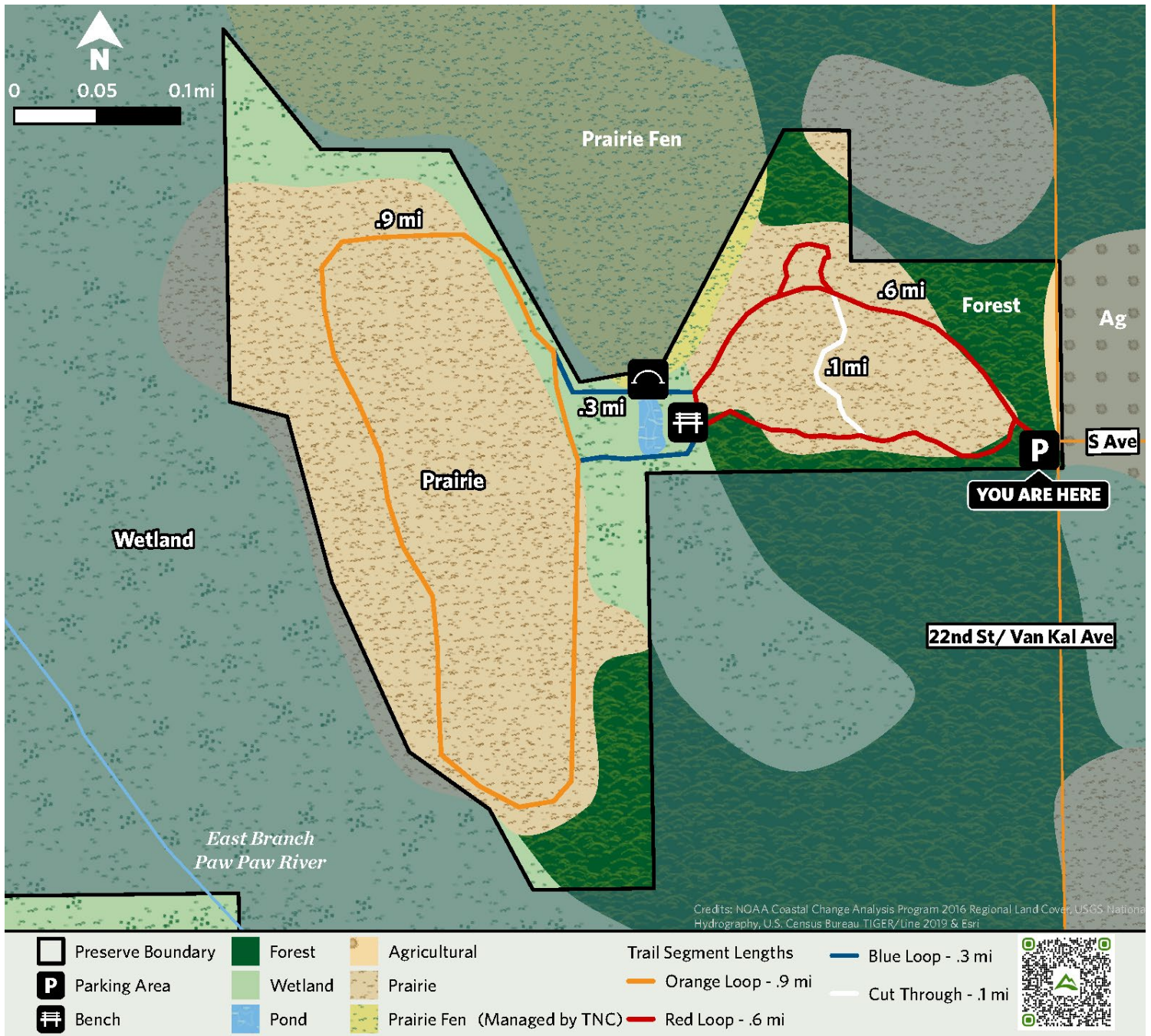
Blanding's turtle. © Ryan Rasmussen



Common yellowthroat. © Timothy T. Lindenbaum

Beyond birds, look for these unique species:

- Blanding's turtle,
- Eastern box turtle,
- Eastern massasauga rattlesnake,
- Marsh blazing star,
- Wild lupine,
- Fringed gentian, and
- Little bluestem.



TIPS FOR A GREAT VISIT

The [Paw Paw Prairie Fen Preserve](#) is open year-round for hiking, birding and wildlife viewing. August and September are the best times to catch sight of migrating songbirds on their way south.

Trail: The 1.5-mile loop trail is generally considered an easy route, with wide, flat, well-packed terrain. Because of wet and uneven ground conditions during much of the year, we recommend wearing waterproof boots with ankle support. Also be sure to check for ticks after hiking since prairie grasses provide them prime habitat.

Located in Mattawan, Michigan: [Visit Google Maps](#) (search Paw Paw Prairie Fen Preserve) for specific directions.

Nearby:

- Ross Coastal Plain Marsh Preserve, 39 mi (nature.org/miexplore)
- Portman Nature Preserve, 10 mi (swmlc.org)
- Lodging, food, and more: stayinpawpaw.org or discoverkalamazoo.com

Rules: You can help us protect this preserve by enjoying only **low-impact, non-motorized** recreation. Please stay on the trails and observe permitted and prohibited activities posted at the kiosk in the parking lot. Thank you for respecting the land, water and wildlife!

