

Kenosha Sand Dunes and Low Prairie is a dune complex lining a half-mile stretch of the Lake Michigan coast in the City of Kenosha, serving as one of the last great lakes coastal dune systems in the Region. Kenosha Sand Dunes and Low Prairie sits atop a buried Pleistocene forest and is also part of a ridge and swale landform which includes Chiwaukee Prairie State Natural Area (NA-1) and extends south of the state line. Exhibiting dune succession, the site contains storm beach, mid beach, foredunes, and rear dunes as well as a good quality remnant of wet prairie, wet-mesic prairie, and emergent marsh. Numerous uncultivated prairie and dune species are present including short green milkweed (*Asclepias viridiflora*), Kalm's St. John's-wort (*Hypericum kalmianum*), horsemint (*Monarda punctata*), and prairie willow (*Salix humilis*). A multitude of state-listed plants are also present in the natural area. Kenosha Sand Dunes and Low Prairie is an important site for migratory shorebirds and serves as vital habitat for critical animal species. This natural area is primarily owned and managed by the Department of Natural Resources (WDNR) while isolated portions of the natural area are privately owned.

Kenosha Sand Dunes and Low Prairie has suffered from rough foot paths and past off-road vehicle use, but the site is recovering. The shore of the natural area has been riprapped which disrupts the natural migratory dynamics of great lake coastal dune environments and restricts dune formation. This armoring has begun to fail, causing large scale erosion of the beach during storm events without replenishment. Removal of the riprap to promote future existence of this rare dune environment would be ideal. Hydrology of the low prairie has been altered from past plowing and ditching attempts. Siltation and sedimentation from stormwater runoff of adjacent lands is also an ongoing issue in the prairie where hybrid cattail (*Typha x glauca*) and tall reed grass (*Phragmites australis subsp. australis*) are expanding. The WDNR manages their portion of the natural area through brushing, targeted herbicide treatment, and prescribed fires. Protective acquisition and management of all of Kenosha Sand Dunes and Low Prairie by WDNR is recommended to secure site protection and stewardship. Hydrologic restoration of the site would also be ideal.

Learn more here:
sewrpc.org/Regional-Planning/Natural-Areas



Southeastern
Wisconsin
Regional
Planning
Commission

Planning Report No. 42, 2nd
Amendment to the Natural Areas &
Critical Species Management &
Protection Plan for the Southeastern
Wisconsin Region (Dec 2025)

Regional Natural Areas



Kenosha Sand Dunes & Low Prairie

T01 R23 Sections 7 & 8
Kenosha County



Photo: Staff

Natural Areas Rank



Natural Area of
Statewide Significance

Level of Protection	Medium (Partial Conservation Ownership w/Site Mgmt Plan)
Level of Threat	Medium (Surrounding Land Use, Invasive Species)
Size	95 acres
Ownership	DNR, Private
Site Management Plan	Yes
Number of Native Plant Species	209
Endangered, Threatened, or Special Concern Species	Yes, Plant & Animal

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Regional Natural Areas

Kenosha Sand Dunes & Low Prairie

NA-1

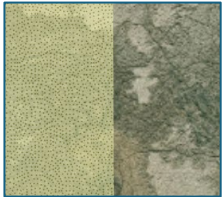


The state-threatened dune thistle (*Cirsium pitcheri*) on the foredunes of Kenosha Sand Dunes and Low Prairie

	NA-1	NA-2	NA-3
Natural Area Boundaries			
Surface Water			
Parcel Boundaries			
		Protected Highlighted Yellow	Not Protected

Protected Lands

Lands owned by Federal, State, County, and local units of government or via conservation easements





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