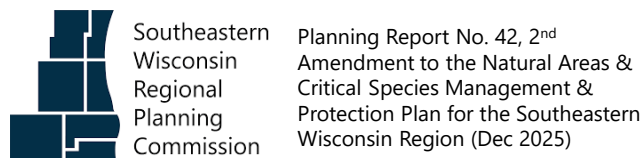


St. Francis Seminary Woods is a relatively large stand of old growth southern mesic forest that is only moderately disturbed. Southern hardwood swamp comprises the lowland forests along an unnamed meandering stream that traverses the woods. A few ephemeral pools can be found throughout the site in poorly drained depressions buffered by hardwood swamp. American beech (*Fagus grandifolia*), sugar maple (*Acer saccharum*), and red oak (*Quercus rubra*) dominate the mesic forest and have achieved great size and age in undisturbed areas. Skunk cabbage (*Symplocarpus foetidus*) carpets the lowland hardwood swamp and forested seeps in early spring. In the core old growth woods, spring ephemerals such as yellow trout lily (*Erythronium americanum*), mayapple (*Podophyllum peltatum*), and trilliums (*Trillium sp.*) blanket the forest floor in early spring. This site represents a remnant of the once vast hardwood forests that covered what is present day Milwaukee County. Beech and sugar maple are reproducing well. The woods are an important migratory stopover and breeding habitat for birds. The natural area is critical habitat for five endangered, threatened, and special concern species.

Extensive trail development has damaged portions of the woods in the past, and siltation and sedimentation from adjacent properties is an ongoing issue. Loss of ash in both the upland mesic woods and the hardwood swamp is creating opportunities for invasive species. Garlic mustard (*Alliaria petiolata*) and non-native buckthorns (*Rhamnus cathartica*, *Frangula alnus*) have infiltrated gaps created by dead and dying ash (*Fraxinus sp.*). However, the herbaceous and shrub layers in this intact forest remain resilient and invasive species have failed to become dominant over significant areas. The forest was selectively logged in the past but has recovered from these past disturbances. Canopy openings created by logging have filled with forest trees and shrubs and the old growth areas remain intact. There are opportunities to buffer and improve forest connectivity on City of St. Francis lands. Afforestation of City-owned land between the natural area and a smaller fragment of woods known as Trestle Ravine Woods, a SEWRPC-designated critical species habitat, could unite the two forested areas into one continuous tract.



St. Francis Seminary Woods

T06 R22 Sections 14 & 15
Milwaukee County

Natural Areas Rank

NA-1

NA-2

NA-3

Natural Area of Regional or County Significance

A meandering stream bordered by southern hardwood swamp and mesic forest

Level of Protection	Low (Private Conservation Ownership)
Level of Threat	Medium (Surrounding Land Use and Invasive Species)
Size	52 acres
Ownership	City of St. Francis, Private
Site Management Plan	No
Number of Native Plant Species	172
Endangered, Threatened, or Special Concern Species	Yes, Plant & Animal

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Regional Natural Areas

St. Francis Seminary Woods

NA-2

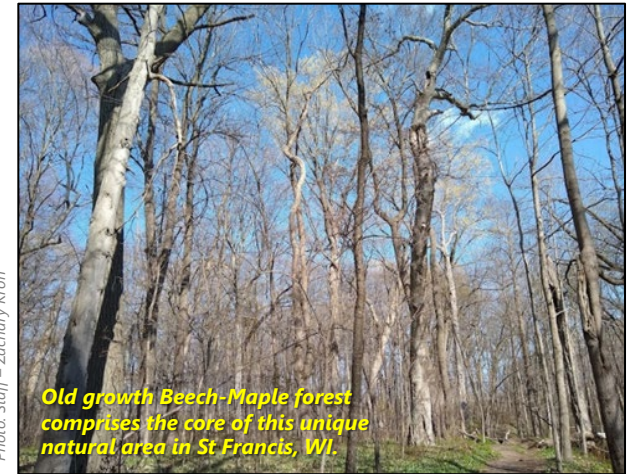
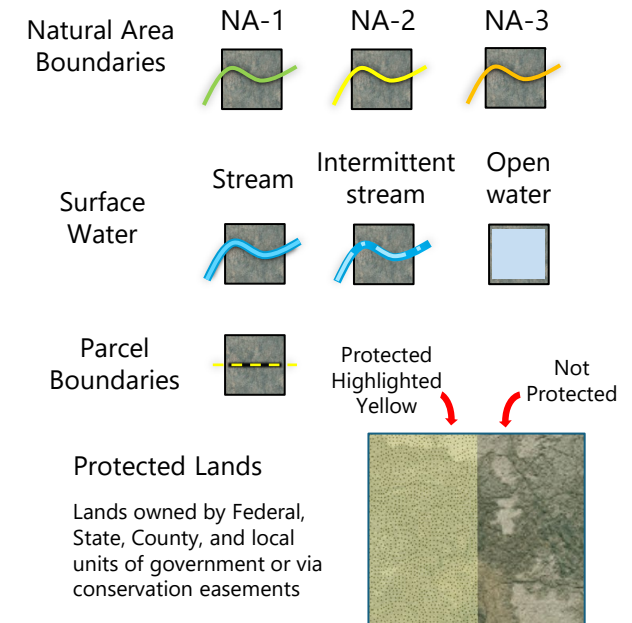


Photo: Staff – Zachary Kron



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)