

Interlake Parks

Hecla / Grindstone Provincial Park

Grassy Narrows Marsh Hiking and Cycling Trails



Grassy Narrows Marsh

Named after the narrows, a channel between Hecla Island and the mainland, this is one of Manitoba's finest marshes and a major feature of Hecla/Grindstone Provincial Park.

Ducks Unlimited and Manitoba Conservation have developed a system of dykes to control water levels in this marsh and restore optimum habitat conditions.

This marsh is an important nesting area for Canada geese and a great variety of other waterfowl. Hikers and cyclists can travel the dykes to explore the marsh's wondrous beauty.

The plants and wildlife are parts of their living homes. Please respect them.

What Is a Marsh?

A marsh is a treeless lowland area of open water and vegetation, that usually has a greater variety of animals and plants than do lakes, grasslands or forests. It is the most productive biological community in Canada. Around the world, marshes are second only to tropical rainforests in

productivity. In the short growing season at this latitude, marsh vegetation is more efficient at energy capture and storage than any other plant community.

Marshes have characteristic plants which grow in distinct zones or layers. The high canopy of emergent plants like cattails and phragmites occupies the tallest layer. On the water surface are duckweeds, the world's smallest floating plants, which are a rich source of protein for waterfowl. Microscopic algae abound throughout the area between the water surface and the soil base. Algae form the food base for tiny grazing animals, tadpoles, caddisflies, and snails. Submerged plants, which form the basic food for ducks, are rooted to the bottom of the marsh. Transparency of the water is most important, as clear water is essential for photosynthesis to occur. In turbid parts of Hecla's marshes, light cannot penetrate the water and these sites are too sterile for many submerged plants and animals to thrive.

In marshes there is a constant interplay between oxygen and carbon dioxide, as these two substances are passed back and forth between plants and animals, and their environment. All green plants manufacture food and are eaten by herbivorous animals such as mayflies and small crustaceans. Carnivorous animals, including dragonfly nymphs and fish, in turn eat these animals. Eventually all plants and animals die and decompose. Their basic components are then reabsorbed by plants and the whole cycle of life in the marsh begins again. There is a loss of energy and mass through gases, such as methane, produced during decomposition.

Hecla's Managed Marsh

The re-routing of the causeway road in 1977 separated this portion of the marsh from Lake Winnipeg. To maintain good marsh habitat, water levels are being controlled:

- to duplicate the natural flood-drought cycle and thus attain more natural water-vegetation balance, and
- to prevent destruction of nests by high water levels and wind tides that can occur in unmanaged marshes.

A thriving marsh has equal areas of water and vegetation which are maintained by periodic flooding and drought. Flooding drowns plants and establishes open water. Drought exposes bottom debris to air and sunlight allowing faster nutrient recycling and germination of seeds to re-establish emergent vegetation. Natural marshes are constantly changing, but will eventually become dry land.

Nesting islands have been constructed to provide upland nesting sites and reduce the effects of predators on waterfowl. Ducks Unlimited and Parks and Protected Spaces Branch are managing this part of Grassy Narrows Marsh for the benefit of wildlife and for the enjoyment and education of park visitors.

Wildlife Viewing Tips



- Most wildlife sightings occur at dawn and dusk when animals are most active.
 - Birds are most numerous in spring and fall during migration.
 - A pair of binoculars and a well-illustrated field guide are the basics for birdwatching.
 - Do not approach deer or moose too closely or attempt to feed any wildlife.
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Safety and Comfort

- Water beside dykes is deep and dangerous! Watch your children at all times.
 - Dress warmly, especially in spring and fall when weather can change rapidly.
 - Take along a windbreaker and wear comfortable walking shoes.
 - Bring drinking water.
 - Other things you may find useful, depending on weather conditions include a hat, sunscreen and insect repellent.
 - Cyclists, please respect traffic signs and be cautious at highway crossings.
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Wildlife Checklist

Marsh Mammals

Look for these mammals or signs of their presence.

- Beaver
- Mink
- Muskrat
- Shrews
- Moose
- White-tailed deer
- Red fox
- Meadow vole
- Coyote
- Gray wolf

Birds

Try identifying these common marsh bird species.

- Pied-billed grebe
- Horned grebe
- Red-necked grebe
- Eared grebe
- Western grebe
- American white pelican
- Double-crested cormorant
- American bittern
- Great blue heron
- Snow goose

- Striped skunk
- Otter
- Lynx
- Red squirrel
- Snowshoe hare
- Deer mouse

Reptiles and Amphibians

- Western painted turtle
- Snapping turtle
- Red-sided garter snake
- Northern redbelly snake
- Leopard frog
- Wood frog
- Boreal chorus frog
- Gray treefrog
- Canadian toad
- Blue-spotted salamander

Fish

- Sticklebacks
- Fathead minnow
- Shiners
- Bullhead catfish
- Darters
- Daces
- Madtom minnow
- Mudminnow
- Chubs
- Yellow perch
- Suckers
- Redhorse suckers
- Burbot (maria, ling cod)
- Trout-perch
- White bass
- Sauger
- Channel catfish
- Walleye (pickerel)
- Freshwater drum (sunfish)
- Sculpins
- Goldeye
- Mooneye
- Northern pike (jackfish)

- Canada goose
- Wood duck
- Green-winged teal
- Mallard
- Northern pintail
- Blue-winged teal
- Northern shoveller
- Gadwall
- American widgeon
- Canvasback
- Redhead
- Ring-necked duck
- Greater scaup
- Lesser scaup
- Common goldeneye
- Bufflehead
- Ruddy duck
- Northern harrier
- Ruffed grouse
- Sora rail
- American coot
- Sandhill crane
- Killdeer
- Greater yellowlegs
- Lesser yellowlegs
- Common snipe
- Franklin's gull
- Bonaparte's gull
- Ring-billed gull
- Herring gull
- Common tern
- Forster's tern
- Black tern
- Mourning dove
- Eastern kingbird
- Tree swallow
- Cliff swallow
- Barn swallow
- Black-billed magpie
- American crow
- Sedge wren
- Marsh wren
- American robin
- Yellow warbler
- Yellow-rumped warbler
- Common yellowthroat
- Clay-coloured sparrow

- Carp
- Song sparrow
- Red-winged blackbird
- Yellow-headed blackbird
- Brewer's blackbird
- Brown-headed cowbird

The marsh is also teeming with insects, spiders, shellfish and micro-organisms amid a myriad of plants.

Other Marshes

Marshes are considered "endangered spaces" in central North America.

Grassy Narrows is one of several significant marshes in Manitoba which are readily accessible. Plan to visit at least one of these others in the near future.

- Wild Wings Self-guiding Trail
Grand Beach Provincial Park
PTH 12
 - Sioux Pass Marsh Self-guiding Trail
St. Ambrose Beach Provincial Park
PR 430
 - Oak Hammock Marsh
Oak Hammock Wildlife Management Area
PTH 67 (north of Winnipeg)
 - Ominnik Marsh
Riding Mountain National Park
PTH 10
 - Netley Marsh
Netley Creek Provincial Park
PR 320 (north of Selkirk)
 - Whitewater Lake
Whitewater Lake WMA
West of Boissevain (north of PTH 3)
 - Delta Marsh
PR 240 (north of Portage la Prairie)
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Map

