



The Fen at Prophetstown State Park

Two unique and important natural features at Prophetstown also bear the influence of the glaciers. Seeps and fens are wetland communities known for their high alkalinity, which influences the plant species that may grow there. Seeps are places where the water table is “perched” near the surface and water seeps out of the ground in places where the topography slopes. Generally these are areas that are wider and much more slow moving-almost sheet-like--than a typical stream emerging from a spring, as you might expect to see in the limestone country of southern Indiana. Heavy muck soils or peat prevent the water from flowing downward as it normally might.

Open wetlands with mineral-rich soils called fens are the result of these seeps. They are often associated with peat or heavy “muck” soils, which slow the water from seeping downward into deeper layers of the earth. This means that they are constantly saturated with water but not flooded (like marshes or swamps) and, because they are spring-fed, they are always flowing at least beneath the surface of the peat or muck substrate. Marshes and swamps often have pools of stagnant water.

At Prophetstown, we have at least one very high-quality fen and it is being managed and protected in cooperation with our Division of Nature Preserves. A hiking trail will skirt the edge of the fen and we will develop a boardwalk and viewing platform that allows visitors to have an up-close look without damaging sensitive plants and wildlife.

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