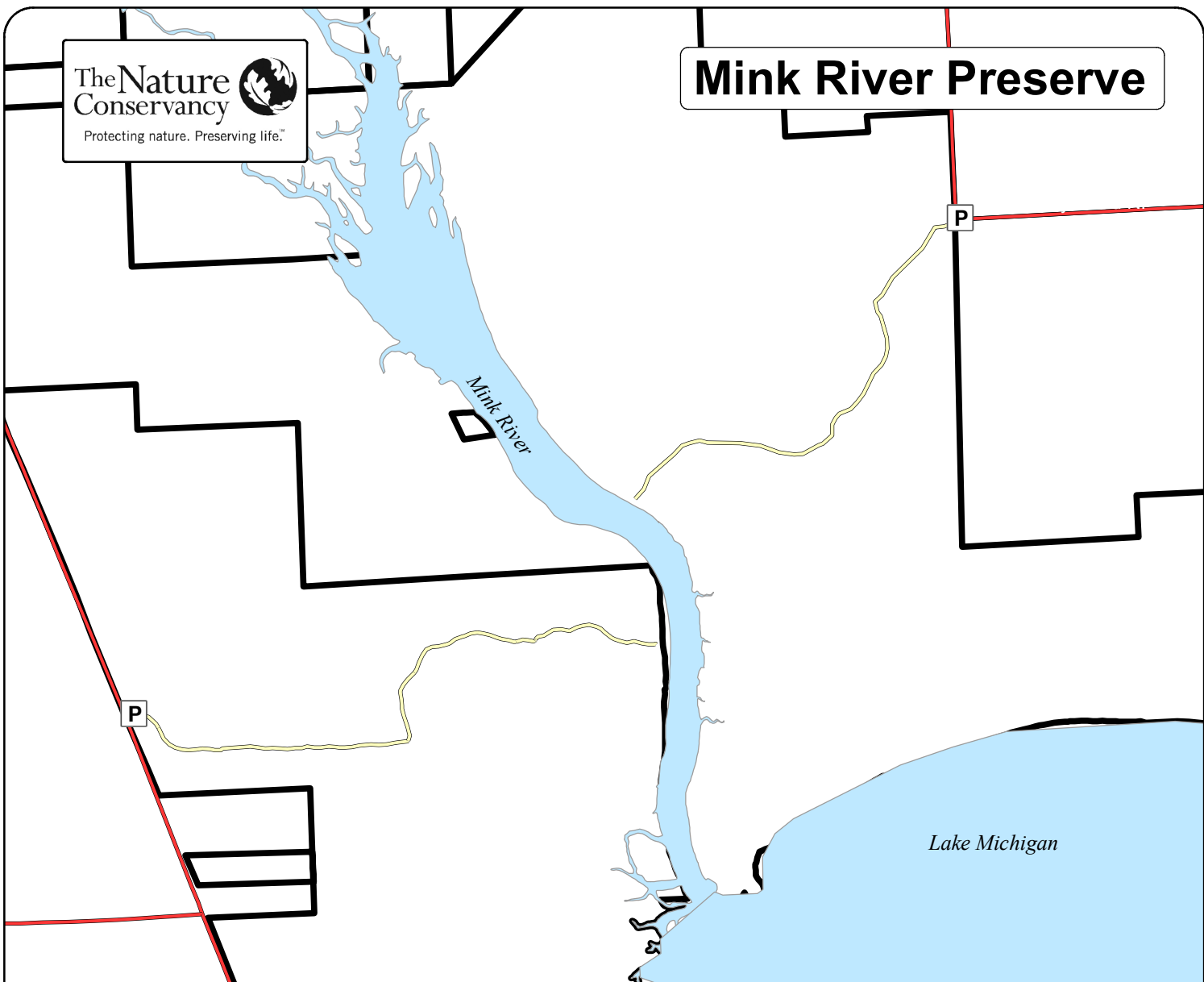


Mink River Preserve

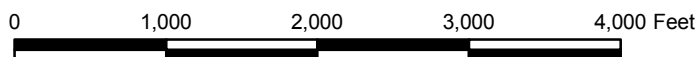


Directions

Fern trail: From Ellison Bay, travel southeast on Mink River Road for approximately 2 miles. A parking area is next to the trailhead on the east side of Mink River Road.

Schoenbrunn trail: From Ellison Bay, travel east on State Highway 42 for 2 miles. Turn right on County Road NP and travel one mile south. The trailhead is on the west side of County NP where it makes a 90 degree turn east. Park in parking area adjacent to gated trailhead.

- Paved road
- Preserve trail
Fern trail = 2 miles (round trip)
Schoenbrunn trail = 1.5 mile (round trip)
- Preserve boundary
- Water
- P Parking area



Mink River Preserve

The Nature Conservancy's (TNC) Mink River Preserve includes northern wet-mesic and upland forest, open and emergent wetland, deep marsh, northern sedge meadow, alder thicket, and open beach communities. The moderate sized coastal wetland – river system at the core of the preserve is one the few remaining high quality freshwater estuaries in North America.

Hours and Conditions

The preserve is open year-round, dawn to dusk, for passive recreation only; this includes hiking, cross country skiing, snowshoeing, bird-watching, nature study and photography. Deer hunting is allowed during regular seasons; please call TNC at 920-743-8695. TNC asks all visitors to clean their boots before entering the preserve. Invasive non-native plants can be transported on footwear or clothing, and rapidly gain a foothold in the preserve if care is not taken. A boot brush is provided at the parking area of the Fern Trail.

Conservation Significance

The Mink River Preserve protects almost the entire shoreline of the Mink River and a considerable percentage of the Mink River watershed. The preserve safeguards the water quality as well as the structure and function of the river, estuary, and ultimately Lake Michigan, providing habitat for a significant amount of biodiversity that depends on this ecosystem.

The estuary, where the waters of Mink River and Lake Michigan meet, is characterized by calcium rich, hard water flowing from the springs in the marsh, mixing with the softer water of Lake Michigan which enters the river with the seiche (see sidebar). The estuary and wetlands provide important spawning habitat for fish, particularly northern pike and smallmouth bass. As spawning habitat and source of organic material, productive estuaries are vital to the Lake Michigan ecosystem.

Seiche – oscillation of water in Lake Michigan

- can alter the water level in the estuary by 4 to 12 inches in approximately hourly cycles;
- is controlled primarily by weather conditions (wind patterns on Lake Michigan) and the topography of Rowley's Bay;
- can shift the conductance and alkalinity gradient, formed by mixing waters, either upstream or downstream in the river channel depending on the direction of flow in the seiche.

What to See: Plants

Several threatened species depend on the wetland and beach areas including grass of Parnassus, the dwarf lake iris, lesser fringed gentian, crawe sedge, and dune thistle.

The northern wet-mesic forest surrounding the Mink River, a declining community type itself, hosts four species of rare orchid.

Surrounding the wetland communities along the river are upland forests of hemlock, sugar maple, white birch, and beech with lesser numbers of yellow birch and white pine.

What to See: Wildlife

The Mink River is a major site for the Hine's emerald dragonfly, a federally endangered species whose natural range is in decline due to habitat destruction.

More than 200 different bird species use the preserve over the course of the year including black-crowned night herons, Caspian terns, Cooper's and red-shouldered hawks, northern harriers, goshawks, osprey, and bald eagles.

American bitterns, double-crested cormorants, rails, and great-blue herons as well as sedge wrens, blue-winged teal, mallards, wood ducks, black ducks, pintails, and common mergansers frequent the wetland areas. The upland forests are rich in warblers such as northern parula, black and white, Nashville, Canada, ovenbird, blackburnian and the northern waterthrush.

What the Conservancy Has Done/Is Doing

The Nature Conservancy began work in the Mink River project area in 1977 and now owns over 1700 acres here. TNC manages the project area for wildlife and water quality, recognizing the interconnectedness of the plant and animal communities. The Conservancy will continue to work with local landowners, land trusts, and property owners associations to protect this nationally significant estuary and surrounding area.

For more information about the Mink River Preserve, contact our Sturgeon Bay office:

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