

PAW PAW PRAIRIE FEN PRESERVE

Life in the Grasslands

**LOCATION:**

Southwest Michigan



SIZE: 106 acres

**TRAIL LENGTH:**

2-mile loop



DIFFICULTY: Easy

**BECOME A COMMUNITY SCIENTIST:**

Help us keep track of the species at our preserves by using iNaturalist to record your observations. Learn more at [nature.org/miexplore](https://www.nature.org/miexplore).



It's no coincidence that the Paw Paw River watershed is also known as Michigan's "Wine Country." The same soils and climate that help prairie fens flourish are also ideal for agriculture, which has largely replaced them. On the Paw Paw Preserve, however, Michigan's golden grasslands still thrive. © Jason Whalen

Once, prairies covered southern Michigan. On the Paw Paw Prairie Fen Preserve, you can still see this natural legacy—a gently rolling land, blanketed by tall grasses and wildflowers among scattered trees, and featuring unique wetlands known as fens. Long-ago glaciers left behind the calcium-rich deposits that allow these fens to support an abundance of plants—and provide a haven for wildlife.

Unfortunately, only a few small pockets of this habitat remain in Michigan. That's why, when this 106-acre site was on its way to becoming a housing development in 2003, The Nature Conservancy (TNC) stepped in to protect it. Over time, we restored its native habitats by removing invasive species such as glossy buckthorn, reed canary grass and spotted knapweed.

Now, prairie wildflowers and grasses abound on the Paw Paw Preserve. Why not borrow some inspiration for your own native garden? For example, lovely prairie grasses such as little bluestem, big bluestem and Indian grass are great for erosion prevention while providing habitat for many birds and insects. (But please, leave all plants on the preserve where you find them!)



Fire, Fire! Prairie fens are dependent on fire for some plants' seeds to open and propagate. TNC's trained burn crews use prescribed fire throughout the preserve to maintain these natural processes and reduce invasive species.

YOU SHOULD VISIT IF...**You love Michigan's prairies!**

Prairie habitats offer a unique show of color any time of year, from the migratory birds of spring, to the wildflowers and insects of the summer, to the autumn color on the oak trees in fall. Here, you may catch a glimpse of a tall sandhill crane or—much lower to the ground—a Blanding's turtle. The endangered eastern massasauga rattlesnake is also an elusive resident of Michigan's prairie fens.

Some of the other plant and animal species you might spot on your visit, depending on the season, include:

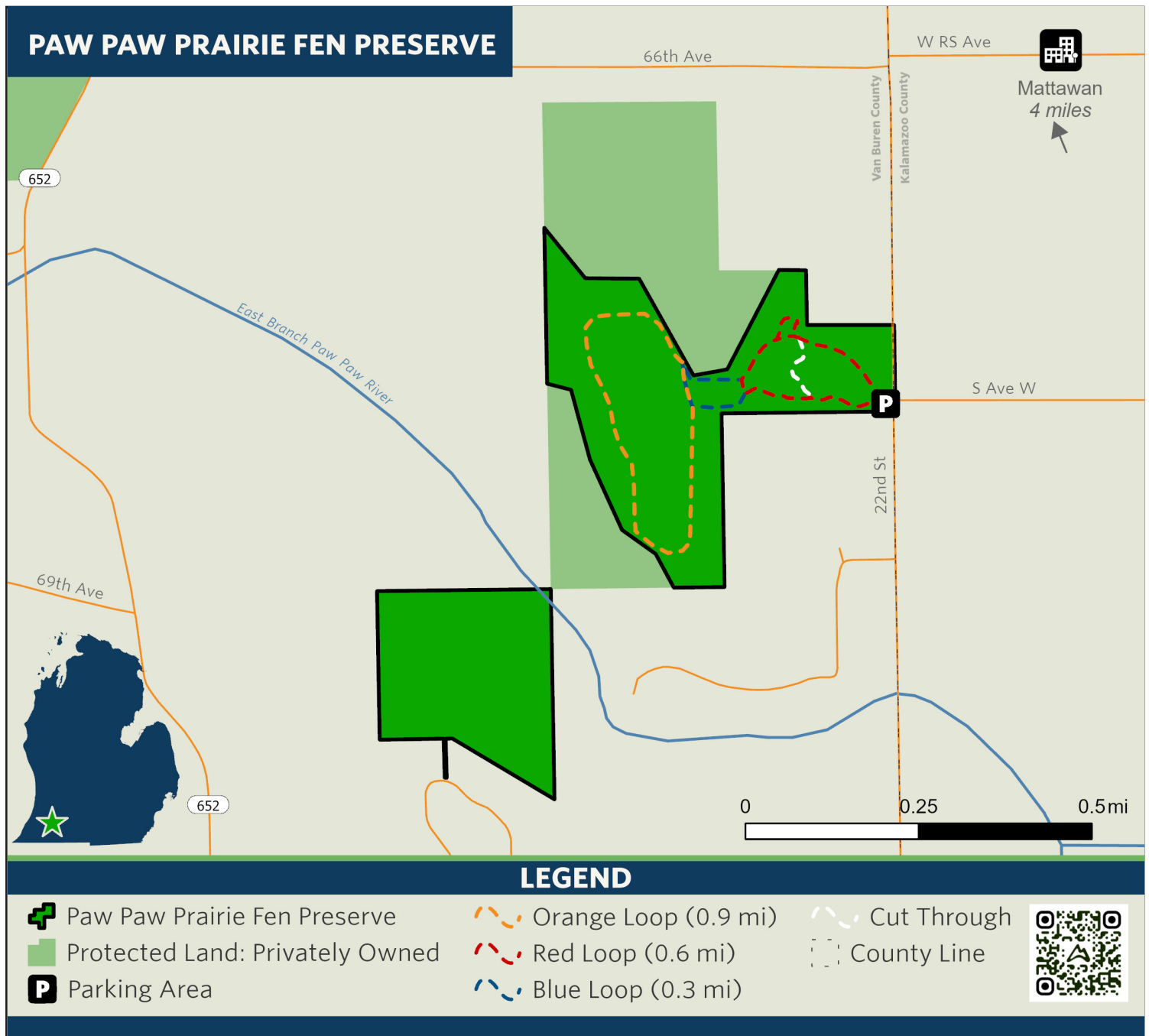
- Marsh blazing star
- Indigo bunting
- Common yellowthroat
- Joe Pye weed
- Fringed gentian
- Wild lupine
- Red-shouldered hawk
- Sandhill crane

INDIGO BUNTING

© Chamong Xiong

FRINGED GENTIAN

© Big Foot Media



HOW TO GET THERE

Directions from Kalamazoo, MI: Take I-94 west to the Mattawan exit (No. 66). Head south on County Road 652/24th Street/South Main. Turn east (left) onto 64th Avenue and continue to its end at 22nd Street/Van Kal Avenue. Turn south (right) onto 22nd Street/Van Kal Avenue and travel approximately 1 mile to the preserve parking lot on the west (right) side of the road at 68032 Van Kal Ave.

MAKE TODAY A NATURE DAY!

Nearby points of interest include:

- Portman Nature Preserve, 9 mi – swmlc.org
- Wolf Tree Nature Trails, 10 mi – swmlc.org
- Maple Lake & Paw Paw River Trail, 10 mi
- Ross Coastal Plain Marsh Preserve, 40 mi – nature.org/miexplore
- Lodging, food and more – stayingpawpaw.org or discoverkalamazoo.com

TIPS FOR A GREAT VISIT

- The Paw Paw Preserve is open year-round for hiking, birding and wildlife viewing. Snowshoeing or cross-country skiing can be enjoyed along the trail in the winter.
- Hiking boots are recommended, as well as insect repellent and sun protection in the summer.
- Be sure to check for ticks after hiking!
- If you visit during the deer hunting season (**early September to early January**), wear bright colors and exercise caution. All hunters must have a TNC permit and state license.
- Please leave pets at home.
- No camping or fires permitted.
- Please follow the rules posted at the preserve and online at nature.org/miexplore.

Thank you for protecting the land, water and wildlife of this place!