



Chiwaukee Prairie-Illinois Beach Lake Plain— A Wetland of International Importance

In 2015, a complex of 3,914 acres owned by eight public and private landowners along Lake Michigan was designated a Wetland of International Importance under the Ramsar Convention. Ramsar sites are chosen because they meet specific criteria that demonstrate their significance for biodiversity, ecosystem function, or other ecological reasons. In the US, other Ramsar sites include Chesapeake Bay, Everglades National Park, and San Francisco Bay and Estuary.

One of just a few bi-state partnerships recognized under Ramsar, the Chiwaukee Prairie-Illinois Beach Lake Plain (Lake Plain) extends from Waukegan, Illinois to Kenosha, Wisconsin. The coastal landscape covers approximately 15 miles and contains the **highest quality coastal dune and swale ecosystem** in the region. It supports six globally rare representatives of fen, sedge meadow, freshwater marsh and seep wetland communities, as well as critical sand savanna and dry prairie upland habitat. In addition, the Lake Plain:

- Supports three federally protected species: dune thistle (*Cirsium pitcheri*), eastern prairie fringed orchid (*Platanthera leucophaea*) and piping plover (*Charadrius melodus*).
- Serves as important breeding habitat for many wetland-dependent bird species and provides critical migratory stopover habitat for at least 310 migratory bird species. A portion of the Lake Plain is designated an Important Bird Conservation Area by the National Audubon Society.
- Provides habitat for over 930 native plant species and 300 animal species, including 63 state protected species.
- Provides critical ecosystem services, including protection of Lake Michigan water quality. Five major tributaries and several minor tributaries flow through the Lake Plain prior to reaching Lake Michigan.
- Generates significant tourism opportunities for local communities, supporting over two million visitors a year, engaging community members in volunteer conservation stewardship, and providing high quality examples of coastal wetland communities for education and scientific research.

The Coalition began as a grant-funded planning initiative by the Lake County Forest Preserve District in 2006. The Chiwaukee Prairie – Illinois Beach Lake Plain Coalition was formally established in 2010 as a concerted effort to protect and manage the region’s unique and high-quality natural features.

More than \$14.7 million in grant funding has been received from federal, state, and private foundation sources to support land preservation, ecological restoration, land management activities such as invasive species control and ecological monitoring. Today, the collaboration is now known as the Lake Plain Coalition, and it has grown beyond the boundaries of the original Ramsar dedication to include 5,497 acres owned by 17 public and private landowners. It is widely recognized as an effective model of diverse agencies collaborating on landscape-scale management across state lines.

After nearly 20 years of working across state boundaries and across public and private lands, the Lake Plain Coalition is planning for long-term ecological, operational, and financial sustainability of this globally important landscape. A private foundation funded a Lake Plain Feasibility Study, which resulted in a three-year initiative to address the following needs:

1. Identify and secure designated capacity to advance stronger collaboration.
2. Undertake a process to establish a common regional identity.
3. Develop a collaborative action plan and prioritization methods to secure early successes.

Lake Plain Coalition Mission: *to conserve the ecological integrity of the Lake Plain through coordination of management and conservation efforts and objectives; sharing data and resources to improve management impact; jointly securing grant funding for the benefit of the Lake Plain; and public education and outreach.*

Lake Plain Coalition Agencies:

- Chiwaukee Prairie Preservation Fund*
- City of Waukegan
- Exelon / Zion Solutions
- Illinois Dunesland Restoration Project
- Illinois Department of Natural Resources*
- Johns Manville
- Lake County Forest Preserve District*
- Lake County Health Department
- Lake County Stormwater Management Commission
- Midwest Generation LLC
- The Nature Conservancy in Wisconsin*

- Southeast Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission
- University of Wisconsin-Parkside*
- The Village of Pleasant Prairie*
- Village of Winthrop Harbor*
- Waukegan Harbor Citizens' Advisory Group
- Waukegan Park District*
- Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources*
- Zion Park District*
- North Shore Water Reclamation District
- Kenosha County

*Landowners within the Ramsar Designation Area

