

Michigan Nature Association Newwaygo Prairie Nature Sanctuary



Sanctuary at a Glance:

Location: Newaygo County

Size: 110 acres

History: Two parcels acquired, 1969-1970.

About MNA:

The Michigan Nature Association is a nonprofit conservation organization working to protect Michigan's rare, threatened and endangered species by protecting the lands and waters they need to survive.

Established in 1952, MNA's members, donors, and volunteers have built a remarkable network of more than 170 nature sanctuaries across the state – the largest network of natural areas established and maintained by a nonprofit conservation organization in Michigan.



Michigan Nature Association

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Photo: Dave Wendling

MNA purchased this 110-acre prairie sanctuary, composed of oak and pine barrens, in 1969. Prairies are one of the most endangered habitats in the state because many owners converted open acres to farmland in the 19th and 20th centuries. But the steep hillsides and sandy soils brought an early end to farming attempts here, which preserved the prairie community found today. More than 40 years of preservation and recent prescribed burning have helped keep this sanctuary similar to its original state.

Despite its size, Newaygo Prairie Nature Sanctuary has no trails. However, the open landscape makes it easy for visitors to navigate and explore. The sanctuary is separated into two units, with 30 acres north of 56th Street and 80 acres to the south. Twenty-five of the northern acres are composed of prairie vegetation, while 30 acres in the southern part are an example of a dry prairie habitat. The rest of the acreage is composed of oak pine barrens. The southern bowl was last farmed in the 1800s and has recovered remarkably well.

More than 100 prairie species survive here, including the porcupine grass, June grass, and Fall Witch grass. Prairie ragwort, rock spikemoss, goat's rue, sand cherry, and prickly-pear cactus also contribute to the variety of plants.

Several species of birds rely on the open habitat at Newaygo Prairie for nesting and foraging. Bluebirds and prairie warblers nest in the open areas of the prairie, while whippoorwills prefer the shaded areas near the wooded edges.

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The eastern prickly pear

The eastern prickly pear (*Opuntia humifusa*) blooms in July, producing bright yellow flowers. Preferring to live in the shadow of the prairie peninsula in Michigan, this cactus is found in prairies with sandy soils, such as in Newaygo County. The small cactus grows close to the ground and produces a red fruit that can thrive until the following spring. The eastern prickly pear is very intolerant of shade and prefers to grow in well-drained soils.



Photo: Aaron Strouse

Side-oats grama grass

Unique to the prairie and savanna communities of Michigan, the side-oats grama grass (*Bouteloua curtipendula*) is more commonly found in dry prairies further west. Now threatened in Michigan, the side-oats grama grass is mostly limited to oak barrens and hillside prairies such as Newaygo Prairie. The grass can grow between one and three feet in length and develops small, oat-shaped seeds on its stalk.



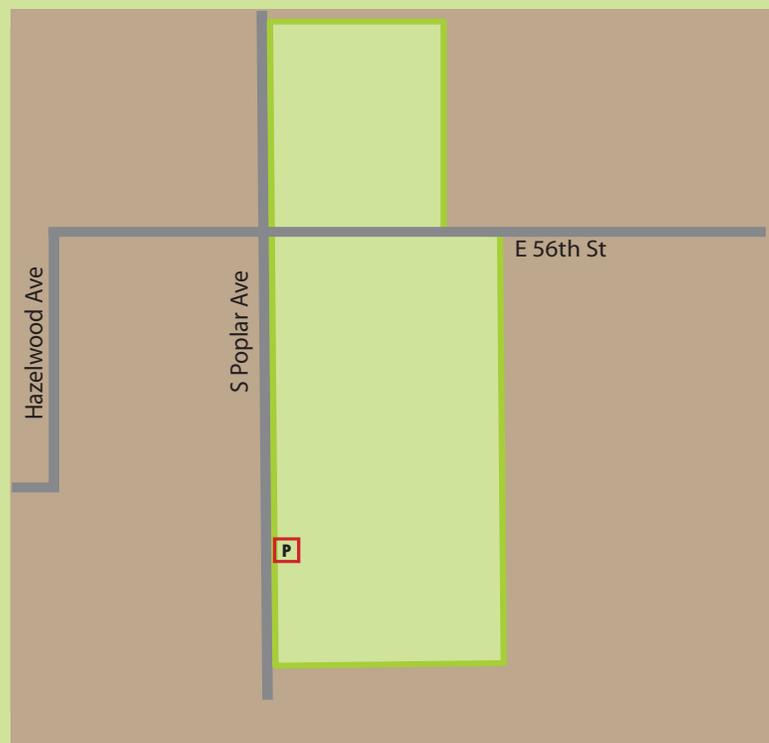
Photo: Chuck Vannette

Planning Your Visit:

Because of the wide plant variety at Newaygo Prairie, there is no one best time to see its blooming vegetation, which remains colorful throughout the year. Late April and early May are the best times to see the early buttercups and violets, which are followed by prairie smoke, sand milkweed, and June grass, among others, in June. July and August bring the prickly pear cactus, blazing star, and several late blooming prairie plants and grasses. Fall brings the blooming of sunflowers, goldenrod, and asters.

How to Get There:

Located in Newaygo County, the sanctuary is northeast of Newaygo at the intersection of S. Poplar Avenue and E. 56th Street.



Sanctuary Map