

Rainbow Springs Lake Self-Guided Nature Walk

Located within the Kettle Moraine State Forest—Southern Unit—Mukwonago River Unit

In conjunction with the 2020 Wisconsin Science Festival

The Mukwonago River Unit is nine minutes or 4.7 miles west of the Library on Highway LO. This nature walk is an out-and-back hike that will take you about a quarter of the way around the perimeter of Rainbow Springs Lake.

PARKING—START HERE

The Mukwonago River Unit is in Waukesha and Walworth counties. The 970-acre, former Rainbow Springs property. It is situated in the Mukwonago River watershed and is known for its outstanding resource waters, varied habitats and biological diversity.

BRIDGE OVER THE MUKWONAGO RIVER

The Mukwonago River is one of the cleanest streams in southeastern Wisconsin and is home to 58 species of fish and many mussels. It provides important habitat for rare fish and mussels including the threatened Long Eared Sunfish and the endangered Rainbow Shell. Do you see any fish swimming under the bridge?

PINE PLANTING

The pine trees planted here are primarily white pine. White pine is the only gymnosperm in Wisconsin with needles arranged in fascicles of five, i.e., five needles per bundle. (Most pines have two to three needles per bundle.) This gives the white pine a fluffy, feathery appearance. Can you distinguish the white pine from the other types of pine in this planting?

RAINBOW SPRINGS LAKE EASTERN LANDING

Here we get our first glimpse of Rainbow Springs Lake. The lake home to panfish, largemouth bass, and northern pike. It has a maximum depth of 16 feet with over 60% of the lake under three feet deep. It has 1.1 miles of shoreline. Note the sandy shoreline. As you walk along the lakeshore, look for sand, clay, gravel, and muck soils.

HOGAN LAKE

Hogan Lake is an 8 acre lake with a maximum depth of 3 feet. It is situated to the northeast of Rainbow Springs Lake. It has a marl basin which is quite unusual for this location. Marls are soft muds made of calcium carbonate and often with abundant shells. Marl is usually gray white to brown in color. Can you see marl at the water's edge?

LICHEN ON TREES

There are approximately 800 species of lichen in Wisconsin. A lichen is a symbiotic compound organism composed of an alga growing inside a fungus. They contain no vascular tissue so they tend to be small. They are dormant when dry, but rapidly change color and grow when wet. Many lichen can be identified in the field, but most others can only be identified in the laboratory using microscopic and chemical characters.

There are three types of lichens:

Crustose: thin, paint-like tissue tightly attached to the substrate. Crustose species often range 10-30 mm across.

Foliose: large, leaf-like tissues free of the substrate. Patches of these range from 10 – 30 cm across depending on age and species.

Fruticose: three-dimensional complex (one or two parts) tissues. Individual thalli are 1-4 cm in size, but colonies can range up to half a meter to a meter in area.

What type of lichen do you see?

DRY PRAIRIE

Note the composition of the exposed soil on this hill. It is a gravelly glacial deposit. The soil is poor for growing but can support a dry prairie. Here you will find dry prairie plants such as little bluestem, hoary vervain, and dyer's weed goldenrod. Dyer's weed goldenrod is an eastern North American herb whose yellow flowers can be used in dyeing.

BEACH BEYOND THE ASPHALT

Here you can find sandbar willow, a common shrub willow that spreads aggressively and forms large clones. Sandbar willow plant provides shelter for game birds and food for deer.

Note the plants growing in the cracks of the asphalt including the wildflower dyer's weed goldenrod and the weed knapweed. Nature finds a way.

MILKWEED PATCH

Common milkweed is a supermarket of food for over 450 insect species. It is one of the most important food sources for Monarch caterpillars. Milkweeds contain a substance that make it toxic to most insects and animals. Monarchs are an exception. By eating milkweed they become somewhat toxic—a great defense against predators.

RAINBOW SPRINGS LAKE SOUTHERN LANDING

Look across the lake. Can you locate the pine planting you walked through? What else do you see? Can you feel a breeze? What do you hear? Close your eyes and listen. Take a deep breath. Enjoy nature.

Prepared by the
Mukwonago Community Library,
511 Division Street, Mukwonago, WI
262-363-6411 ~ mukwonagolibrary.org
October 2020

Birders' Checklist

- _____ Black-capped Chickadee
- _____ Blue Jay
- _____ Great Blue Heron
- _____ Hairy Woodpecker
- _____ Mourning Dove
- _____ Northern Cardinal
- _____ Red-winged Blackbird
- _____ Song Sparrow
- _____ White-breasted Nuthatch

GIANT OAK

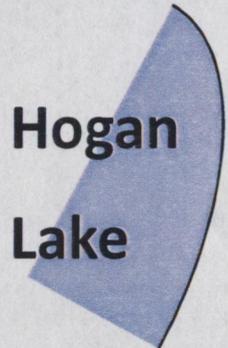
The Mukwonago River Unit hosts three kinds of Oak: Bur, White and Black. Note the giant oak on the left side of the road. Find an acorn and identify the oak: bur oak has a acorn 1-2" long and, cap has a hairy edge and covers more than the upper half of the nut; white oak as a acorn 1/2 -1 1/2" long, cap cover upper third of the nut; black oak has a acorn 3/4" long, almost as wide as long, thin black vertical lines on the hull, cap covers the upper half of the nut.

END OF THE ROAD

You have passed through a canopy of great oaks. This is the official end of this nature walk. Will you retrace your steps back to the parking lot or adventure on and explore more of the KMSFSU-Mukwonago River Unit?



Map not to scale.



Hogan Lake
craft landing
N042 51.011'
W088 24.929'

To old golf course and
building foundationS

Dry prairie
N042 50.908'
W088 24.909'

Milkweed patch
N042 50.843'
W088 25.031'

End of oak lined road
N042 50.811'
W088 24.850'

Giant Oak
N042 50.846'
W088 24.950'

Rainbow Springs Lake
southern landing
N042 50.825'
W088 25.068'

Beach beyond asphalt
N042 50.879'
W088 24.998'

Lichen on trees
N042 50.962'
W088 24.877'

Rainbow Springs Lake
eastern landing
N042 51.009'
W088 25.009'

Pine planting
N042 51.172'
W088 25.076'

Bridge over the
Mukwonago River
N042 51.335'
W088 25.092'

Parking—START HERE
N042 51.406'
W088 25.076'

Rainbow Springs Lake

October is a great month to get outside and enjoy nature. Take a walk on the wild side through the Mukwonago River Unit of the Kettle Moraine State Forest-Southern Unit. Your trek will take you alongside Rainbow Springs Lake, through a dry prairie, and into an oak forest. On your adventure you will see cattails and lily pads, discover lichens, and identify oaks. You will come to appreciate the wonders of this stellar wetland habitat. Go play outside!

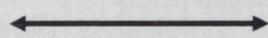
In case of emergency dial 911.

DNR contacts:

KMSFSU-MRU: 262-594-6204
Property supervisor: 262-470-6952
General information: 1-888-936-7463
Violation hotline: 1-800-847-9367

S103 W33599 County Road LO,
Mukwonago, WI 53149
Open 6:00 am-11:00 pm year-round

To Mukwonago



Highway LO - - - - Highway LO



To Eagleville