

Rich Shrub Fen

Fens are rare wetlands created by the outflowing of mineral rich, alkaline water that has flowed through glacially deposited sands and gravels. Shrubs usually dominate the stands with over 50 percent cover. Tall shrubs include speckled alder, black chokeberry, silky dogwood, red-osier dogwood, willows, and nannyberry. Low shrubs include alder-leaved buckthorn and poison sumac. Trees, such as red maple or tamarack, may be present as saplings or stunted trees. Characteristic herbs include interior sedge, porcupine sedge, sterile sedge, tussock sedge, prairie sedge, cotton grass, purple avens, swamp thistle, soft-stemmed bulrush, and ferns such as royal fern and marsh fern.

Fen communities have meadows dominated by different mosses than bogs. However, sphagnum moss, the naturally acidic moss of bogs, can also grow on the alkaline surfaces of fens, and these sphagnum mounds can maintain acidic bog species within the generally alkaline fen seepages.

Many of the region's rare and endangered plants, such as showy lady's slipper, yellow lady's slipper, shrubby cinquefoil, and bayberry are restricted to fens. These include "Ice Age relics," northern plants left behind by retreating glaciers.

Fens are habitat for the uncommon gray petaltail dragonfly and the rare two-spotted skipper butterfly. One can also see red-bellied snakes and birds such as alder flycatcher, cedar waxwing, common yellow-throat, and northern waterthrush.

Where to Go

- ☞ Gott Fen State Nature Preserve (access by permit only) (Portage County, OH)
- ☞ J. Arthur Herrick State Nature Preserve of The Nature Conservancy (Portage County, OH)
- ☞ McCoy State Nature Preserve and North Kingsville Sand Barrens of the Cleveland Museum of Natural History (access by permit only) (Ashtabula County, OH)
- ☞ Pennsylvania State Game Land 109 (Erie County, PA)
- ☞ Pennsylvania State Game Land 197 (Warren County, PA)
- ☞ Pymatuning State Park (Crawford County, PA)
- ☞ Wattsburg Fen, Western Pennsylvania Conservancy (Erie County, PA)

Note that some of these areas have restricted access to protect fragile habitats.



Grass of parnassus



Smaller fringed gentian



Northern waterthrush



Showy lady's slipper



Spreading globeflower



Small purple-fringed orchid