

ROSS COASTAL PLAIN MARSH PRESERVE

Out of Place and Right at Home

The Nature
Conservancy 
Michigan

**LOCATION:**

Southwest Michigan



SIZE: 1,448 acres

**TRAIL LENGTH:**

5.3-mile loop



DIFFICULTY: Easy

**AUDIO TOUR AVAILABLE:**

Get the insider's view of this preserve with a free self-guided tour on the TravelStorys app! To learn more, visit nature.org/miexplore.



©Chake Maynard/TNC

What's so rare about coastal plain marshes? The Ross Preserve's coastal plain marshes host several plants that are rare in Michigan—with fun names like globe-fruited seedbox and netted nutrush—but these habitats are common along the Atlantic or Gulf coasts. So how did they end up here, hundreds of miles from the nearest ocean? They flew, of course!

When migratory birds return north, they bring souvenirs with them—seeds from the Atlantic and Gulf coasts that cling to their feathers and take root here. Over time, this has created the coastal plain marsh habitat unique to the Great Lakes. Out of the 42 coastal plain marshes in Michigan, The Nature Conservancy's (TNC's) Ross Preserve boasts three of the highest quality.

But that's not all you can find at the Ross Preserve, which is located less than a mile from Lake Michigan. Visitors have several trail loops to choose from, in which you can encounter wet meadows, sand dunes, wooded inland dunes, small lakes and northern hardwood forests.

The Ross Preserve sits within one of the last remaining stretches of northern hardwoods in southwest Michigan, which is why you may see signs of forest restoration in action, as TNC removes patches of former red pine plantation and plants climate-resilient native trees. This will help maintain the area's forest legacy in a changing climate.



©Ellie Scholtz/TNC

The evergreen eastern hemlocks on the Ross Preserve provide winter cover and food sources for wildlife, while protecting cold-water streams for fish. Unfortunately, this tree is threatened by a tiny invasive pest called hemlock woolly adelgid. A network of West Michigan partners is working to control the spread of this insect and protect our coastal forests.

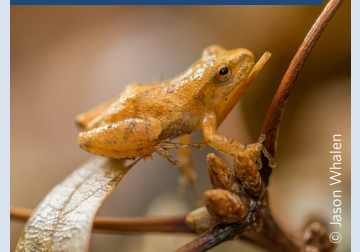
YOU SHOULD VISIT IF...

You love treasure hunting! The Ross Preserve's hidden geocache offers a great activity for preserve explorers. Visit geocaching.com to set up a free account and start the hunt on site using a smartphone or GPS device.

Of course, there are many natural treasures to discover as well, including a diverse array of plant life, from the carnivorous round-leaved sundew to the ephemeral spring beauty. Spring also turns the Ross Preserve into a birder's paradise.

Some of the wildlife you might spot include:

- Eastern box turtle
- Blanchard's cricket frog
- Red fox
- Great horned owl
- Belted kingfisher
- Cerulean warbler

BLANCHARD'S CRICKET FROG

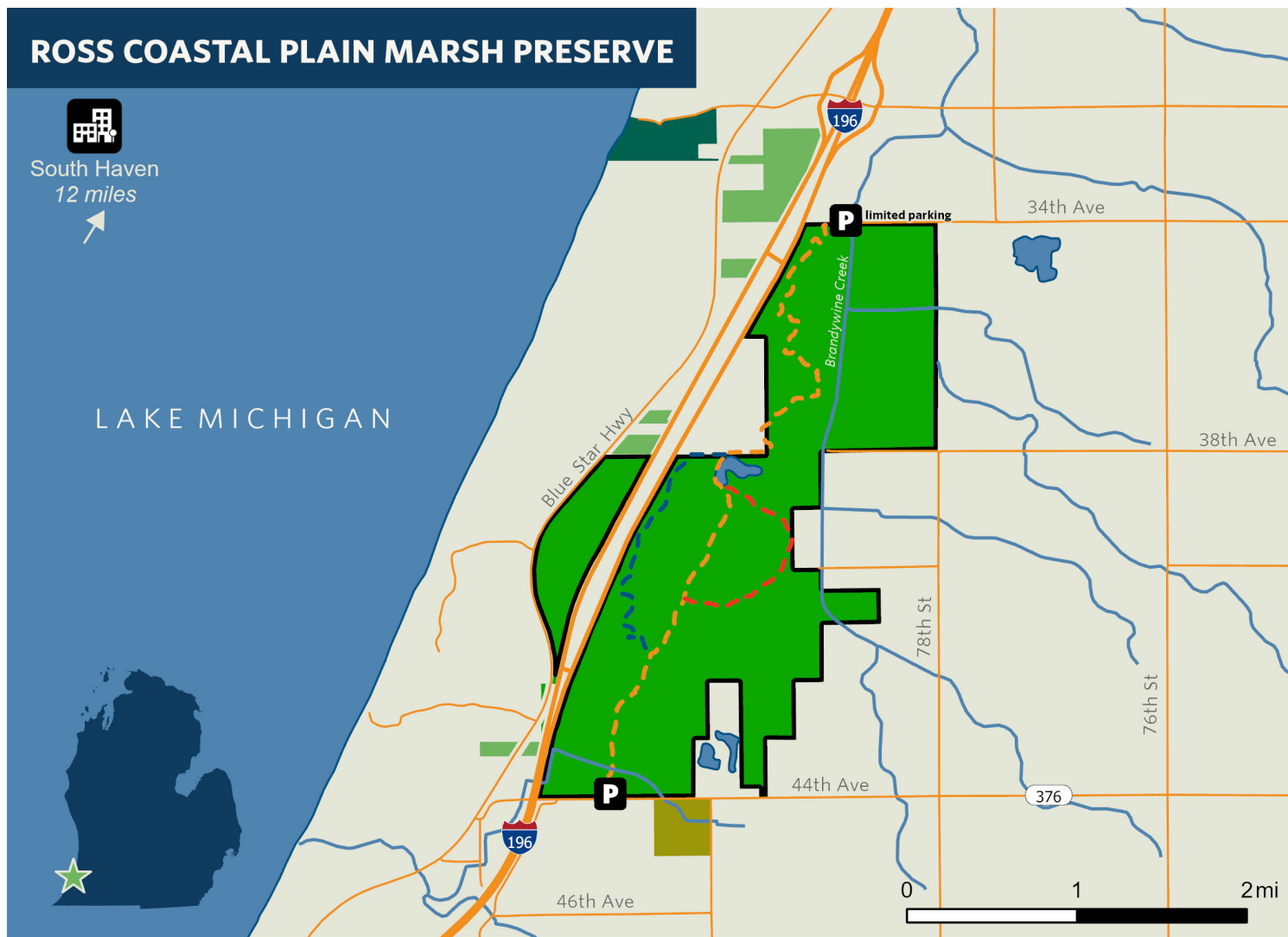
© Jason Whalen

CERULEAN WARBLER

© TNC

TNC purchased the first section of the Ross Preserve from Lake Michigan College in 1989. It was donated to Lake Michigan College in the 1960s by the **Ross family**, after decades of use as a family retreat. Alton Ross, who purchased it in the 1920s, was a lover of the outdoors who wanted this property to remain a sanctuary for wildlife. The remnants of the family's lodge are still visible on the southwestern shore of Mud Lake.

ROSS COASTAL PLAIN MARSH PRESERVE



LEGEND

- | | | |
|-----------------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|
| Ross Coastal Plain Marsh Preserve | Covert Township Park | Orange Trail - 3.6 mi |
| Southwest MI Land Conservancy | Parking Area | Blue Trail - 1.4 mi |
| Barvick's Sand Dune Preserve | | Red Trail - 1 mi |



HOW TO GET THERE

Directions from St. Joseph, MI: Head north on I-196. Parking is available in two locations:

North Parking: Take Exit 13 off of I-196 and head east (right) on County Road 378. Turn south (right) on 77 1/2 St, then west (right) on 34th Ave. Continue to the end of 34th Ave, where parking is available on the south side of the road.

South Parking: Take Exit 7 off of I-196 and head west on Hagar Shore Road. Turn north (right) onto Blue Star Highway, and go about 2.5 miles. Turn east (right again) on County Road 376/44th Avenue. Go about 0.5 miles and turn north (left) into the dirt driveway opposite the "Dune Lake Campground" sign. Park near the locked vehicle gate, where the trail begins.

MAKE TODAY A NATURE DAY!

Nearby points of interest include:

- Van Buren State Park, 8 mi
- Pilgrim Haven Natural Area, 8 mi: swmlc.org
- Sarett Nature Center, 10 mi: sarett.org
- Grand Mere State Park, 23 mi
- Saugatuck Harbor Natural Area, 32 mi: saugatuckcity.com
- Warren Dunes State Park, 32 mi
- Paw Paw Prairie Fen Preserve, 40 mi: nature.org/miexplore
- Lodging, food and more: michiganbeachtowns.com

TIPS FOR A GREAT VISIT

- The Ross Preserve is open year-round. Visitors can enjoy hiking, birdwatching, snowshoeing and cross-country skiing.
- 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.
- Bring insect repellent in the warmer months.
- Please leave pets at home.
- No camping or fires permitted.
- Please follow the rules posted at the preserve and online at nature.org/miexplore.

Thanks for your help protecting the land, water and wildlife of this special place!