



Making Observations: Ecoregion Appendix

INTRODUCTION

Ecoregions are defined as a geographical area within which the biotic (living) and abiotic (nonliving) components of the ecosystems exhibit relatively similar patterns in comparison to that of other areas. The United States Environmental Protection Agency defines and delegates ecoregions, which are important for structuring and implementing natural resource management practices.

Defining characteristics of ecoregions include: fauna (wildlife), flora (plants), climate, soils, geology, and topography. Biodiversity varies across ecoregions due to both human and environmental factors. Some human caused impacts on biodiversity include exploitation of species, habitat loss, introduction of invasive species, and climate change. These factors can lead to a decrease in biodiversity and the sustainability of communities.

Environmental factors can also impact the biodiversity of regions. Picture an arctic tundra. Now picture a tropical rainforest. While these are two dramatically different examples, they vary across important environmental drivers of biodiversity including temperature and rainfall. Areas that are warmer and more wet can support more primary producers and create more ecological niches. Different species can coexist in the same habitat by occupying different niches. An ecoregion in Wisconsin that has greater soil, plant, structural, and microclimate diversity is likely to have high diversity of available niches, and thus a higher number of species to occupy those niches.

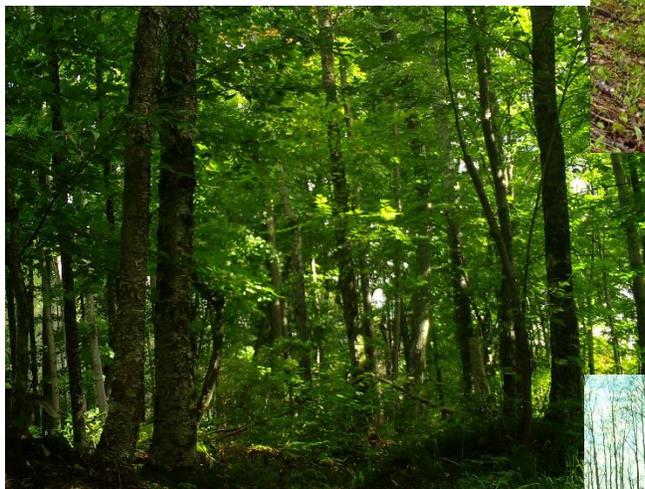


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NORTHERN LAKES AND FORESTS

The Northern Lakes and Forests ecoregion covers the northern portion of the Wisconsin and is characterized by coniferous and hardwood forests. Forest species include maple, basswood, aspen, spruce, and white pine. This ecoregion tends to have shorter growing seasons, colder summers, and greater snowfall than ecoregions further south. Due to these characteristics, in addition to its nutrient poor glacial soil, agriculture is uncommon in this region. Rivers, streams, and lakes are widespread.

Bears captured on Snapshot Wisconsin camera in Sawyer County →



← Example of Northern Lakes and Forests habitat

Elk captured on Snapshot Wisconsin camera in Sawyer County →





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SOUTHERN WISCONSIN TILL PLAINS

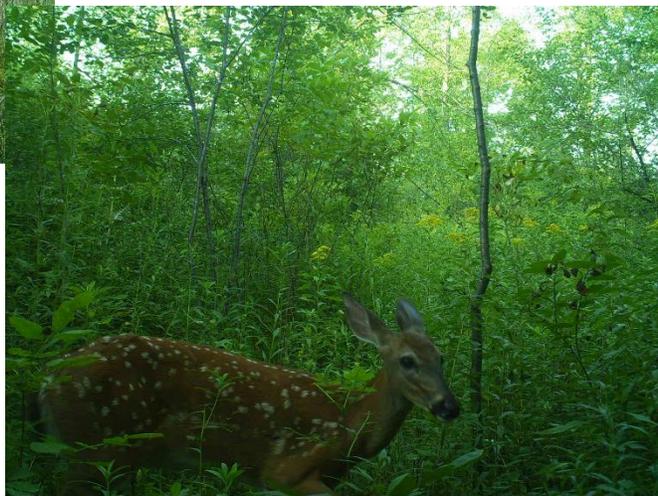
The Southern Wisconsin Till Plains covers the southeastern part of the state and supports a mosaic of vegetation types, from hardwoods and oak savannahs to the west and tall grass prairies to the east. The Southern Wisconsin Till Plains has less native communities and is composed primarily of crop land – mostly forage and feed grains to support dairy operations. Compared to other ecoregions, there are fewer lakes and flatter topography.

Turkey captured on Snapshot Wisconsin camera in Racine County →



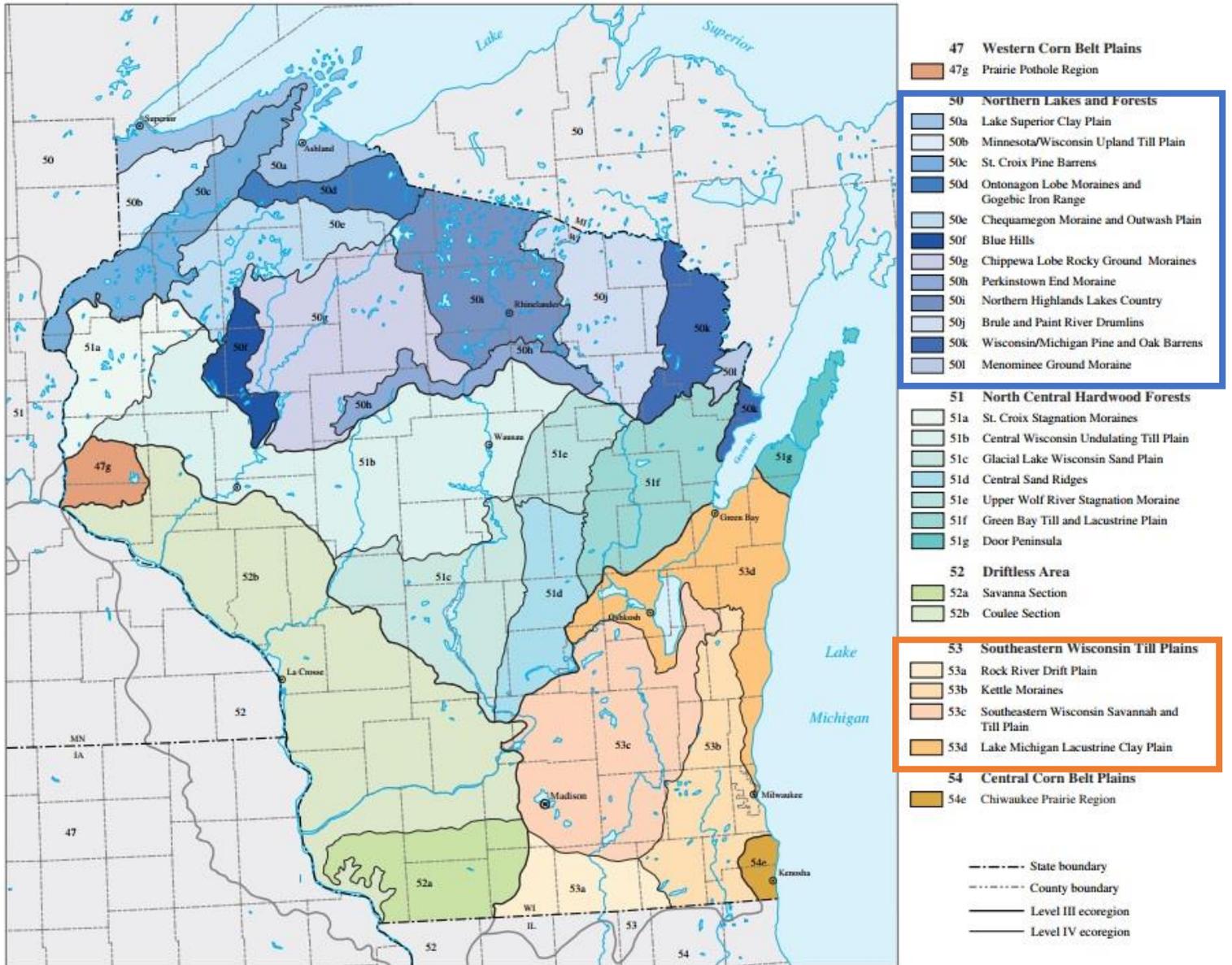
← Example of Southern Wisconsin Till Plains habitat

Fawn captured on Snapshot Wisconsin camera in Milwaukee County →





Level III and IV Ecoregions of Wisconsin



Wisconsin ecoregion map prepared by the United States Environmental Protection Agency

*For clarity, legend shades referring to Northern Lakes and Forest are encompassed by a blue box, Southern Wisconsin Till Plains by an orange box.

For a more in depth look at Wisconsin ecoregions, search keyword "Wisconsin Ecoregions" at wi.dnr.gov and follow the first link (https://dnr.wi.gov/topic/surfacewater/datasets/omernik_eco/).