



# Untouched

Research Natural Areas help preserve unique environments in the Hiawatha National Forest

The fens of the proposed Shingleton Bog RNA are a unique habitat home to many rare and endangered species. *Photo courtesy of The Nature Conservancy*

*Hiawatha National Forest* - Today, it is difficult anywhere – including the wild Upper Peninsula of Michigan (UP) – that has not at one time absorbed a human footprint. Over the centuries, the UP has served as a rich, diverse source for natural resources of all sorts. Extensive logging, mining and hunting, however, have had an undeniable effect on the ecology of unique areas in the region. To measure this effect and preserve these distinctive areas, it is sometimes necessary to let the land grow wild and untamed by human intervention.

The US Forest Service (USFS) and other agencies establish Research Natural Areas (RNA) on sites that contain important ecological and scientific values that can be managed for minimum human disturbance. There are over 450 designated RNAs nationwide. In the Upper Peninsula of Michigan, the USFS hopes to preserve and protect the unique ecology of several RNAs, while providing an area that scientists and educators can use to carry out research.

Two examples of candidate RNAs in the Hiawatha National Forest are Scott's Marsh (1,538 acres) and Shingleton Bog (3,366 acres), both located in Schoolcraft County. As two excellent examples of a patterned fen peatland, a wetland complex that can include many rare and endangered plant species, and are often visited and studied by university classes.



A Forest Service volunteer monitors plants at Shingleton Bog. *Photo Courtesy of Deb LeBlanc/USDA Forest Service*

More information can be found [Here](#) or at <https://www.nrs.fs.fed.us/rna/>

However, indiscriminate rare plant hunting has led to damage in the marsh. Shingleton Bog is the only known location in Michigan where the rare dwarf raspberry can be found. The area provides habitat for the northern harrier, American bittern, moose, and gray wolf.



The ruffed grouse is one of the bird species that calls Scott's Marsh home. *Photo Courtesy of the USDA Forest Service*

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While preservation of rare species is important, these preserved areas also serve a crucial function for researchers throughout the state. Researchers use untouched areas in RNAs as a benchmark to measure long-term ecological changes and as a control area to measure ecological changes in unprotected areas. These areas are critical to analyzing the effect of human interaction on natural areas around the state.

In a world where climate change is at the forefront of scientific concern, analyzing the long-term effects of human interaction and preserving areas for rare species and scientific research has never been more important. Research Natural Areas in the UP like Shingleton Bog and Scott's Marsh are crucial in a region of the world where wilderness can still be found.