

peatland

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RECREATION

hiking, wildlife observation and/or photography

WHERE IS IT FOUND?

Peatlands can be found in the northeastern corner of Illinois. The best example is in Volo Bog State Natural Area in Lake County. This state natural area contains Illinois' only open-water quaking bog. Originally a 50-acre lake, Volo Bog began filling with plant material 6,000 years ago. Today, cattails and sedges grow along the outer edge while a floating mat of sphagnum moss encircles the water. As the moss dies and decomposes, it builds a layer of peat. This floating mat supports rooted plants like leatherleaf, winterberry and tamarack.

CHARACTERISTICS

A peatland has highly acidic soils and water due to its restricted drainage and an abundance of sphagnum moss. The soils are saturated throughout the growing season in most years. Peatlands were originally lakes formed by the action of glaciers. Over time the lakes began to fill in with dead plant material. Because the acidic water will kill many bacterial species, few bacteria live here and decomposition is very slow. As plants die and sink to the bottom they provide more substrate for other plants to grow in. A floating mat of vegetation is commonly found around the edge of a peatland. Walking on this floating mat gives one the experience of "quaking" or moving earth. Without disturbance, a peatland eventually reverts to dry land.

WHAT LIVES HERE?

A good variety of animals and plants may be found in a peatland. The plants include many unique species such as orchids, tamarack and the carnivorous pitcher-plant. Herbaceous plants are common around open water sections. Shrubs and/or small trees may be found where the soil is firmer.