

MICHIGAN ISLANDS NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

The Michigan Islands National Wildlife Refuge consists of three small islands—two in Lake Michigan and one in Lake Huron, totaling 12 acres. Shoe and Pismire Islands are part of the Beaver Island group in Charlevoix County in northern Lake Michigan.

Scarecrow Island is located in Thunder Bay of Lake Huron in Alpena County. The three islands were constituted in 1947 as the Michigan Islands National Wildlife Refuge by public land order as a refuge and breeding ground for migratory birds.

Though seldom visited by man, these islands have considerable ecological significance. Preservation for research and observation by future generations is in itself sufficient justification for designation of these primitive islands as wilderness.

Shoe Island is a gravel bar devoid of trees or shrubs, but supporting cinquefoil, scattered clumps of grass and other types of volunteer vegetation. The heavily shoaled waters and difficulty of access result in isolation of the island from human disturbance, making it an attractive area for herring gulls and ring-billed gulls which nest on barren gravel areas. Especially significant is the nesting area which Shoe Island affords for the Caspian tern—one of the few sites used by the Caspian tern in the whole of north-central North America. Though it is distributed around the globe, this species—the largest of the terns—is rarely seen in the interior of North America because it depends upon such isolated nesting sites as this.

Pismire Island is somewhat larger and rises further above lake level. Thus it harbors a more complex vegetation, with trees and shrubs, and provides habitat for additional wildlife species such as mallards and red-breasted mergansers.

Scarecrow Island, sheltered in Thunder Bay, is the largest of the three and has considerable tree and shrub cover. Great blue herons and cormorants use the trees as nesting sites, while gulls use the gravel shore areas. Three small inland potholes attract ducks and shorebirds.

The differing elevation of these islands above lake level produces a range of contrasting environmental types. The islands thus offer graphic and contrasting examples of the effects of tides, elevation, and vegetation on such exposed sites. The rapid development and disturbance which is occurring on surrounding islands, especially in the Lake Michigan Beaver Island group, make the strongest possible protection an urgent matter if these important scientific and research opportunities are to be preserved.

Small islands of this kind, which are difficult to reach, are not yet exposed to intensive recreational use. Small and isolated as they are, the quiet and solitude of these rugged, windswept, and wave-battered islands offer an excellent wilderness experience to those willing to visit them. This value should be protected by wilderness designation and by careful administration of the area. All public use, however, must be regulated by the Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife so as to avoid interference with the resident birdlife during breeding seasons and to assure that the sensitive island environments remain undisturbed.

These pristine islands will add importantly to the variety of habitats and opportunities which the wilderness system endeavors to save for this and future generations.