

# ESTUARIES & COASTAL WETLANDS OF LAKE SUPERIOR

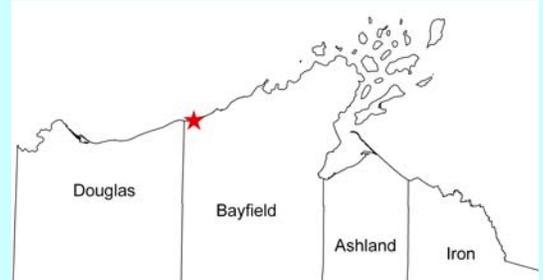
## Reefer Creek Mouth

Approximate Size: 5 acres\*

Ownership: Private

Year Last Surveyed by WDNR/NHI: 2012

GLCWC Classification: Barred Drowned River Mouth



Photos by Amy Staffen

### *Site Description*

Reefer Creek is a Cool (Cold Transition) Headwater stream that flows through a deep ravine before entering Lake Superior approximately 6 miles west of Port Wing. Cool (Cold-Transition) Headwaters are small streams with cold to cool summer temperatures. A wide sand barrier constrains Reefer Creek as it enters Lake Superior, connecting a small Great Lakes Dune community on one side and a tiny Alder Thicket on the other. The channel is 40- to 50-feet wide with no braids or islands near the mouth. Dune grass (*Ammophila breviligulata*) dominates the dune community, along with non-native invasive plants such as common tansy (*Tanacetum vulgare*), white sweet clover (*Melilotus alba*), and yellow sweet clover (*M. officinalis*). Submergent aquatic vegetation is lacking, and only small patches of graminoids line the channel, including dark-green bulrush (*Scirpus atrovirens*), tussock sedge (*Carex stricta*), retrorse sedge (*C. retrorsa*), and lake sedge (*C. lacustris*). These sedges and bulrushes quickly give way to narrow bands of low-quality Alder Thicket on either side of the river upstream. The uplands adjacent to the creek are used for low-density residential homes, recreation, and timber management.

\*Area includes creek mouth, lower creek, and associated wetlands.

## *Threats*

Non-native invasive plants noted here include common tansy, yellow sweet clover, white sweet clover, queen-of-the-meadow (*Filipendula ulmaria*), and Canada thistle (*Cirsium arvense*). The proximity of this site to Highway 13 may result in degradation of wetland and aquatic resources due to pollution (e.g., runoff laden with sediment, road salt), increased water temperatures and thus lower dissolved oxygen levels (from heated water runoff in summer), and disruption of ecosystem and habitat continuity. Across the Lake Superior clay plain, water quality and wetland function are known to be adversely affected by open lands (e.g., developed land, agriculture, young forest) and positively affected by older forests and conifers. Land use analysis of the watershed and associated water quality monitoring could facilitate better understanding of this site's aquatic and wetland resources. For example, past dairy farming in the upper part of the watershed where cattle were allowed access to the stream has caused erosion and sedimentation.

## *Additional Comments*

The Lake Superior Binational Program identified this stream as important to the integrity of the Lake Superior ecosystem for coastal wetlands and fish and wildlife spawning and nursery grounds. (The creek supports a self-sustaining trout population three miles upstream; the lower creek is degraded and only supports a forage fishery.)

## *Abbreviations and Helpful References*

GLCWC - Great Lakes Coastal Wetland Classification.- [http://glc.org/wetlands/pdf/wetlands-class\\_rev1.pdf](http://glc.org/wetlands/pdf/wetlands-class_rev1.pdf)

Lake Superior Binational Program - <http://www.epa.gov/glnpo/lakesuperior/>

WDNR Coastal Wetlands webpages - <http://dnr.wi.gov>, Keyword: "coastal wetlands"

WDNR/NHI - Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, Natural Heritage Inventory Program.  
<http://dnr.wi.gov> , Keyword: "natural heritage"

"Managing Woodlands on Lake Superior's Red Clay Plain" - WDNR publication #PUB-FR-385 2007.  
<http://dnr.wi.gov>, Keyword: "bmp landowner guides"



Amy Staffen

A wide sand barrier constrains Reefer Creek's mouth.

## *Suggested Citation*

A. Staffen, K. Doyle, and R. O'Connor. 2012. Site Description for Reefer Creek Mouth. Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. Madison, WI. <http://dnr.wi.gov>, Keyword: "coastal wetland reefer creek"



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