

# Messalonskee Lake Marsh

Belgrade

## Description

Messalonskee Lake Marsh is a large emergent wetland at the south end of Messalonskee Lake (Snow Pond), where Belgrade Stream flows into the lake. It is best known as one of only a dozen nesting sites in Maine for the black tern. Terns have been documented here since 1946 (the first state record), making this a very well established colony, as well as consistently one of the largest.

The marsh vegetation includes extensive Cat-tail Marsh vegetation, dominated by cat-tail, bluejoint grass, rushes, meadowsweet, and pickerelweed. (Shrubby areas at the southern extremity of the marsh may be a different community type; these have not been investigated.) The vegetation is patchy, with cat-tails prominent in some areas and shrubs, grasses, and sedges in other portions. Despite its large size, the marsh is not considered an exemplary natural community in itself because it developed after the lake was dammed and the water level raised many decades ago<sup>1</sup>. However, it does provide excellent habitat for black terns and other wetland-dependent birds. Least bitterns and stinkpot turtles (state special concern species) have been seen here regularly.



Bald eagles have been documented as nesting in the area since 1995, with two alternate nest sites. A small islet supported nesting eagles from 1995 – 1998, and an alternate site

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<sup>1</sup> Source: A Belgrade Town Report from a year in the 1990s; historical note at the back of the report.

in woodlands along the lakeshore has been occupied since. The eagle habitat here is considered a moderate priority from a statewide perspective, but somewhat higher than that if one considers only central Maine. The nearest known eagle nests are on the Kennebec River about 5 miles east and on Androscoggin Lake some 15 miles west.

A recent and unwelcome find here (in Belgrade Stream and the boat channel from the landing to the open lake) is the variable water-milfoil, *Myriophyllum heterophyllum*. This aggressive aquatic plant is currently known from about a dozen sites in Maine, this one being the furthest north. It has the potential to spread vigorously and crowd out other native aquatic plants that contribute to the habitat diversity here.

*Rare Species and Natural Communities Summary Table*

Common Name	Latin Name	EO Rank	Global Rank	State Rank
Black Tern	<i>Chlidonias niger</i>	E	G4	S2B
Bald Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus leucocephalus</i>	E	G4	S4B
Stinkpot	<i>Sternotherus odoratus</i>	E	G5	S3

*Other Resources Mapped by MDIFW*

The marsh and adjacent Belgrade Stream is mapped as Wading Bird / Waterfowl Habitat. A bald eagle nest site occurs on a small outcrop of land at the northeast edge of the marsh in Messalonskee Lake.

*Protection Status*

The Department of Conservation maintains a public boat launch for Messalonskee Lake at the site. It receives moderate to heavy use in both summer and winter. The remainder of the marsh is privately owned. An active railroad track bisects the marsh on its northwestern edge.

*Conservation Considerations*

A primary conservation need is to maintain adequate wetland buffers. The adjacent uplands are in agricultural and light residential use. At a minimum, standard shoreland zoning provisions should be followed.

Efforts in the Belgrade Lakes watershed to maintain water quality will be important to the future of this site. Messalonskee Lake is the furthest downstream of all of the Belgrade Lakes, and at least some of the lakes are in “priority watersheds”, considered at risk for further water quality degradation.

The extent of the variable water-milfoil population should be monitored every 1-3 years. Clean boat-trailing at the boat launch site is very important to minimize the spread of

this noxious species to other lakes; this will require outreach and perhaps on-site monitoring.

Conservation easements and/or fee acquisition would be appropriate land protection vehicles here, but are probably secondary to efforts to maintain or improve the water quality within the watershed.