

MARAIS TEMPS CLAIR CONSERVATION AREA

Bill Rowe, fall 2020

918 acres St. Charles Co. Delorme 41, B-6

Owned by MDC; for additional information go to

<https://nature.mdc.mo.gov/discover-nature/places/marais-temps-clair-conservation-area>

Directions: A bit complicated. From the east, you reach the north entry by taking MO-94 west from its starting point on US-67 just south of Riverlands. Go about 10 miles; pass the intersection with county road H and continue west on 94 another 7+ miles; the signed entry and small parking lot are on your left. To reach the other three entries, turn south on H and proceed over the train tracks to the first intersection, with Mertz Road on the left; turn right there and follow Powers Road, which changes its name to become Island Road as it approaches a large wooded area (which is MTC) and bends left (southwest) along the edge of the area. Find the three entries using the area map at the above web address. Either side can also be accessed by driving northeast from St. Charles; consult a map.

Overview: Marais Temps Clair (French for “Fair Weather Marsh”) was historically part of an old oxbow wetland, cut off long ago from the Missouri River and in private hands for decades as a duck club. In 1979, 900+ acres were acquired by the Missouri Department of Conservation and developed for hunting, fishing, and “passive” activities like wildlife viewing. It is low-lying, flat land, divided into sections (“pools”) whose water levels can be managed, with some of them dry at times and some wooded sections. A network of levees topped with flat gravel paths outlines these sections and provides hiking access to the whole area. To the northeast is another piece of the old marsh that remains private; other than that, all of the surrounding countryside consists of open agricultural fields, making MTC an island of habitat in a “corn and soybean desert.”

Conditions: The entire area must be walked—not a difficult task, just a total of many miles around the levees. Fortunately, as described above, there are four entry points where you can park and make in-and-out walks of any length you wish, or longer loops; one of these is on the north boundary, off highway 94, and the other three are along the southeast boundary. The middle one of these three has an equipment barn, a small mobile headquarters, and a port-a-potty.

Birds: The best source for a bird list nowadays is eBird, where MTC is a “hotspot” with 233 species recorded; visit <https://ebird.org/barchart?r=L283109&yr=all&m=> to see the list (it may not include some that were observed there pre-eBird). Area management focuses on waterfowl, and so good numbers and variety of those are expected, in season. As a byproduct, there are often patches of good marsh habitat, conducive to finding bitterns, gallinules, and rails, and sometimes partial drying will produce the shallow-water-and-mud mixture that shorebirds love. Meanwhile, the stands of willow and some taller trees can be great for breeding birds like Prothonotary Warbler, Yellow-billed Cuckoo, and Willow Flycatcher, as well as passerine migrants, and the weedy, brushy areas can be a haven for sparrows. So the potential is high at most times, although large parts of MTC are closed during waterfowl season, October to February.

Toilets: One port-a-potty at the middle entry and parking lot along the southeast boundary.

Camping: None.

Hazards/Limitations: As in most CA's, some hunting is permitted, and so you need to be aware of the various legal seasons, e.g., dove, waterfowl, and deer.

Nearby birding sites: Riverlands Migratory Bird Sanctuary, Portage Des Sioux NA (municipal nature area), Hide-A-Way Harbor (St. Charles County Park), Dresser Island Access (part of Upper Mississippi CA), 370 Lakeside Park (municipal park). Note: All these sites are eBird hotspots, with names exactly as given here.