

Barton Nature Area is an 83.6-acre park with wonderfully diverse natural features. Prairie, emergent marshland, wet meadows, old field (former farmland), and mesic (moist) forest areas are home to large numbers of plants, birds, butterflies and many other species.

The majority of Barton is very flat, which is one reason why it was historically used as farmland. The southern border of Barton is a circular bend in the Huron River, called an "oxbow." An oxbow is created when a river's current cuts into its outer bank over time, forming a curved shape that resembles a collar worn by oxen.

In 1912, a dam was built on the Huron River that produced electricity for the Detroit Edison company. In the mid-1960s, the City of Ann Arbor purchased the area and the dam to create Barton Nature Area, yet continued to sell the electricity to the company. Barton is the only dam in Ann Arbor still used for energy production.

Natural Communities of Barton Nature Area

A great diversity of natural plant communities makes Barton an ideal home for a large variety of animal species, and thus an amazing location to observe nature.

Plants

A number of eye-catching plant species inhabit Barton, including the locally uncommon wild senna. This large plant can be spotted easily in the wet shrubland area, standing up to six feet tall and crowned with large clusters of brilliant yellow flowers. Another unique plant is the leafy skunk cabbage, found near the southeast foot-bridge. Its leaves give off an unpleasant odor when crushed, and its flowers emit enough heat in the springtime to melt the snow around it.

In the fall, the old field is one of the best sites in Ann Arbor for observing a variety of asters and goldenrods in bloom, as well as big bluestem grass as it reaches its peak height and color.

Butterflies

Barton is one of the top butterfly spots in Ann Arbor, with 62 species observed to date. A locally rare butterfly, the harvester, makes its home in the mesic forest area, where its carnivorous caterpillar eats aphids off the many alder trees. Due to the wide range of plant communities in Barton, a large number of species can be found, including the striped, banded, and coral hairstreaks; baltimores; giant swallowtails; and numerous skippers.

Birds

Over 80 officially recorded species make Barton an excellent place to see a variety of birds. The American Goldfinch, a year-round resident, is the most abundant species here. However, springtime brings a number of migrant swallows, warblers and sparrows as well as two species of kinglets. Yellow Warblers and Song Sparrows will stay here as some of the more common breeding species. Tree Swallows and Eastern Bluebirds often compete for the nest boxes located in the field area. If observers allow the birds a respectful distance, these boxes provide a nice view of breeding behavior. A sunset walk in early spring is also a sure way to hear the "peent" call of the American Woodcock. In the central open fields, observant walkers may also be lucky enough to catch a glimpse of this long-billed shorebird's aerial pre-nuptial display. During the winter months, a number of ducks and geese can be seen on the Huron River below Barton Dam, as it is often some of the only open water in the area. Common Mergansers, Buffleheads, and Common Golden-eye may be present, along with numerous Canada Geese and Mallards.

Invasive Plants and Natural Area Preservation (NAP)

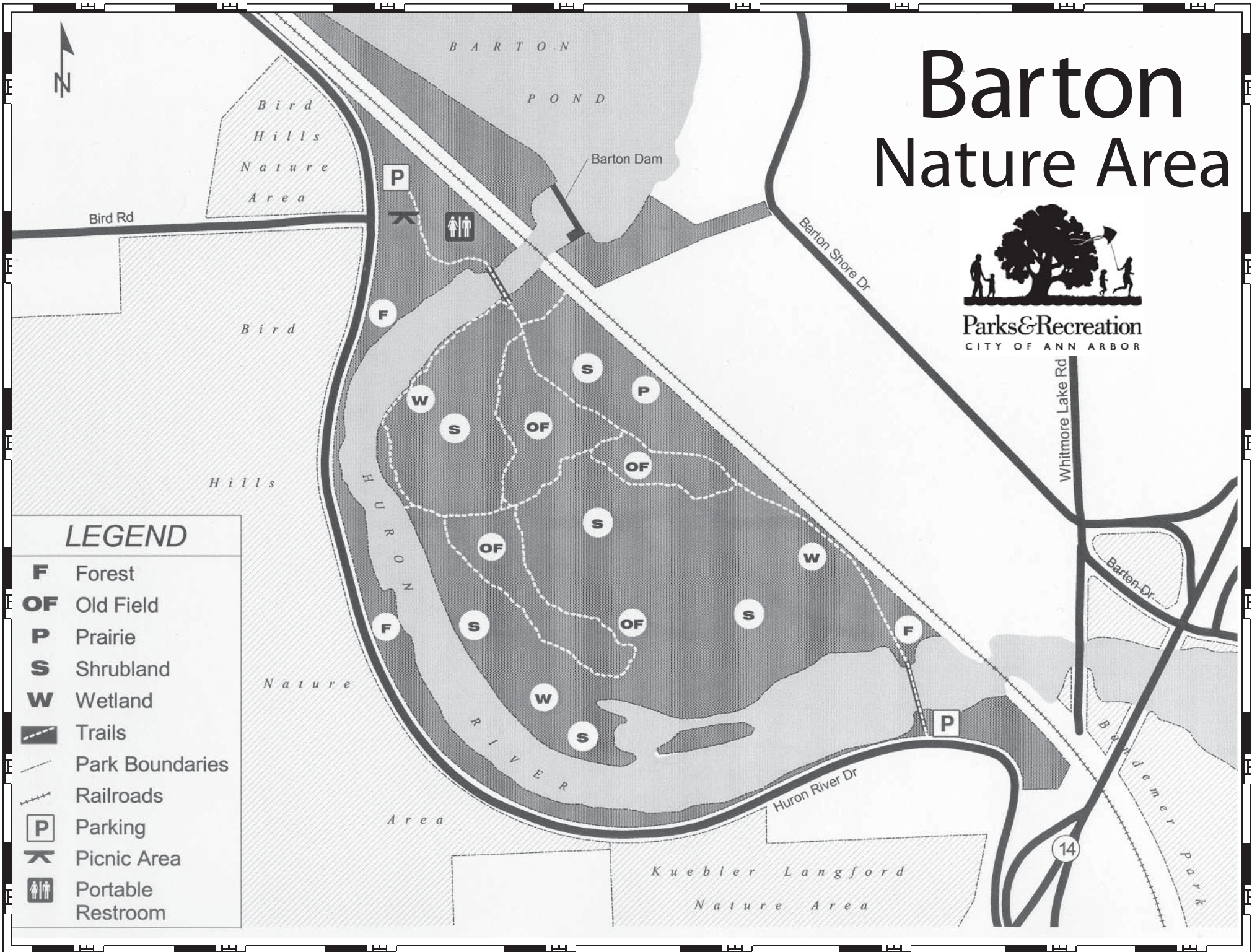
"Invasive plants" are those non-native species that, when introduced into a natural community, take over the habitat and considerably disrupt the ecological balance between species already growing there. For example, the prairie and old field areas that make up most of Barton are susceptible to a few species of invasive shrubs, including buckthorn and honeysuckle.

To help control these species and prevent them from quickly overtaking the native ecosystems, NAP staff conduct ecological burns. Historically, fire occurred regularly in this area, so the native plants have adapted to it very well. While natives can recover quickly from burnings, the invasives that have never adapted to fire cannot. In this way, NAP can use natural means—fire—to help control these unwanted species.

Another way in which NAP deals with invasives is by introducing natural predators of the plants into the area. Galerucella beetles are natural predators of the invasive species purple loosestrife, feeding on it throughout the growing season. Over time, this helps to control the advance of this non-native plant in Barton's wetlands.

For more information, contact
Ann Arbor Parks at (734) 794-6230 or visit
www.a2gov.org/Parks

Barton Nature Area



LEGEND

- F** Forest
- OF** Old Field
- P** Prairie
- S** Shrubland
- W** Wetland
-  Trails
-  Park Boundaries
-  Railroads
-  Parking
-  Picnic Area
-  Portable Restroom