

Official Sunrise Coast Birding Trail Hotspots

Iosco County Sites

1. Shoreline Park - AuSable River Mouth



The southern end of the Sunrise Coast Birding Trail begins here. Located on the east side of US 23 just south of the AuSable River bridge, this mixed woodland and shoreline area offers diverse habitat and bird species. From the “hide”, observe birds feeding at stations. Climb the observation platform along the paved trail and boardwalk leading to the shoreline where Green Herons frequent the small pond below the observation deck. The federally endangered Great Lakes Piping Plovers often nest along this Lake Huron shore. Walk the sugar sand beach north to the break wall. Spring and fall are opportune times to observe migrating waterfowl along the river mouth.

2. Piety Hill Riverwalk



In downtown Oscoda on US 23, turn west onto Dwight street. Follow the road up to the top of the hill. Here a long zig-zagging boardwalk leads down to the AuSable River where numerous waterfowl can be seen along the river. A variety of shrubs and hardwoods along the boardwalk offer great cover and food sources for a number of warblers and thrushes. American Redstarts are abundant during the spring movement.

3. Riverbank Park



Following River Road west from the main light in Oscoda is Riverbank Park. Located on the left just prior to the AuSable River bridge, this small park has several short paved trails and easy access along the river. A variety of conifers, hardwoods, vines, and shrubs offer food, shelter, and nesting habitat for many species. Warblers frequent the area. Woodpeckers, thrushes, and nuthatches thrive here along with many waterfowl along the river. A small bayou at the end of one trail offers seclusion for Blue Herons, Belted Kingfishers and several duck species.

4. Eagle Run



Located two miles west on River Road is Eagle Run. This US Forest Service-managed area contains seven miles of trails in a quiet remote setting. Numerous spring wetland flowers can be seen along the natural-based woodland trails. Various songbirds, Bald Eagles, an occasional owl, thrushes, warblers, and woodpeckers inhabit the area. Numerous waterfowl and wetland species can be viewed along the AuSable River where trails run along the river’s banks. Tundra Swans have been sighted overhead during migration.

5. Foote Site Park & Foote Tailwater Site



The backwaters of Consumers Energy’s AuSable River Foote Dam form this 1,800-acre pond. Located on River Road about 5 miles west of Oscoda, Foote Site Park pulsates with bird life. Trumpeter Swans nest off shore. There are great photo opportunities for filming these and many other aquatic avians. Caspian Terns, Belted Kingfishers, Bald Eagles, Grebes, Blue Herons, Common Loons, and numerous duck species inhabit the pond during the spring and summer breeding seasons. Red-headed woodpeckers frequent the wooded picnic grounds. Several boat launches allow the adventurous bird watcher access to the water for a gentle cruise on the AuSable via kayak, canoe, or boat. The Foote Tailwater Site is on the far side of the dam off Rea Rd. This attracts Bald Eagles, Turkey Vultures, Common Ravens and many river and woodland species.



Trumpeter Swans

6. Clark’s Marsh



Located near the Oscoda/Wurtsmith Airport off Perimeter Rd, this vast wetland has many unpaved woodland trails surrounding it. The serene setting offers an abundance of species including Marsh Wrens, Virginia Rails, Green Herons, Swamp Sparrows, Blue-headed Vireos, and numerous warblers. To access this site, follow Perimeter Rd straight to the edge of the runway. Continue on the pavement and turn left onto the forest trail that parallels the chain link fence. Drive south ¼ mile to the parking area at the end of the trail.

7. Oscoda Airport Grasslands



Just a short distance from Clark’s Marsh is a grassland area next to the airport runway. Road access from the former Wurtsmith Air Force Base makes travel by car or foot easy. During the breeding season Eastern Meadowlark, American Kestrel, Upland Sandpiper, Northern Harrier, Savannah and Grasshopper Sparrows are commonly observed. Spring migrants include the Horned Lark and Vesper Sparrow. The paved road along the grasslands provides excellent views and photo opportunities right from your car. Some areas are restricted, so watch for signs.



Upland Sandpiper

Alcona County Sites

8. Harrisville State Park & DNR Boat Launch Site



Approximately 13 miles north of Oscoda on US 23 is Harrisville State Park. This 107-acre park is a mecca for bird watchers. The heavily wooded pine and cedar habitat, Cedar Run Nature Trail, hosts a variety of warblers, nuthatches, woodpeckers, wrens, thrushes, sparrows, and hawks. A Merlin has nested inside the park near the camping area. Many shoreline species roam the Lake Huron beach which borders the park on the east end. Downtown Harrisville is within easy walking or driving distance. Located in town near the Harrisville Harbor/Marina is the DNR boat launch. A short, but interesting birding path leads from the launch out toward Lake Huron. Spring bird migration activity is abundant here.

9. Sturgeon Point Lighthouse State Recreation Area



Located two miles north of Harrisville, Sturgeon Point Lighthouse is a 60-acre State-owned park with free admission and grounds open year round. Habitat includes Lake Huron sand dunes, stunted growth trees, bushes and lake grasses with wetlands along the old lane, and mature hardwoods and conifers. Nesting species include American Redstart, Red-eyed Vireo, Yellow Warblers and N. Cardinals. A wide variety of birds migrate through the park and use the 1.5 mile shoal out into the big lake as a gathering point. A resident Bald Eagle frequently circles the lighthouse tower for the enjoyment of visitors. Lighthouse is open Memorial Day through Labor Day Weekend.

Alpena County Sites

10. Negwegon State Park



Negwegon State Park, located 25 miles north of Harrisville, is a 3,700-acre mixture of low land and small ridges that include mature pine forest, hardwoods and aspen with open pockets of meadows. Starting at the parking lot, a one-hour hike to South Point through mature deciduous woods will bring you to an excellent birding site for the spring and fall passerine and waterbird migration. Nearing the point, one can hear the gulls nesting on Bird Island calling. Red-shouldered Hawks and Merlin nest within the park. The park is accessible by Sand Hill Road that connects to Black River Road – a sandy but passable road. However, Sand Hill Road that connects to Negwegon Park Road north from US 23 is very sandy and a four-wheel drive vehicle is recommended.

11. Partridge Point



Partridge Point, a 53-acre parcel owned by the State of Michigan, is located just south of Alpena. There are two two-tracks that extend off of South Partridge Point Road to parking areas. The north two-track shouldn’t be attempted during the wet seasons, as the ruts are very deep and water-filled in places. Partridge Point is excellent for birds of all species, and, at times during migration, is teaming with birds. Black Terns, Marsh Wrens, Sora, Virginia Rails, and Blue-gray Gnatcatchers nest here. The lush land vegetation is loaded with poison ivy, so be forewarned!

12. Alpena Wildlife Sanctuary (including Duck & Island Parks)



Located at the north end of the city of Alpena along the Thunder Bay River, this 500-acre wildlife sanctuary is an easily accessible birding site. The marshy area and slow-moving Thunder Bay River provide nesting habitat for many marsh birds, including Least Bitterns. Island Park, a 17-acre island jewel, includes a series of nature trails and wooden platforms in varied ecosystems including sand dunes, meadows, woodlands, gentle slopes and marshy areas. Seasonally, one can rent a kayak or canoe from a private business at the park or bring your own to launch at the site.

13. Lake Besser



This is a flooding of the Thunder Bay River (caused by the Ninth Street Dam) which created a quiet lake. In the spring and fall, waterfowl of many species visit. In the fall, Ring-necked Ducks occur here in the hundreds. Roadside parking.

14. Ninth Street Dam Outflow



This site is best in the winter, when open water is limited locally. The outflow from the Ninth Street Dam keeps this section of Thunder Bay River from freezing most years. Diving ducks, including all three species of Mergansers, Common Goldeneye, and Bufflehead, are common.

15. Wessel Road “CKD Prairie”



This is an old Huron Portland Cement kiln dust dump, now naturally overgrown with weeds, grasses and forbs. Many grassland species nest here, like Bobolink, Eastern Meadowlark and Grasshopper and Savannah Sparrows. Roadside parking.

16. Misery Bay Road & Isaacson Bay



The north end of Thunder Bay is a good stopover site for many species of waterfowl, and the bay can be scoped from several sites along Misery Bay Road. There is no public access, so visitors are limited as to how much walking around they can do. Roadside parking.

17. Alpena Township Nature Preserve



This preserve has a series of hiking trails leading to a sinkhole in Lake Huron. These trails and a Great Lakes fen offer a wide variety of wildflower viewing. The mixed woods harbor a variety of nesting birds, including Black-throated Green Warblers and American Redstarts. Roadside parking is limited, so make sure your vehicle is off the roadway.

18. Rockport State Recreation Area & Besser Natural Area



This site offers more than 4,200 acres ready for you to explore! The mature deciduous woods and coniferous lowlands offer nesting habitat for many birds, including Winter Wrens, Wood and Hermit Thrushes and a variety of warblers. A trek to one of the sinkholes is awesome, but be sure to take a GPS or compass as the trails can be deceiving. Miles of undisturbed Lake Huron shoreline offers many viewing sites for migrating waterbirds. Rockport has a deep-water boat launch into Lake Huron for visiting anglers, an abandoned stone quarry that boasts of world-class fossil hunting, a ghost town, sinkholes and shipwrecks! The Besser Natural Area, accessed off Grand Lake Road, is located at the very north end of the Rockport State Recreation Area. The virgin pines offer nesting habitat to Pine Warblers, American Redstarts and a variety of other birds. There is a one-mile hiking loop here that will take the walker to several different woodland habitats here, as well as passing through the ghost town of Bell. Besser Natural Area is not accessible during the winter.

Presque Isle County Sites

19. The New Presque Isle Lighthouse



Enjoy the hiking trails and vistas overlooking Lake Huron. The best waterbird observation site is at the end of the driveway directly east of the lighthouse. All three species of scoters have been recorded here during migration. Daily counts of Long-tailed Ducks have exceeded a thousand birds on a good migration day in November.

20. Thompson’s Harbor State Park



THSP has several well marked trails looping out toward Lake Huron. A June early morning walk is an auditory challenge to the visiting birdwatcher! Good birding habitats include the re-growing clearcut area along the main Trailhead Road, the brushy alder swale where the Grand Lake Outlet crosses Old State Road, and the cattail marsh (where Virginia Rails, Least Bittern and Marsh Wren nest) at the end of Thompson Harbor Road. THSP is a well-known site for the wide variety of wildflowers!

21. Sea Gull Point



This site, located at the northern end of Rogers City, is easily accessible from the Huron Sunrise paved bike trail and offers excellent views of Lake Huron. It is a very good waterbird migration site. Harlequin Ducks have been recorded here rarely in October. Bald Eagles and Merlin regularly frequent the shoreline.

22. Herman Vogler Conservation Area



On the banks of the Trout River, this 270-acre park features picnic area, fishing areas, and more than seven miles of wooded hiking trails. Species that have been spotted here include Black capped Chickadees, White breasted Nuthatch, Golden crowned Kinglets, Downy Woodpeckers, Mallard Ducks, American Crow, Blue Jays and a Hawk circling by the picnic grounds!

23. P.H. Hoeft State Park



Located approximately three miles north of Rogers City, P.H. Hoeft State Park offers marked hiking trails that wander through the mature pine and oak woods and provide nesting habitat for an excellent variety of passerines, especially warblers. Some of these species that regularly nest here include the Nashville, Magnolia, Black-throated Blue, Yellow-rumped, Black-throated Green, Blackburnian, Pine, Black-and-white Warblers, American Redstart, Ovenbird, and Merlin.

Cheboygan County Sites

24. Cheboygan State Park



Located four miles east of Cheboygan, this woodland park features over three miles of wilderness-quality Lake Huron shoreline and is excellent for spring migration birding. Birds are best viewed from road and forest edges where waves of warblers, thrushes, vireos and flycatchers feast on midges swirling over the cedars. Follow the trails to the North shore where terns, gulls, shorebirds, and Bald Eagles forage. The campground and the road leading there offer easier access to the migrating birds. Keep an eye to the sky as many raptors move north over the park each spring. Over 1,000 owls of six species have been banded here and a sharp eye may spot a roosting owl in the conifer forest. Breeding species include warblers such as Parula, Nashville, and Magnolia. Hermit Thrush, Veery, Winter Wren, and Pileated Woodpeckers add their song to the summer chorus.

25. Gordon Turner Park



This Cheboygan City Park at the north end of Huron Street features Lake Huron shoreline, the mouth of the Cheboygan River, and a large cattail marsh with a boardwalk and observation tower. In the spring and fall, scan the river and open water for waterfowl and gulls as several rarities have been found here, including Brant and King Eider. In winter, look for Snowy Owl on the break wall and Bald Eagles patrolling the shore and River. In summer and migration, the gravel bars may be crowded with gulls and terns and a few shorebirds. Look over the willows along the parking lot and soccer fields for warblers and other migrants. Walk the boardwalk over the marsh and listen for breeding birds such as Sora, American Bittern, Marsh Wren, and Osprey. In winter, the river stays ice free and draws many waterfowl which can be viewed at close range.

26. Dingman Marsh



Dingman Marsh is a State and Ducks Unlimited wildlife flooding which provides an extensive wetland habitat. The roads leading to the flooding are lightly travelled and pass through excellent birding habitat. From US 23, take Stimpson Road south, pausing in the hardwoods to listen for Hermit Thrush, Veery, Ovenbird, and the drumming of Ruffed Grouse. At 1.6 miles, stop at the power line crossing where Northern Waterthrush, Common Yellowthroat, and Rose-breasted Grosbeak breed. From here to Potter Road, the road passes through Alder and Willow thickets favored by Golden-winged Warbler, Chestnut-sided Warbler, Alder Flycatcher, and Yellow Warbler. Great Gray Owls have been sighted in this area in all seasons over the years. Turn left on Potter Road for 1.4 miles to where a power line crosses the road, and turn right onto a two track for a short distance and park in the open grassy area. Walk the berm road straight ahead and watch for nesting species such as Common Loon, Ring-necked Duck, American Bittern, Virginia Rail, Black Tern, Pied-billed Grebe, Eastern Kingbird, and Osprey. In spring, migrating raptors may form kettles above as they head north. The woodlands and fields south of the parking area attract Eastern Bluebird, Vesper Sparrow, Black-billed Cuckoo, and American Kestrel.

27. Historic Mill Creek Discovery Park



Located three miles south of Mackinaw City, this unique park combines history, adventure, and nature on 625 acres of northern hardwood forest. A working stream-powered sawmill is a replica of the original built here in the 18th century. Over three miles of well-maintained hiking trails, much of it handicapped accessible, meander along the rushing Mill Creek and under the shelter of the maples and oaks. Listen and look for Ovenbird, Redstart, Black-throated Green Warbler, Wood Thrush, and Red-bellied Woodpecker. Visit the bird feeders at the visitor center for close views of White-throated Sparrow, Rose-breasted Grosbeak, Red-breasted Nuthatch, and Pileated Woodpecker. A highlight for birders is the 50-foot tall tower with an observation platform at treetop level offering spectacular views of the Mackinac Bridge and Mackinac Island. Here one can be eye to eye with canopy-loving birds such as Blackburnian Warbler, Scarlet Tanager, and Baltimore Oriole. Bald Eagles, Northern Goshawks, and Red-shouldered Hawks soar over the forest from nearby nests and, during spring migration, Golden Eagles may glide by. For the adventurous birder, for a small fee, one can challenge the five-story climbing wall with bird songs that ring out as one moves upward. Peeking into holes will reveal cavity nesters such as Northern Saw-whet Owl and Pileated Woodpecker. A zip line ride follows the course of a Bald Eagle down the valley and riders are encouraged to try and spot the trout swimming in the stream below. The swinging canopy bridge runs across the creek bed far below and the park Naturalist provides lessons about forest and stream ecology while suspended high in the treetops. Plan to spend at least half the day in this one of a kind park with the unique combination of education and fun.

28. Mackinac Straits Raptor Watch



The Mackinac Straits Raptor Watch is a spring hawk count with two sites in Mackinaw City. Operating from mid-March to the end of May, observers have documented an impressive concentration of raptors that pass through the tip of the mitt. It is the top spring site in North America for Red-tailed Hawks with 9,700 tallied in 2014, just part of a total count of 43,191 of 18 raptor species. Swainson’s Hawk and Black Vulture are seen some years. Visitors are encouraged to come and share the spectacle of raptor migration. Dress warm, bring a lawn chair, and enjoy the show. Red-tailed Hawk numbers peak in the first week of April and the big Broad-winged Hawk push is in late April. Golden Eagles are early migrants but are seen on most days through April. Heading west on Central Avenue, watch for the Raptor Watch signs on the left.

Photo Credits: Sunrise by Denise M. Willis; Golden Eagle by Steve Baker; Red-headed Woodpecker by Phil Odum; Kirtland’s Warbler by George Falkenhagen; Upland Sandpiper by Roger Eriksson; and Trumpeter Swans by Peggy Ridgway.



Golden Eagle



Check out www.sunrisecoastbirding.org or scan the QR code for more information. Something for everyone!

The Sunrise Coast Birding Trail covers a total of 145 miles along US 23. The trail begins at the final birding hotspot of the Saginaw Bay Birding Trail and travels up the Lake Huron coast to Mackinaw City. The change in seasons, diverse habitats, miles of shoreline and remote and in-town sites make the Trail a birder’s paradise which offers something for everyone!

The Partners
Michigan Audubon Society, Straits Area Audubon Society, Thunder Bay Audubon Society, and Consumers Energy.



Code of Ethics

The Sunrise Coast Birding Trail endorses the American Birding Association’s code of ethics and encourages all visitors to do the same. www.aba.org/about/ethics.html

Key

- Parking - Site has a parking lot or suitable area for vehicles.
- Kayak/Canoe Access - Site has an access suitable for kayakers and canoes.
- Restrooms - Site has a port-a-toilet or more formal facilities available for public use.
- Boat Launch - Site has an access suitable for launching motorized watercraft.
- Restrooms - Site has a shelter, boardwalk, tower, or other structure for wildlife viewing.
- Fee - Site requires an entrance fee.
- Paved Trail - Site has paved trails for hiking to the interior areas of the site.
- Picnic - Site has picnic areas.
- Trail - Site has unpaved trails for hiking to the interior areas of the site.
- Universal Accessibility - Site has universally-accessible features to gain access to areas of the site.
- Winter Access - Site is plowed and accessible in the winter.

Red-headed Woodpecker



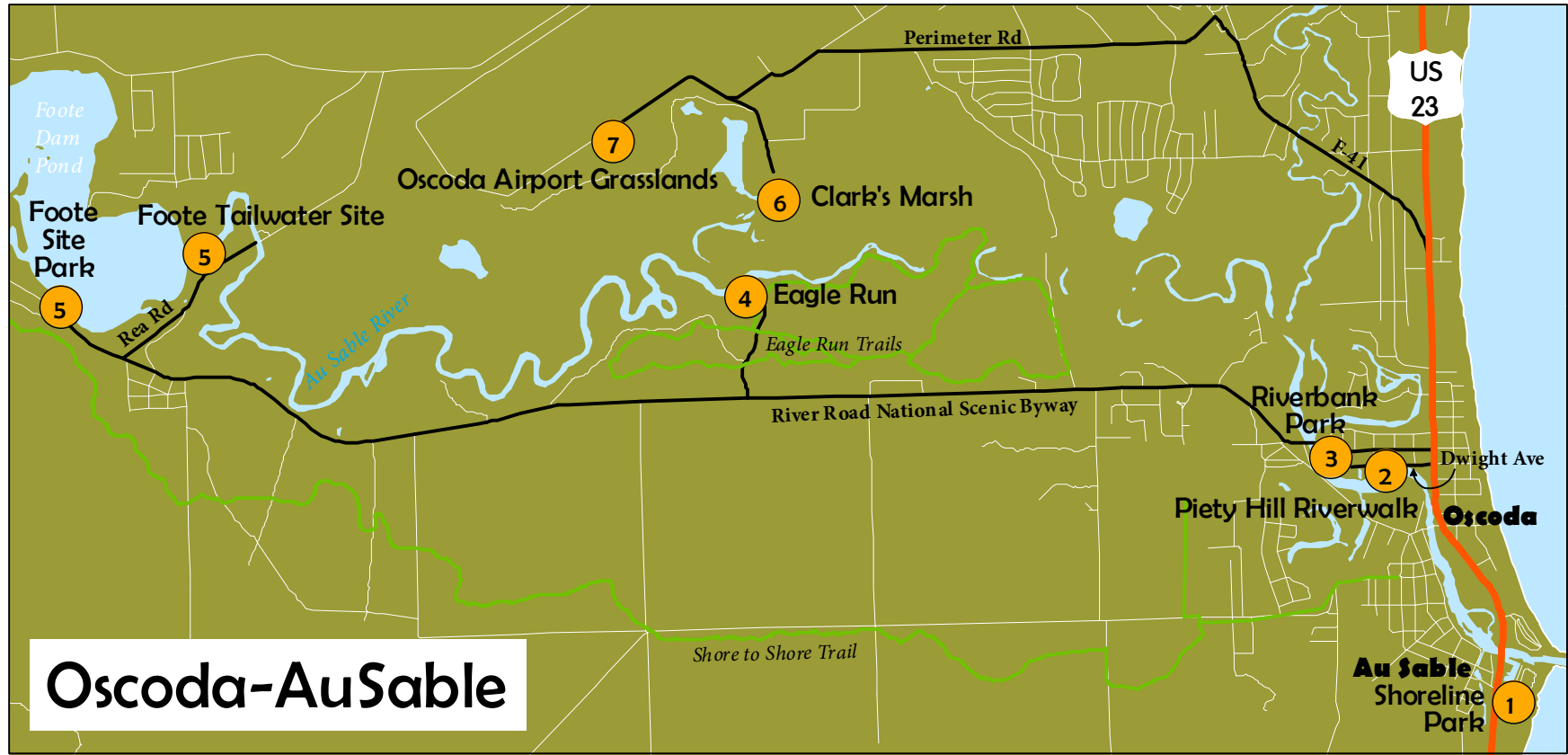
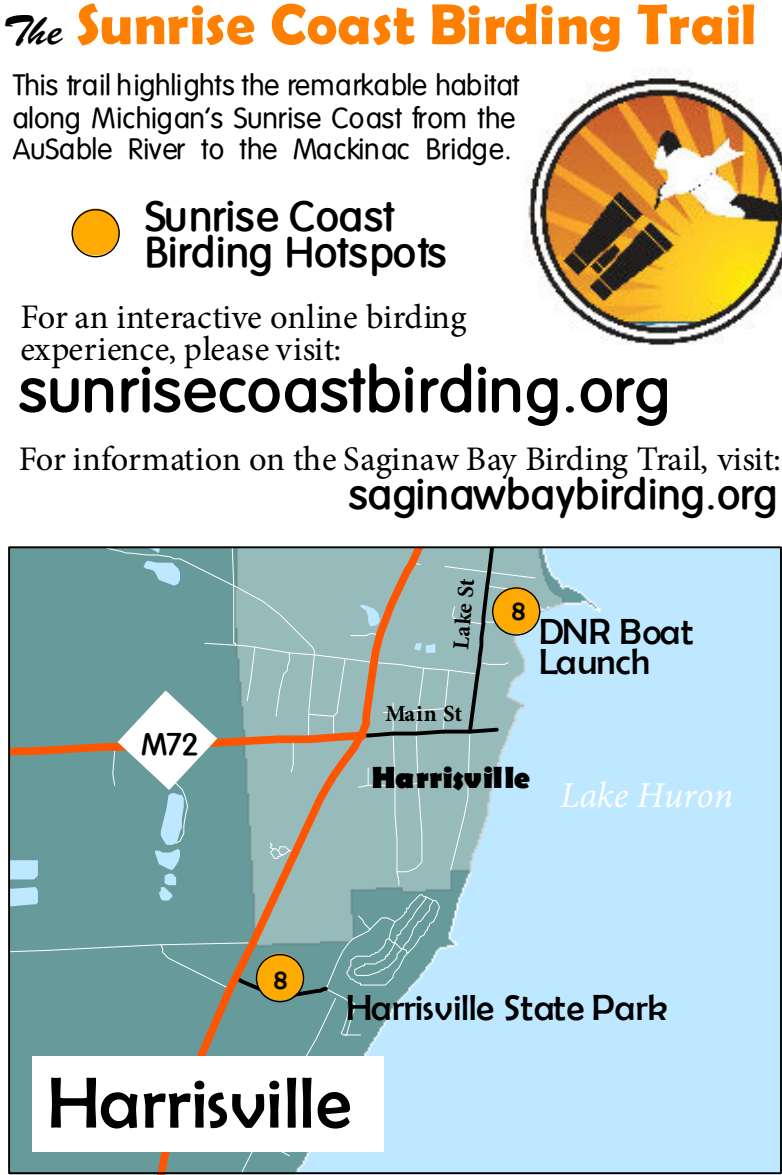
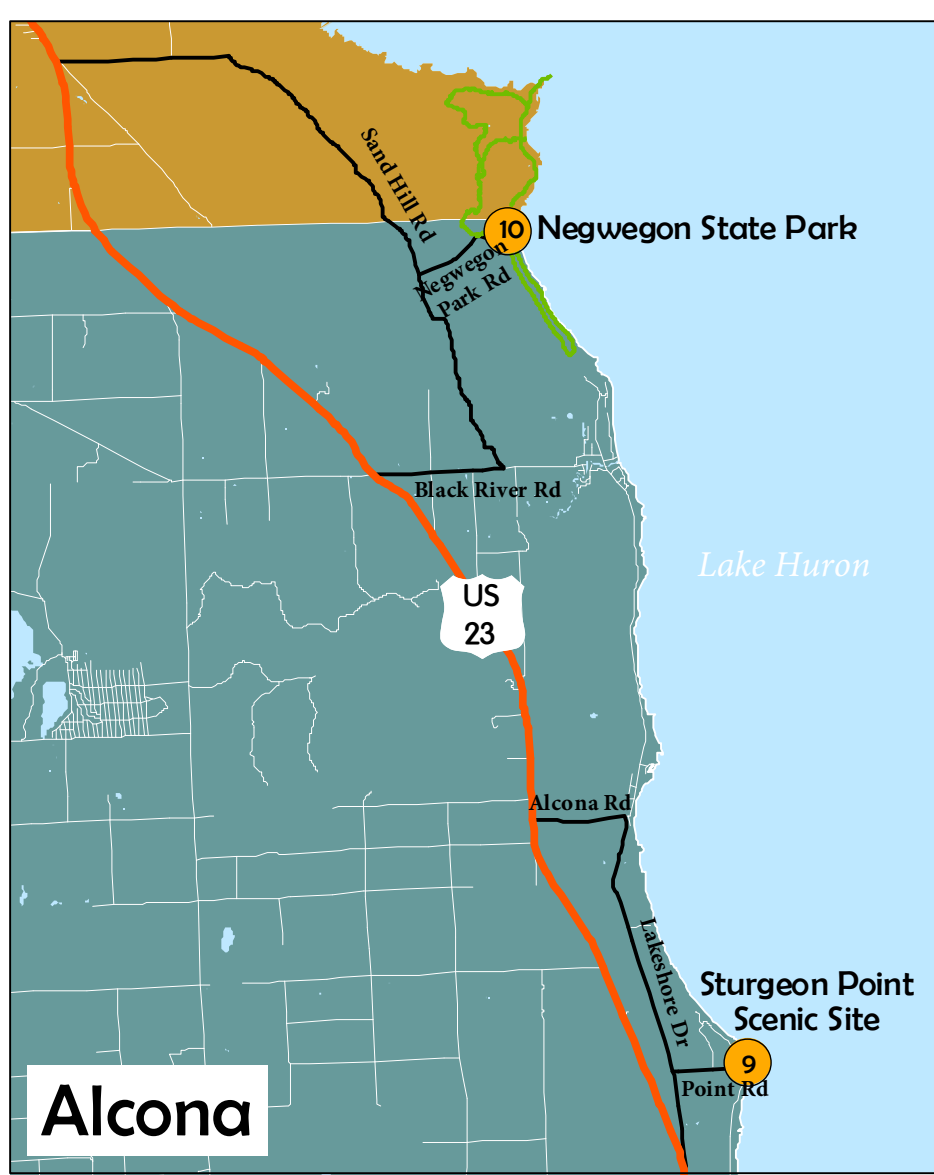
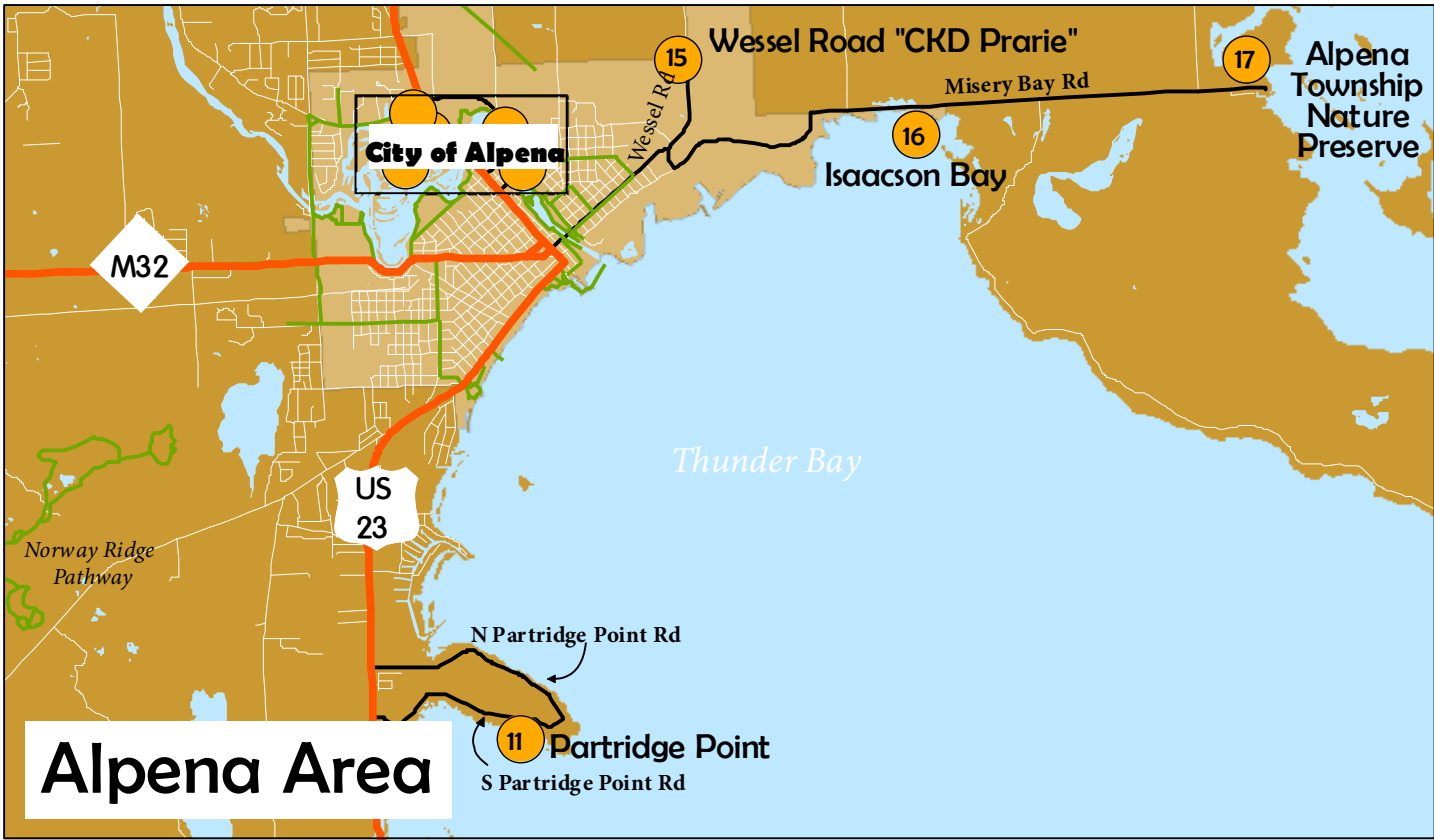
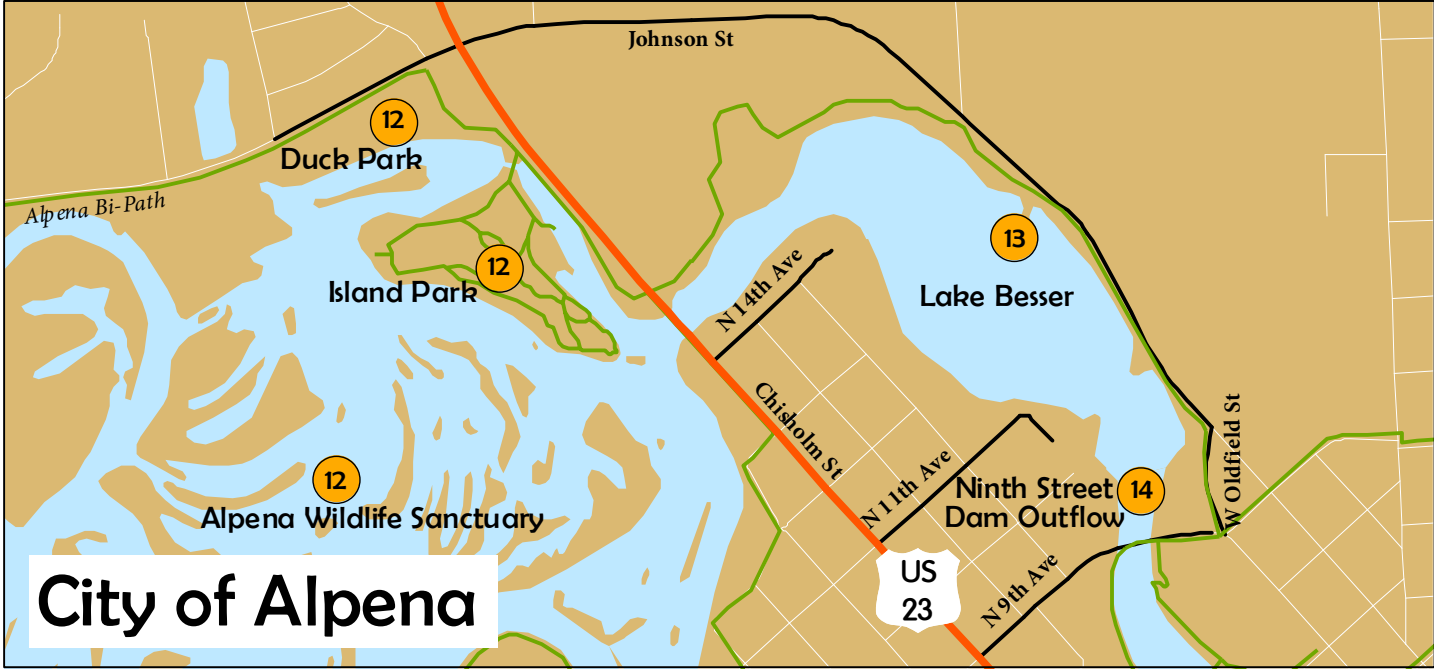
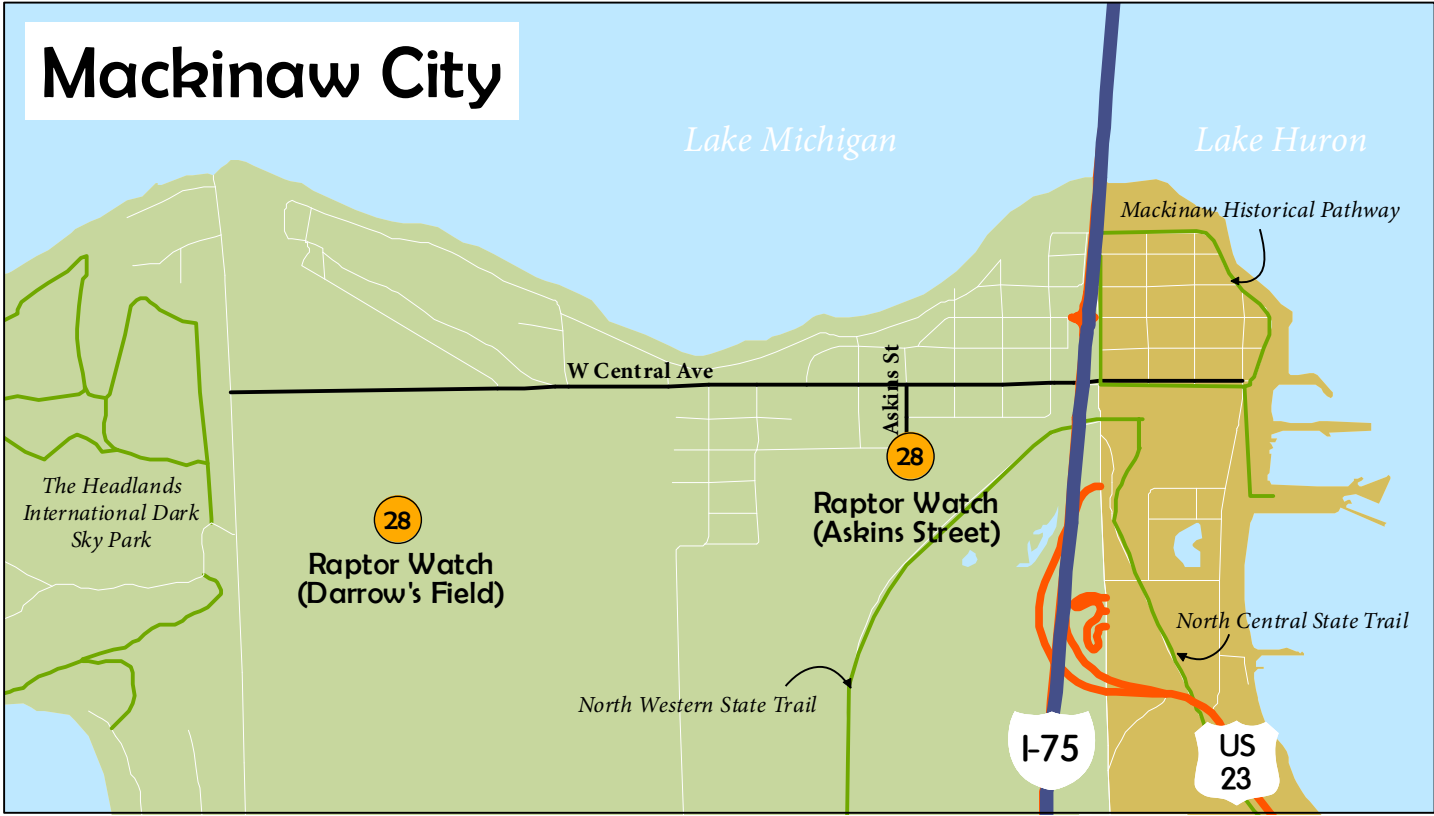
Additional Birding Sites

The following sites in Iosco County are excellent spots to check out while you’re visiting the other locations highlighted on this map. Although they may lack official SCBT signage of the other sites and are a little farther from the coast, they harbor more than their fair share of interesting birds and are worth a stop when birding along the Sunrise Coast!

Kirtland’s Warbler



- Kirtland’s Warbler Pine River Management Area**
Located 10 miles from Oscoda off Bissonette Road, toward Pine River Campground. The Kirtland’s Warbler is an endangered species and this habitat is closed to the public. However, viewing from the public road is permitted.
- Cooke Dam Area**
Located off River Road National Scenic Byway. From US 23 in Oscoda, follow River Road 14 miles west to Cooke Dam Road.
- Lumberman’s Monument**
Located off River Road National Scenic Byway. From US 23 in Oscoda, follow River Road 15 miles to Lumberman’s Monument (1.4 miles west of Cooke Dam Road).
- Iargo Springs**
Located off River Road National Scenic Byway. Site is located three miles west of Lumberman’s Monument.
- Highbanks Trail**
Located off River Road National Scenic Byway. The Highbanks Trail is located along the AuSable River and connects Iargo Springs, Canoers’ Memorial Scenic Overlook, Lumberman’s Monument, and points east.
- Westgate Overlook**
Located off M-65 – overlooking the AuSable River. Wintering trumpeter swans can be viewed here.
- Loon Lake Park**
Located off M-65 (south of Hale). A boardwalk leads to Mud Lake.



The Sunrise Coast Birding Trail

This trail highlights the remarkable habitat along Michigan's Sunrise Coast from the AuSable River to the Mackinac Bridge.

Sunrise Coast Birding Hotspots

For an interactive online birding experience, please visit: sunrisecoastbirding.org

For information on the Saginaw Bay Birding Trail, visit: saginawbaybirding.org

