

CLARK'S POND

UTM Ref. 17TPA136035

Watt Township, Muskoka Lakes
Status: Recommend Heritage Area

Area: 259 ha

Site Characteristics

This site is centered around Clark's Pond, a relatively deep undeveloped lake, and the Dee River which feeds into it from the east. The river has a gentle gradient between Rostrevor Road and its outlet to Lake Rosseau at Clark's Falls. Several small seasonal streams also feed into the lake. Beavers are active along the river, maintaining one large dam.

On the glaciolacustrine deposits of silt, sand and clay along the Dee River floodplain, communities of Alder thicket swamp and Red Maple-Silver Maple-Black Ash swamp forest have developed. To the north, sandy glacial tills on some of the uplands support a rich Sugar Maple-mixed hardwood forest, ideal habitat for the Red-shouldered Hawk. Bedrock ridges and slopes with shallow to non-existent soils display a White Pine-mixed Oak forest type, unusual because of the presence of White Oak. The cool north facing slope along the south shore of the lake supports an Eastern Hemlock-White Pine forest community on steep boulder talus. The rocky shoreline provides habitat for Pickerel Frogs. At the north end of the site, a poorly drained bedrock depression has developed a White Pine-mixed hardwood swamp forest on sphagnum.

Several sheltered bays around the pond contain Bur-reed and grass marshes. Nearshore waters contain a sparse submerged aquatic community with the pondweed, *Potamogeton spirillus* and Water Wort.

Flora and Fauna

Total numbers of species recorded were:

Vascular Plants	335 native ; 49 introduced 3 A.C.P.F. with a score of 16 (Low)
Birds	73 observed during breeding season
Mammals	11 (4 from small mammal trapping)
Herpetofauna	15
Butterflies	14

Significant Natural Values and Selection Criteria Met

1. **Representation** - (B1) The White Oak-White Pine open rock barrens community (warmer/rock/dry-mesic) is of limited distribution within Muskoka.
2. **Diversity** - (B2) The total number of native plant species related to the size of the area is higher than expected for Muskoka as shown on Figure 1. The area also has a high diversity of birds and herpetofauna.

3. **Rare Species** - (B4) The Clark's Pond area provides habitat for the following rare species:

Wildlife

Coccyzus americanus Yellow-billed Cuckoo [RR]

Buteo lineatus Red-shouldered Hawk [NR PR]

Rana palustris Pickerel Frog [RR]

Vascular Plants

Armoracia lacustris Lake Cress [RR]

Carex backii Sedge [RR]

Carex comosa Bristly Sedge [RR]

Cerastium nutans Nodding Chickweed [RR]

Chenopodium simplex Maple-leaved Goosefoot [RR]

Elatine minima Water Wort [PR]

Gnaphalium obtusifolium Sweet Everlasting [RR]

Potamogeton illinoensis Illinois Pond Weed [RR]

Triadenum virginicum Marsh St. John's Wort [PR]

Triodanis perfoliata Venus Looking Glass [RR]

In addition, two species of birds, five species of reptiles and amphibians and twenty-five species of vascular plants were recorded as regionally uncommon.

4. **Fish and Wildlife Concentrations** - (B5) Yellow Pickerel are known to spawn at the outlet of Clark's Pond, in the fast water below the dam. The Eastern Hemlock mixed forests with Canada Yew understory provide deer wintering areas. An active turkey vulture nest was discovered in the talus cliffs along the north shore of Clark's Pond in August of 1993, by the local cottagers/landowners and confirmed by B. Bergsma. While turkey vultures are not rare, nest locations are rarely confirmed.

5. **Biogeographic Significance** - (B7) The Clark's Pond area contains plant communities and species which are at their distributional limits. The woodland community with White Oak as the dominant species is unusual this far north. This community also supports two regionally rare species (Venus Looking Glass and Sweet Everlasting), both of which are at their northern range limits.

The regionally rare Yellow-billed Cuckoo is near the northern edge of its range, occupying the deciduous wooded swamp habitat at the fringe of agricultural land along the Dee River.

Western Fescue (*Festuca occidentalis*), a disjunct western grass species, while eastern seaboard disjuncts include three common Atlantic Coastal Plain species.

6. **Scenic Landscapes** - (C7) The view from the concrete dam at Clark's Falls is identified as having high scenic value, particularly related to the fast water tumbling down into Lake Rosseau and to the pristine nature of Clark's Pond.

Ownership and Disturbance

The area is privately owned with most of the property belonging to one family. They have maintained the area in its natural state and allowed natural succession to proceed on former farm land by Clark's Falls. The majority of the site is undisturbed with no development. However, human impacts are evident in the habitats at the boundary edges, in particular the drier White Oak-White Pine barren woodlands. These woodlands, which harbour the majority of the rare and uncommon plant species, are especially sensitive to trampling.

Approximately 13% introduced plant species were noted in the lake. The area and surrounding land is part of a canoe route and is a popular spot for fishermen, sightseers and cross-country skiers. In the past few years, the small thicket swamp in the bay below the falls has been invaded by Purple Loosestrife. This has the potential to be carried into the area and establish in the marshy bays of Clark's Pond.

The Dee River-Clark's Pond water route frequently becomes eutrophic during mid-to-late summer due to heavy upstream nutrient loading in a system which is already naturally enriched.

Sensitivity

The sensitivity of this site is especially related to the vegetation community and plant species at their northern range limits and of limited distribution within Muskoka. This site also supports several regionally rare species of flora and fauna. Management guidelines should ensure the protection of both rare species and distinctive vegetation community habitats, particularly the White Oak-White Pine woodland community surrounding most of Clark's Pond. The thin soils in this habitat make it especially vulnerable to minor disturbances such as trampling and vegetation removal.

Long-term protection strategies to maintain the natural shorelines around Clark's Pond are also needed to protect the aesthetic, wildlife, and diversity values of this area.

Major Sources of Information

Berney, & Reid, 1993; Brunton, 1991 b; District Municipality of Muskoka, 1985 Sensitive Area Schedules; Kor, & Miller, 1987; OMNR 1988 Deer Wintering Aerial Survey Maps; OMNR, Bracebridge Area office, 1992; Reid, et al., 1991 .