

## EILEAN GOWAN ISLAND

UTM Ref. 17TPV245870

Muskoka Township, Bracebridge  
Status: Recommend Heritage Area

Area: 107 ha

### *Site Characteristics*

This large island is located on Lake Muskoka, east of Bracebridge. It is a good example of post-logging, mature, late successional deciduous and mixed forest (Sugar Maple, Eastern Hemlock, Yellow Birch, American Beech) on acidic tills of varying depths. Some sections of thin soils with exposed rock support Red and White Oak open woodland, while low-lying pockets are dominated by tall thicket shrubs or wet grass meadow. Along parts of the adjacent shore, especially on the spits extending westward, several Atlantic Coastal Plain species are present as well as a small stand of Jack Pine.

### *Flora and Fauna*

Total numbers of species recorded were:

Vascular plants	254 native; 28 introduced
	10 A.C.P.F. with a score of 51 (High)
Birds	33 observed during breeding season
Mammals	7
Herpetofauna	5
Butterflies	6

### *Significant Natural Values and Selection Criteria Met*

1. **Representation** - (B1) The small stand of Jack Pine is a community type with limited representation in other Heritage Areas in Muskoka. The site type matrix position is normal/sand/dry.
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 in Figure 1.
3. **Rare Species** - (B4) Eilean Gowan Island provides habitat for the following rare species:

#### Wildlife

*Sylvilagus floridanus* Eastern cottontail [RU]

#### Vascular plants

*Carex conoidea* Field Sedge [PR RR]

*Chenopodium simplex* Maple-leaved Goosefoot [RR]

*Elatine minima* Water Wort [PR]

*Linum striatum* Ridged Yellow Flax [NR PR RR]

*Panicum spretum* Eaton's Grass [PR]

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

*Xyris difformis* Slender Yellow-eyed Grass [PR]

In addition, 13 species of vascular plants were recorded as regionally uncommon.

4. **Fish and Wildlife Concentrations** - (B5) Approximately 50% of the island is a deer yard. Shallow waters between Baxter Island and the westernmost spit are habitat for Lake Trout spawning.

5. **Biogeographic Significance** - (B7) The emergent beaches or spits extending off the western shoreline of the island contain a high significance of representation for Atlantic Coastal Plain Flora, with a score of 51 (10 species).

#### *Ownership and Disturbance*

The entire shoreline is surrounded by cottage development. A hydro service line set-back from the shoreline also surrounds the island. Inside of this hydro cut, in the interior of the island, is a nature reserve which was recently donated to the Muskoka Heritage Foundation. The forest has regenerated from past logging over 60 years ago. The understory is heavily grazed in areas by deer. There were 10.1% introduced species recorded.

#### *Sensitivity*

The sensitivity of this site is related primarily to the small shoreline spits which harbour significant flora and fish spawning habitat, plus an association of limited representation. Policies related to protection of fish habitat and A.C.P.F. conservation should be followed. The values present in the interior woodland (diversity, deer yard and mature forest) are relatively self-sustaining providing no dramatic changes occur. Management of the island as a nature reserve should aim at maintaining or enhancing the significant natural values.

#### *Major Sources of Information*

Brunton, 1991b; Keddy & Sharp, 1989; District Municipality of Muskoka, 1985 Sensitive Areas Schedules; OMNR, 1988, 1989 deer yard surveys; Reid, et al., 1991.