

GRAY RAPIDS

UTM Ref. 17TNV932872

Gibson Township, Georgian Bay
Status: Recommend Heritage Area

Area: 300 ha

Site Characteristics

The Musquash river flows north from Highway 69 for about two kilometres and then veers to the west before widening into Gray Lake. Dense Red Maple-Red Oak deciduous forests and mixed forests of Eastern Hemlock-Maple-Oak line the shores of the river. Fluctuating water levels reveal muddy shores which support emergent grass marshes and forb-rich wet meadow marshes, with late summer displays of Red and White Cardinal Flower and Golden Hedge Hessop.

The site takes on a different appearance at Gray Lake, with open water expanses and rocky shorelines. The landform consists of a thin, discontinuous veneer of stony sand over Precambrian bedrock. Open shoreline forests are dominated by White and Red Pine with White and Red Oak. At the west end of Gray Lake a series of waterfalls and rapids spill into Flatrock Lake. Its numerous bays and inlets support wetland communities zoned from open water aquatic macrophytes to shallow emergent herb-rich and rush marshes, merging into shoreline Silky Dogwood-Buttonbush-Water Willow thicket swamps and wet lowland Silver Maple forests. At the west end of Flatrock Lake other sets of rapids and falls spill into Go Home Lake. Numerous small beaver controlled lakes drain into Gray and Flatrock Lakes.

Flora and Fauna

Total numbers of species recorded were:

Vascular Plants	149 native ; 2 introduced 5 A.C.P.F. with a score of 25 (Moderate)
Birds	21 observed during breeding season
Mammals	4
Herpetofauna	6
Butterflies	1

Significant Natural Values and Selection Criteria Met

- 1. Representation** - (B1) The Gray Rapids area supports unusual vegetation community types not represented in other Heritage Areas. These communities are the White Pine-White Birch-Silver Maple Bottomland forest (warmer/sand/wet-mesic) and the Silver Maple-Basswood Swamp Forest (warmer/sand/wet). These are located in inlets along the southern edges of Gray and Flatrock Lakes, respectively.
- 2. Quality and Disturbance** - (B3) The Gray Rapids area contains vegetation community types which are strongly influenced by the riverine system and by the rocky shorelines of undisturbed lakes. There were only 1.3% introduced species of vascular plants recorded from the area. The quality and mixture of biotic communities is high, with a moderate representation of Atlantic Coastal Plain Flora.

3. **Rare Species** - (B4) The Gray Rapids area provides habitat for the following rare species:

Wildlife

Sistrurus c. catenatus Eastern Massassauga [NR PR] *

Buteo lineatus Red-shouldered Hawk [NR PR] *

Vascular Plants

Corallorhiza striata Striped Coralroot [RR]*

Cynoglossum boreale Northern Wild Comfrey [RR] *

Elatine minima Water Wort [PR] *

Equisetum palustre Marsh Horsetail [RR]

Isoetes tuckermanii Tuckerman's Quillwort [RR]

Panicum rigidulum Panic Grass [NR PR] *

Potamogeton praelongus White-stemmed Pond Weed [RR]

Sisyrinchium angustifolium Stout Blue-eyed Grass [RR] *

* Reported by Goltz, 1992

In addition, one turtle, one bird and fifteen species of vascular plants were recorded as regionally uncommon.

4. **Fish and Wildlife Concentrations** - (B5) The area provides winter habitat for a significant deer population, and is part of the larger Galla Lake Deer wintering area.

5. **Scenic Landscapes** - (C7) The Gray Rapids area provides scenic value in a number of locations. The Musquash River boasts a spectacular display of Cardinal Flower in the late summer (Goltz, 1992); Gray Rapids is identified as a highly scenic rapids and waterfalls. Also identified is a small waterfall which exits into Log Bridge Inlet from Flatrock Lake named "Boulder Falls" because of the enormous erratic present in the middle of it. Flatrock Lake is a pristine, clear lake with a shoreline dominated by exposed bedrock outcrops supporting an open Red and White Pine forest.

Ownership and Disturbance

The Gray Rapids area is approximately 90% Crown land ownership. There are a few small privately owned cabins on Gray Lake and along the Musquash River. Flatrock Lake is virtually undisturbed, except for a few semi-permanent campsites along the shoreline. The Gray Rapids are unregulated with respect to the flow of water. Small boats and canoes can access Gray Lake, and Flatrock Lake is only accessible by portage. Boaters and fishermen from Go Home Bay frequent the small scenic falls (Boulder Falls) at the east end of the Log Bridge Inlet.

Sensitivity

The sensitivity of this site is related to the lake and riverine shoreline features which support a diverse, high quality assemblage of vegetation community types and high scenic elements. Management guidelines for shorelines should be followed with a forested buffer defined by the slope and aspect of the land. The Gray Rapids falls and Flatrock Lake should be maintained as pristine, natural environments.

Major Sources of Information

Berney & Reid, 1993; Bergsma, et al., 1993; District Municipality of Muskoka 1985, Sensitive Areas Schedules; Goltz, 1992; Kor, & Miller 1987; Parry Sound Sensitive Areas Schedules.