

LEWISHAM WETLAND

UTM Ref. 17TPV480710

Ryde Township, Gravenhurst
Status: Recommend Heritage Area

Area: 640 ha

Site Characteristics

Lewisham Wetland occupies a large basin of organic peat and muck which forms the headwaters of several tributary streams of the Black River. Beatty's Lake in the southwestern section of the area provides open water, as do scattered beaver ponds and marshy wetlands along the stream courses. Extensive wetland areas are separated by gneissic bedrock ridges with discontinuous shallow till, oriented in a northeast-southwest direction.

This wetland complex provides a diverse array of wetland types, including aquatic floating-leaved emergents, deep emergent marsh with sedge tussocks, open fen communities on floating organic mats, extensive low graminoid marshes, tall shrub-rich marshes, Leatherleaf shrub bog, Virginia Chain Fern poor fen, Alder thicket swamp, Tamarack and Black Spruce treed poor fens, and Red Maple-Yellow Birch swamp forest.

In areas of deep, moist soils, there are extensive mixed forests of Balsam Fir and Red Maple, mixed with Eastern White Cedar, White Pine, Eastern Hemlock, Poplar, and White Birch. Much of the dry thin-soiled upland supports a deciduous forest of Trembling Aspen and White Birch, with Bracken Fern in the understory. In some rock barren areas, White Pine is mixed with the Aspen-Birch community. A few pockets of richer deciduous forest occur as well, with Red and Sugar Maples dominating.

On the eastern side of Beatty's Lake, a mature Red Pine stand occupies a small knoll.

Flora and Fauna

Total numbers of species recorded were:

| | |
|-----------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Vascular Plants | 203 native; 15 introduced 2 A.C.P.F. with a score of 8 (Insignificant) |
| Birds | 73 observed during breeding season |
| Mammals | 7 |
| Herpetofauna | 14 |
| Butterflies | 12 |

Significant Natural Values and Selection Criteria Met

1. **Hydrology** - (A3) Lewisham Wetland contributes to the regional hydrological system by acting as a headwaters and major water storage area for Riley Creek and two other tributaries of the Black River.

2. **Representation** - (B1) The mature Red Pine stand (warmer/sand/dry) found within this area is an association that has limited distribution elsewhere in Muskoka; this is the best such stand found during Heritage Areas field work.

3. **Quality and Disturbance** - (B3) Lewisham Wetland contains marsh and fen communities of high quality and showing little disturbance. There are many successional stages present, and representation of almost the full range of Muskoka wetland types. Only 6.9% of the vascular plant species recorded are non-native, a relatively low ratio.

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

Vascular Plants

Rubus odoratus Purple Flowering Raspberry [RR]

Senecio pauperculus Balsam Ragwort [RR]

Solidago gigantea Late Goldenrod [RR]

In addition, regionally uncommon species within the area included six plants, five birds, and two butterflies.

5. **Size and Linkage** - (B6) This area is one of the largest contiguous wetlands identified within Muskoka, providing habitat for a variety of wildlife requiring undisturbed interior conditions.

Ownership and Disturbance

Approximately 85% of the area is Crown land. Much of the area is protected from disturbance by difficulty of access. A trail along the southern edge of the area serves as an access for hunters and snowmobilers, and several small boardwalks cross wet channels. Several seasonal dwellings are located near the road along the eastern edge of the area.

Sensitivity

The diverse wetland communities of this site could be adversely affected by water level changes or nutrient enrichment. Buffer areas should be maintained to minimize the effects of adjacent development. Road construction or utility corridors should not be permitted to fragment the interior of this area.

Major Sources of Information

Reid et al, 1992; Bergsma et al, 1993; Bajc and Paterson, 1992 a.