

## LOWER MOON RIVER

UTM Ref. 17TNV875944

Freeman Township, Georgian Bay  
Status: Recommend Heritage Area

Area: 570 ha

### *Site Characteristics*

Moon River is a major waterway draining the Muskoka watershed system into Georgian Bay. A portion of the river between Curtain Chute and Arnolds Bay at Moon Falls, is included in this area as it has "high potential for the representation of a variety of low cliff, bedrock slope and talus slope habitats and a diversity of associated significant river shoreline flora" (Brunton, 1991a).

The geology of the area is typical of the Georgian Bay region. Precambrian bedrock ridges and knolls supporting scrub vegetation of Common juniper, grasses and Staghorn sumac dominate the landscape, particularly near Moon Falls. Elsewhere, the bedrock-drift cover of till is deeper, supporting early to late successional Trembling Aspen, Red Maple, White Birch, Red Oak and White Pine forests, as well as mature Red and White Pine forests on the islands and along the shorelines immediately above Moon River Falls.

### *Flora and Fauna*

Total numbers of species recorded were:

Vascular Plants	136 native ; 5 introduced
	6 A.C.P.F. with a score of 34 (Moderate)
Birds	10 observed during breeding season
Mammals	1
Herpetofauna	4

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

1. **Rare Species** - (B4) The lower Moon River area provides habitat for the following rare species:

#### Wildlife

- Dendroica discolor* Prairie Warbler [NR PR] \*
- Sistrurus c. catenatus* Eastern Massasauga [NR PR] \*

#### Vascular Plants

- Elatine minima* Water Wort [PR]
- Panicum rigidulum* Panic Grass [NR PR]
- Rhexia virginica* Virginia Meadow Beauty [NR PR]
- Sagittaria graminea var cristata* Grass-leaved Arrowhead [NR PR]
- Xyris difformis* Slender Yellow-eyed Grass [PR]

\* Reported by Sinclair, 1992

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

2. **Fish and Wildlife Concentrations** - (B5) The Moon River area is a designated fish sanctuary and spawning area for Muskellunge and Yellow Pickerel.

3. **Scenic Landscapes** - (C7) The area has many cliffs and steep slopes supporting mature Red and White Pine forests, which provide rugged and spectacular scenery. The view from the top of the Moon Falls across the Moon River basin has been identified as having high scenic values.

#### *Ownership and Disturbance*

The Moon River area between Curtain Chute and Moon Falls is Crown land. Minor disturbances in the form of fire pits, campsites, garbage and trampling were noted. The area is used by fishermen, campers and small groups of tourists from the community of Moon River. The majority of the area is undisturbed, with only 3.5% introduced species recorded.

Water levels are regulated by hydro-electric installations upriver, impairing the development of a natural shoreline community. During the spring, the Moon Dam is opened to allow for the heavy runoff. The dam is later closed and the water levels restricted. Nevertheless, enough water level fluctuations do occur to support a moderate representation of Atlantic Coastal Plain Flora.

#### *Sensitivity*

The sensitivity of this site is particularly related to the area around Moon Falls and the islands above Twin Rapids, where scenic elements, fish habitat values and rare species occurrences are high. Policies related to protection of fisheries values should be followed. There should be no development allowed which would impact upon the scenic values of the area. Protection of habitat for rare species particularly includes rock barrens and shorelines.

#### *Major Sources of Information*

Berney, & Reid, 1993; Brunton, 1991a; District Municipality of Muskoka, 1985 Sensitive Areas Schedules; Geomatics International, 1992; Kor, & Miller, 1987; Sinclair, 1992, personal communication.