

LOWER OXTONGUE RIVER

UTM Ref. 17TPA570196

Franklin Township, Lake of Bays
Status: Recommend Heritage Area

Area: 172 ha

Site Characteristics

This site includes the lower course of the Oxtongue River, below Marsh's Falls, and a sandy, low-energy delta where the river enters Lake of Bays. The quiet edges of the meandering river and several meander scars and oxbow lakes support a variety of aquatic and emergent vegetation communities. An isolated kettle near the mouth of the delta has matured into a small bog pond with a Leatherleaf floating shrub mat and Buckbean along its edges.

Most of the delta is undulating terrain with light brown fine sands near the surface and a basal layer of silty fine sand and clay. A fan-shaped deposit occurs at the river mouth, and a small spit has built up at the southern tip of the delta. These sands are covered in deciduous and mixed successional forests, likely of fire origin. Trembling Aspen and White Pine early successional forests occupy much of the site, together with stands dominated by White Spruce, White Birch, and Red and Sugar Maple.

In an earlier study of this site, Simpson (1978) reported the occurrence of an American Elm-Yellow Birch association on poorly drained deltaic sands near the mouth of the river. While the continued presence of this community could not be confirmed because of refused access onto private land, it would be an uncommon association, not known elsewhere in Muskoka.

Flora and Fauna

Total numbers of species recorded were:

Vascular Plants	181 native; 8 introduced 3 A.C.P.F. with a score of 14 (Low)
Birds	68 observed during breeding season
Mammals	5
Herpetofauna	8

Significant Natural Values and Selection Criteria Met

1. Distinctive Landform - (A1) The Lower Oxtongue River exhibits several features associated with a modern low energy depositional environment, including a meandering river and alluvial floodplain features; ongoing deposition along the delta mouth, including development of a recurved spit; and build-up of organic deposits in wet floodplain depressions. Mature delta deposits of this size are unusual in Muskoka.

2. Quality and Disturbance - (B3) The area provides an extensive undisturbed length of riverfront and lakefront on a large Muskoka lake, backed by forests and wetlands in a natural state. 4.2% of the plant species are introduced, a relatively low ratio.

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

Wildlife

Dendroica tigrina Cape May Warbler [RR]

Vascular Plants

Agrimonia striata Woodland Agrimony [RR]

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

As well, three regionally uncommon plants and one regionally uncommon bird species were found within this area.

4. **Fish and Wildlife Concentrations** - (B5) The Lower Oxtongue River and adjacent waters are known spawning areas for Trout and Yellow Perch.

5. **Scenic Landscapes** - (C7) Marsh's Falls and the Lower Oxtongue River have been identified as areas of high scenic value, with heavy use for wildlife viewing and sightseeing from cottagers on Lake of Bays.

Ownership and Disturbance

This area is entirely privately owned. While there are few recent signs of disturbance in the wooded delta, the area around Marsh's Falls is regularly used for picnics, swimming, and hiking. A few seasonal cottages exist within the area, and proposals are being considered for additional development below the falls. Heavy use of the river by motorboats is a significant disturbance factor, causing erosion from boat wake in some sections.

Sensitivity

This site provides a substantial length of natural, undisturbed river and lake shoreline on one of the large lakes of Muskoka. Its aesthetic and ecological values could be seriously impaired by cottage or campground development along those shorelines. Measures to limit boat traffic on the river corridor and to minimize boat wake would help to alleviate the disturbance associated with this ongoing use.

Major Sources of Information

Bergsma et al, 1993; Reid et al, 1991; Bajc and Henry, 1991; Simpson, 1978; Spek, 1978; Towle, 1989.