

LOWER SWIFT SLOPE

UTM Ref. 17TPV151682

Wood Township, Muskoka Lakes
Status: Recommend Heritage Area

Area: 7 ha

Site Characteristics

The Lower Swift Slope is a rather steep, southwest-facing slope extending in a narrow strip about 700 metres downstream from the Swift Rapids Lock. The area has a warm, dry microclimate and numerous gneissic bedrock exposures. Where there is sufficient soil, a White and Red Oak woodland has developed.

This slope harbours a number of southern and prairie type plant species with very restricted distribution in Muskoka, with the highest concentration found on a small peninsula jutting into the river. The greatest diversity and most of the significant species are found just above the wave wash zone, low on the slope.

Flora and Fauna

Total numbers of species recorded were:

Vascular Plants 261 native; 36 introduced

Significant Natural Values and Selection Criteria Met

1. **Representation** - (B1) Lower Swift Slope is one of two Heritage Areas providing representation of a South-facing Rock Shoreline with prairie species (warmer/rock/wet), an association that is not well-represented elsewhere in Muskoka.
2. **Diversity** - (B2) Lower Swift Slope has a higher than expected number of native plant species relative to size than other sites in Muskoka, as shown in Figure 1.
3. **Rare Species** - (B4) The area provides habitat for the following rare species:

Vascular Plants

Allium canadense Wild Garlic [RR]
Anemone virginiana Thimbleweed [RR]
Bromus kalmii Kalm's Chess Brome [RR]
Carex conoidea Field Sedge [PR RR]
Ceanothus herbaceus Narrow-leaved New Jersey Tea [RR]
Desmodium canadense Showy Tick Trefoil [RR]
Hypericum punctatum Spotted St. John's Wort [RR]
Pedicularis canadensis Wood Betony [RR]
Penstemon hirsutus Hairy Beard Tongue [RR]
Rhus aromatica Fragrant Sumac [RR]
Sanicula marilandica Black Snakeroot [RR]
Thalictrum dasycarpum Purple Meadow Rue [RR]

In addition, 29 regionally-uncommon species of vascular plants were documented within this small site.

4. Biogeographic Significance - (B7) Lower Swift Slope includes among its flora several species at the northern edge of their range, including Groundnut, Narrow-leaved New Jersey Tea, Panicked Tick-trefoil, Broad-leaved Grass, and Fragrant Sumac.

5. Scenic Landscapes - (C7) The Severn River, which is immediately adjacent to the Lower Swift Slope, has been identified as a corridor of high scenic value.

Ownership and Disturbance

Approximately 70% of the area is privately owned; the remainder is Crown land. No cottages have been built along this stretch of the river, probably due to the steep slopes. Boat traffic around the locks is very heavy, creating considerable wake. Picknickers occasionally land on the small point, and a crude hut has recently been constructed there.

Sensitivity

Many of the rare plants within this area, especially those concentrated near the water's edge, are sensitive to destruction by future development activities, or even by excessive trampling. Information signs to discourage intensive use of the small point could be helpful.

Major Sources of Information

Kamstra, 1992; Berney and Reid, 1993.