

NORTH MUSKOKA CANYON

UTM Ref. 17TPV322930

Macaulay Township, Bracebridge
Status: Recommend Heritage Site

Area: 123 ha

Site Characteristics

This prominent valley is situated along the North Branch of the Muskoka River between High Falls and Wilson Falls, north of Bracebridge. Just below High Falls the valley is flanked by two large outcroppings of Canadian Shield bedrock. Downstream, the valley is incised into an area of deep glaciolacustrine fine sands and older alluvial silts and sands. In places where the valley walls have been recently exposed, the layering effect (or varves) created by annual fluctuations in these sediments can be readily seen.

The valley walls and river floodplain provide a variety of sheltered habitats for wildlife and a locally significant corridor for the movement of wildlife and plant species. The mixed forests have a northern aspect with White Spruce, Balsam Fir and Eastern Hemlock, Red and Sugar Maple, White and Yellow Birch, Black Cherry and White Pine as common elements.

A total of 49 species of birds were seen in the Muskoka Canyon site during breeding season, together with 141 species of native vascular plants and 16 introduced plant species. Incidental sightings of other fauna were noted, including White-tailed Deer. Only one species of plant, Bloodroot (*Sanguinaria canadensis*), was considered regionally rare and one bird was uncommon.

Significant Natural Values and Selection Criteria Met

1. **Fish and Wildlife Concentrations** - (B5) The North Muskoka Canyon is within a sizeable deer wintering area (District Municipality of Muskoka, 1985 Sensitive Areas Schedules; Jan McDonnell, personal communication, 1993) and provides a corridor of wildlife habitat within an urbanizing area of Muskoka.

Ownership, Disturbance and Sensitivity

All of the Muskoka Canyon site is privately owned, with most of the vegetation communities having undergone considerable disturbance over the years. Some forests are at an early successional stage of growth; others show evidence of continued disturbance from camping, recreational use of the land and cottage development. The sensitivity of the site is related to the maintenance of coniferous habitat for deer and the value of the natural corridor. Minimization of development on the valley floor and slopes and rehabilitation of shoreline areas would assist in protecting the natural river valley corridor.