

SOUTH MUSKOKA CANYON

UTM Ref. 17TPV341842 to 330853

Draper and Muskoka Townships, Bracebridge
Status: Recommend Heritage Area

Area: 49 ha

Site Characteristics

This site is situated along the South Muskoka River near Bracebridge. The river valley corridor includes the South Falls generating station headpond, the falls, and approximately 1.5 km of river downstream. Fluctuating water levels in the headpond above the falls provide suitable habitat for Atlantic Coastal Plain species. Adjacent to the generating station, the river drops steeply through a bedrock fault surrounded by White Pine forest. The massive rocks of the talus slope provide nesting habitat for Turkey Vultures. Below this point, the river runs through a steep-sided valley clad in fairly mature mixed forests of Eastern Hemlock, Red Maple, White and Yellow Birch, White Pine, and Red Oak on deep clay soils. Several small tributaries enter through deeply-incised side valleys.

The site is geologically interesting; the river follows ancestral meltwater discharge routes, verified by the presence of older alluvial sand and silt deposits along the river valley. The steep-sided eastern valley wall is composed of glaciolacustrine fine-grained deposits of clay and silt, while the western slopes are underlain by coarser-grained deposits of fine sand and silt (Bajc and Henry, 1991). These deposits account in part for the richness of the flora and wildlife habitat.

The sheltered canyon-like valley provides a green corridor into the urbanizing core of Bracebridge.

Flora and Fauna

Total number of species recorded were:

Vascular plants	298 native; 39 introduced 11 A.C.P.F. with a score of 51 (High)
Birds	40 observed during breeding season
Mammals	7
Herpetofauna	5
Butterflies	5

Significant Natural Values and Selection Criteria Met

1. **Diversity - (B2)** The total number of native plant species related to the size of the area is higher than expected for Muskoka, as shown on Figure 1.
2. **Rare Species - (B4)** The South Falls Canyon area provides habitat for the following rare species:

Vascular Plants
Carex folliculata Long Sedge [PR]

Carex novae-angliae New England Sedge [PR]
Elatine minima Water Wort [PR]
Equisetum scirpoides Dwarf Scouring Rush [RR]
Rubus canadensis Thornless Blackberry [RR]
Triadenum virginicum Marsh St. John's Wort [PR]
Xyris difformis Slender Yellow-eyed Grass [PR]

In addition, 11 species of vascular plants were recorded as regionally uncommon.

3. Fish and Wildlife Concentrations - (B5) Pickerel are known to spawn below the falls (MNR fish spawning maps) and spawning bed enhancement was undertaken by the MNR in 1987. The 1990 confirmation of nesting Turkey Vulture was significant since known nest locations for these birds are sparse.

4. Biogeographic Significance - (B7) The South Falls generating station headpond provides habitat for Atlantic Coastal Plain Flora, with 11 species recorded. In the assessment and ranking of areas for A.C.P.F., this site obtained a high score of 51 which ranked it 9 of 10 significant sites.

5. Scenic Landscapes - (C7) The falls beside the South Falls generating station and the view down the valley are identified as having high scenic value.

Ownership and Disturbance

The area is privately owned with uses varying from cottage and residential to Hydro generation. A large portion of the area is undisturbed, but it is evident that the river corridor is well-travelled with most associated disturbances located near the falls or close to the cottages along the shoreline. There were 11.3% introduced plant species recorded from the area.

Sensitivity

The sensitivity of this site is related to the river corridor and shoreline features. Protection of the slopes using MNR Area of Concern guidelines and shoreline protection for A.C.P.F. should be considered in developing policies related to this area.

Major Sources of Information

Bajc & Henry, 1991; Bergsma, et al., 1993; Berney & Reid, 1993; Keddy & Sharp, 1989; Reid, et al., 1991.