

SOUTH THREE MILE LAKE WETLAND

UTM Ref. 17TPV369718

Morrison Township, Gravenhurst
Status: Recommend Heritage Area

Area: 338 ha

Site Characteristics

This site is located to the north of Kahshe Lake in an area of shallow overburden, supporting hardwood forests, open Pine and Oak mixed stands on shallower soils, and several areas of open White and Red Oak. One section of the eastern shore of the lake has a stand of Red Pine, Red Maple, with Black Huckleberry and Roundleaf Dogwood understory. Five-lined Skink were found in the open rock areas of these uplands.

Atlantic Coastal Plain species are abundant in at least ten locations along the shoreline of the lake and its islands. The diversity of coastal plain species is good with Virginia Meadow Beauty dominating at all sites. Atlantic Coastal Plain Flora were noted in 1981 by M. Sharp who reported extensive populations of Virginia Meadow Beauty. A later visit by MNR showed the population to be much smaller and less extensive due to higher water levels. This area was again visited in 1988 by Keddy and Sharp (1989) who documented only three A.C.P.F. species. In a visit by MHAP biologist in 1990, four species were recorded. A 1992 visit by MHAP biologists confirmed nine species and a more extensive shoreline distribution of A.C.P.F. than in 1990. Fluctuations in water levels control the distribution and abundance of coastal plain species. Shorelines with no coastal plain flora one year, may support extensive populations in subsequent seasons. It appears that the flora has gradually extended its shoreline distribution and species diversity on this lake since 1981.

Numerous small wetlands drain into the lake from all directions. These wetlands vary from open water with emergent and submergent aquatics, to wet meadow marshes and shoreline fens supporting orchid species such as Rose Pogonia.

Flora and Fauna

Total numbers of species recorded were:

| | |
|-----------------|---|
| Vascular Plants | 253 native; 16 introduced 9 A.C.P.F. with a score of 43 (Moderate) |
| Birds | 11 recorded during breeding season |
| Mammals | 4 |
| Herpetofauna | 8 |
| Butterflies | 2 |
| Dragonflies | 2 |
| Mushrooms | 5 |

Significant Natural Values and Selection Criteria Met

1. **Representation** - (B1) The association of Black Huckleberry and Roundleaf Dogwood within a stand of Red Pine (warmer/rock/dry-mesic) is an unusual community type with limited representation in other Heritage Areas of Muskoka.

2. **Diversity** - (B2) The total number of native plant species related to the size of the area is higher than average for Muskoka as shown in Figure 1.

3. **Rare Species** - (B4) South Three Mile Lake provides habitat for the following rare species:

Wildlife

Sternotherus odoratus Stinkpot [RR]

Vascular Plants

Aster ericoides Heath Aster [RR]

Cyperus diandrus Two Stamen Umbrella Sedge [RR]

Elatine minima Water Wort [PR]

Galium boreale Northern Bedstraw [RR]

Rhexia virginica Virginia Meadow Beauty [NR PR]

Xyris difformis Slender Yellow-eyed Grass [PR]

In addition, one amphibian and one reptile plus thirteen species of vascular plants were recorded as regionally uncommon.

4. **Fish and Wildlife Concentrations** - (B5) Several areas in the north end of the lake are known to serve as spawning habitat for Muskellunge. Two small deer yards are present in the northeastern side of the lake. A heronry is present east of the lake.

Ownership and Disturbance

The majority of the shoreline of this lake, which is approximately 3 km long, is undeveloped Crown Lake. Shoreline at the southern end of the lake is privately owned. Several unregulated campsites and semi-permanent structures are present on the small islands in the southern end of the lake. These island habitats and portions of shoreline are suffering from abuse from trampling, burning, littering, tree-cutting and hunting. The area is a popular spot for parties, fishermen and campers with easy vehicle access.

Sensitivity

The sensitivity of this area is related to the shoreline habitat for Atlantic Coastal Plain Flora, wildlife habitat and the representative rock barren - shrub community. The MNR should give priority to protection of these significant ecological features by following management guidelines for A.C.P.F., deer yards, fish spawning areas and significant plant communities. Increased enforcement presence in this area is necessary to prevent further damage to the shoreline and island habitats.

Major Sources of Information

Bergsma, et al., 1993; District Municipality of Muskoka, Sensitive Areas Schedules 1985; Keddy & Sharp, 1989; Reid, et al., 1991; OMNR, rare species mapping; Muskoka Field Naturalists, 1991.