

WELL'S CREEK/WALKER POINT

UTM Ref. 17TPV174885

Wood Township, Muskoka Lakes
Status: Recommend Heritage Area

Area: 158 ha

Site Characteristics

This site is situated on an undeveloped bay of Lake Muskoka. Wells Creek begins from an inland shallow wetland area underlain by organic deposits. The creek follows a small area of glaciolacustrine deltaic deposits of sand and fine gravel. Rich Eastern Hemlock-Beech-Sugar Maple forests surround the creek valley, on deposits of shallow to deep till over bedrock. Closer to the bay the creek enters an area of localized clay and silt deposits supporting a Black Ash-Basswood-Red and Silver Maple-American Elm deciduous forest.

On the western slope of the bay is a narrow band of very mature mixed and deciduous forest, with large specimens of Red Oak (max. dbh=38.0 cm), White Ash (max. dbh=23.6 cm), American Beech (max. dbh=31.4 cm), Sugar Maple (max. dbh=35.2 cm), and Red Maple (max. dbh=23.7 cm) mixed with White Birch, Basswood, Eastern Hemlock, Ironwood and Striped Maple. The understory consists of an exceptionally rich herbaceous and sedge groundcover.

The narrow bay supports a diverse mixture of floating and submerged aquatic macrophytes, including Floating Hearts, bladderworts, and pond weeds. The shallow shorelines are dominated by Pickerelweed, Bullhead Lily and Three-way Sedge. Backshore areas support a thicket swamp grading into bottomland forest. The rich wetland supports a corresponding diversity of herpetofauna, especially frogs and turtles.

Flora and Fauna

Total numbers of species recorded were:

Vascular Plants	191 native ; 9 introduced
	2 A.C.P.F. with a score of 8 (Insignificant)
Birds	31 observed during breeding season
Mammals	5
Herpetofauna	10

Significant Natural Values and Selection Criteria Met

1. **Quality and Disturbance** - (B3) The Wells Creek area supports mature, late successional, deciduous and mixed woods plus a narrow, undisturbed bay with a high diversity of aquatic vegetation. The remnant old growth forest along the bay contains a mix of mature tree specimens. Compared with nine other sites where tree diameter breast measurements were taken, the Red Oak, Beech and Red Maple were the largest individuals. In an area that is otherwise densely populated with cottages along the shoreline, the bay and creek system running through rich forests, provide important, high quality wildlife habitat.

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

Wildlife

Buteo lineatus Red-shouldered Hawk [NR PR]*

Vascular Plants

Pilea pumila Clearweed [RR]

* Nesting location recorded by OMNR, Bracebridge District

In addition, two species of herpetofauna and nine species of vascular plants were recorded as regionally uncommon.

3. **Fish and Wildlife Concentrations** - (B5) A heronry of fifteen nests, with at least three active, was located on a small inland pond. The herons feed in the narrow bay on Lake Muskoka, which was noted as "teeming with polywogs". Nesting of the nationally and provincially rare Red-shouldered Hawk has been documented and confirmed annually by the M.N.R.. Wells Creek is also part of the Walker Point deer wintering area.

4. **Biogeographic Significance** - (B7) Some of the flora found in the Wells Creek area have southern affinities and/or are often associated with clay based soils. This includes species such as Bur Oak, Silver Maple, Water Willow or Swamp Loosestrife, Buttonbush and Snowberry. The Map Turtle identified in the bay of Lake Muskoka is an inland range limit for this species, which is more common in the Georgian Bay vicinity.

Ownership and Disturbance

Although the area is all privately owned, there is presently no development on any of the land. Snowmobile trails run through the central portion of the site. The narrow bay is largely undisturbed. A cottage access road runs through the site, immediately beside the old growth forest. The other side of this road has been logged and is heavily disturbed. A portion of bottomland forest on the eastern side of the bay was once farmland. There is a high percentage of introduced species in this part of the site, as well as a large area of Poison Ivy.

Sensitivity

The sensitivity of this site is related to the wildlife habitat values of the mature, rich forest and wetland which support Red-shouldered Hawk, a heronry, an old growth forest and a diversity of herpetofauna, aquatic plants and plant species associated with rich soils and southern habitats. Existing management guidelines for heronries and Red-shouldered Hawk should be followed. The small remnant old growth forest should be left undeveloped. The quality of the small wetland bay should not be compromised by inappropriate development or recreational uses.

Major Sources of Information

Bergsma, et al., 1993; District Municipality of Muskoka, 1985 Sensitive Areas Schedules; Kor, & Miller, 1987; OMNR, 1986 Deer Aerial Survey Maps, Bracebridge Area Office.