

COOPER'S POND

UTM Ref. 17TPA253027

Watt Township, Muskoka Lakes
Status: Recommend Heritage Area

Area: 570 ha

Site Characteristics

Cooper's Pond is a small lake, bordered by wetlands, which drains into Three Mile Lake. Constant water levels in the lake, controlled by a concrete dam at its outlet, have allowed the invasion of floating-leaved aquatic plants and Leatherleaf-Sweet Gale shrubs on a floating sphagnum mat. Other beaver pond and wetland communities scattered throughout the site include areas with standing dead trees, White Cedar, Red Maple and Black Ash swamps, Alder thicket swamps, and a small area of Black Spruce swamp forest.

The upland areas around Cooper's Pond have a mantle of thin sandy tills, with some deeper pockets of fine silty till. Much of this upland is clad in a relatively mature Sugar Maple-Beech-Hemlock forest, with some areas of almost pure Eastern Hemlock. To the west of Cooper's Pond, the gentle slopes support a mature woodland of Sugar Maple, Black Cherry, and White Ash. This woodland has a rich herbaceous layer of fern species and herbs, including such species as Wild Leek and Ostrich Fern, which are indicative of relatively rich conditions.

In the 1960s and 1970s, Cooper's Pond was a productive waterfowl habitat, and records of annual banding activity show up to several hundred Wood Duck, Mallard, Black Duck, and other ducks (Gillespie and Lewis, 1985). However, its productivity has declined significantly in the absence of periodic water drawdowns to allow vegetative decay and nutrient release.

Flora and Fauna

Total numbers of species recorded were:

Vascular Plants	252 native; 20 introduced 1 A.C.P.F. with a score of 4 (Insignificant)
Birds	87 observed during breeding season
Mammals	15
Herpetofauna	11
Butterflies	19

Significant Natural Values and Selection Criteria

1. **Diversity - (B2)** The Cooper's Pond area shows an exceptional richness in diversity of bird species, with 87 species recorded during the breeding season. This richness is related in part to a good diversity of habitat types.

2. **Rare Species** - (B4) The Cooper's Pond area provides habitat for the following rare species:

Wildlife

Buteo lineatus Red-shouldered Hawk [NR PR]

Anas acuta Northern Pintail [RR]

Vireo philadelphicus Philadelphia Vireo [RR]

Vascular Plants

Botrychium dissectum Cut-leaved Grape Fern [RR]

Carex blanda Woodland Sedge [RR]

Carex interior Inland Sedge [RR]

Carex novae-angliae New England Sedge [PR]

Dryopteris Xboottii Bootts Wood Fern [RR]

Luzula multiflora Wood Rush [RR]

Shepherdia canadensis Canada Buffaloberry [RR]

In addition, regionally uncommon species documented from the site included 13 plants, five birds, one mammal, three amphibians and one butterfly. An unconfirmed summer sighting of Long-eared Owl, a provincially and regionally rare species, was also recorded during field work on the site.

2. **Fish and Wildlife Concentrations** - (B5) According to MNR records, a woodlot within the Cooper's Pond area supports a small heronry.

3. **Biogeographic Significance** - (B7) The flora of the Cooper's Pond area includes several species with eastern affinities, including New England Sedge, Slender Manna Grass (*Glyceria melicaria*), and the only Atlantic Coastal Plain species, Purple Bladderwort.

Ownership and Disturbance

Over half of Cooper's Pond itself is Crown land; the remainder of the site is privately owned. A number of seasonal and permanent residences have been constructed around the edges of the area, and a hydro corridor cuts through the northwest corner. Parts of the forest, especially in the southern third of the site, have been selectively logged. Water levels in the Pond are controlled by a concrete dam.

Sensitivity

The natural values of the Cooper's Pond area could be impaired by further development or heavy logging, especially in the vicinity of rare species such as Red-shouldered Hawks. Artificial maintenance of the waters levels in the Pond has greatly reduced its productivity for waterfowl, a trend that will continue unless periodic water fluctuations are permitted to return.

Major Sources of Information - Reid et al, 1991; Gillespie and Lewis, 1985 Wetland Evaluation, OMNR; Bajc and Henry, 1991.