PORT CUNNINGTON WETLAND UTM Ref. 17TPA550145

Franklin Township, Lake of Bays Area: 50 ha.
Status: Recommend Heritage Site

Site Characteristics

This site occupies a lowland basin inland from Haystack Bay on the Lake of Bays and some of the surrounding upland forests. A small pond with watershield and duckweed is surrounded by an emergent marsh of Cattail, Iris and Burreeds. Drainage from the pond is slowed by beaver activities, resulting in a area of grass wet meadow marsh through which a small stream flows into Lake of Bays. A small area of Virginia Chain Fern poor fen with Leatherleaf and Sweet Gale increases the diversity of wetland types at this site. The northern edge of the wetland is lined with a narrow band of mixed conifer-broadleaf swamp forest with an herb-rich understory on sphagnum. Adjacent to this community on slightly raised ground is an area of Red Maple - Yellow Birch - Black Cherry bottomland forest. A rich late successional Sugar Maple - Beech - Eastern Hemlock forest on deep soils surrounds the wetland.

There were 146 species of native vascular plants and 13 introduced species, plus 11 birds observed during breeding season, four mammals, six herpetofauna and 13 mushroom species recorded from the site. All were common except for the Pickerel Frog which is regionally rare and Tall Manna Grass (*Glyceria grandis*) which is uncommon in Muskoka.

Significant Natural Values and Selection Criteria Met

1. **Diversity** - (B2) This small site supports a good diversity of vegetation community types including mature upland forest, rich bottomland forest, swamp forest, emergent marsh, meadow marsh, floating shrub mat, and open water with floating aquatics macrophytes. Towle (1989) rated the diversity of habitats important for wildlife, while Brunton (1991 b) assessed the area as a regionally significant wetland for candidate ANSI status.

Ownership, Disturbance and Sensitivity

The area is privately owned but is recognized on an "area of natural constraint" in schedule E of the Muskoka District Official Plan and is therefore unlikely to be developed. There is visible human-related disturbance in the form of a dump site located adjacent to the main road. Building materials and scrap metal have been dumped here and it is strewn down the hillside and into the top end of the pond and marsh.

The sensitivity of this site is related to the wetland function. The mature upland forests form a suitable buffer for the protection of the wetland. The greatest threat to the wetland is from the improper use of the area adjacent to the road as a dump. There exists the potential for contamination of the wetland and/or impairment of function in addition to the poor aesthetics of the dump itself.