

SPRING CREEK WETLAND

UTM Ref. 17TPV488873

Oakley and Draper Townships, Bracebridge
Status: Recommend Heritage Area

Area: 402 ha

Site Characteristics

Spring Creek is a classic palustrine wetland positioned above a riverine wetland. The source of the wetland begins at Wood Lake, with an intermittent inflow of water draining through a MNR maintained floodgate dam into a large, circular, rather flat floodplain underlain by swamp and organic deposits. A deep (> 2 metre), permanent, clear water stream with abundant aquatic vegetation meanders through a thicket swamp, a shrub-rich wet meadow marsh and open graminoid wet meadow marsh to a large beaver dam at the west end. Two small treed outcrops are present as breaks in the otherwise flat wetland. North of the stream is an extensive low shrub rich fen grading into Eastern White Cedar and White Pine-mixed hardwood swamp forests and Eastern White Cedar-Red Maple mixed herb-rich swamp forest. The slightly elevated upland in the northern section of the area supports a mature to sub-mature Balsam Fir-Sugar Maple northern hardwood forest with a rich herbaceous understory.

From the beaver dam, the water (which is now tea-coloured), falls about five metres through a narrow, bedrock exposed valley, treed with White Pine and Eastern Hemlock. The stream flows for two kilometres between White Pine northern mixed hardwood forest, Red Maple-Yellow Birch-Black Cherry rich bottomland forest, White Spruce-Red Maple forest and Silver Maple-American Elm deciduous swamp forest. The stream widens as it descends, past several beaver dams and associated low shrub and sedge meadow marsh communities. It then opens into a broad, fan-shaped delta where it meets the South Muskoka River. At this confluence, the wetland is riverine and supports floating and submerged aquatics and tussocks of sedges, plus an extensive shrub-rich marsh. To the north on slightly elevated ground is a large area of Black Spruce-Tamarack-Alder-Sphagnum transitional herb-rich swamp forest.

Flora and Fauna

Total numbers of species recorded were:

Vascular Plants	222 native ; 2 introduced 1 A.C.P.F. with a score of 6 (Insignificant)
Birds	37 observed during breeding season
Mammals	5
Herpetofauna	12
Butterflies	2
Fish	3 minnows

Significant Natural Values and Selection Criteria Met

1. **Hydrology** - (A3) The area is a significant hydrological system, with the large floodplain basin contributing a water storage function, plus enhancement of water quality downstream from Wood Lake.

2. **Representation** - (B1) Good examples of mature Eastern White Cedar conifer swamp forests (normal/sand/ wet-mesic) are not well-represented in other Heritage Areas. The

presence of this community type contributes to the full range of biotic representation in Muskoka.

3. **Diversity** - (B2) The area exhibits a high diversity of community types and successional stages with representation of aquatic, marsh, swamp, fen and riverine wetland communities, plus mature to sub-mature coniferous, mixed and deciduous lowland and upland forests, many which display a rich herbaceous understory.

4. **Quality** - (B3) The area is in pristine condition, containing biotic communities of unusually high quality showing little recent disturbance. The Balsam Fir-Sugar Maple northern hardwood forest contains mature specimens of Sugar Maple (maximum dbh 34.9 cm) and Black Cherry (max. dbh 14.8 cm). The Eastern White Cedar swamp forest is also mature with the largest specimen measured at 20.0 cm dbh.

5. **Rare Species** - (B4) The Spring Creek Wetland provides habitat for the following rare species:

Vascular Plants

Potamogeton filiformis Filiform Pond Weed [RR]
Triadenum virginicum Marsh St. John's Wort [PR]

In addition, one bird and ten species of vascular plants were recorded as regionally uncommon.

6. **Fish and Wildlife Concentrations** - (B5) The Spring Creek wetland is on the edge of a large deer wintering area. Yellow Pickerel spawn at the outlet of Wood Lake. The deep, clear waters of the creek support an abundance of minnows and small fish.

7. **Large Size and Linkage** - (B6) The area is large enough to provide habitat for River Otters with an undisturbed linkage between Wood Lake and South Muskoka River. A den with two adult otters present was confirmed during field visits in 1992.

Ownership and Disturbance

The area is privately owned and used mainly for recreation in the form of hunting for Deer, Moose and Bear and harvesting of bait minnows from the stream for fishing. A snowmobile trail crosses the creek in one place and goes across the northern and eastern edges of the site. Minor logging is carried out in the surrounding forests. The area is otherwise undisturbed.

Sensitivity

The sensitivity of this site is related to the hydrological functioning of the wetland system. The Provincial Wetland Policy related to protection of wetlands should be followed including sufficient surrounding forests as buffer. Fragmentation of the wetland corridor would disrupt the natural functioning of wetland species.

Major Sources of Information - Bajc, 1992; Bajc, & Henry, 1991; Bergsma, et al., 1993; District Municipality of Muskoka, 1985 Sensitive Areas Schedules.