

Why Protect Wetlands?

Wetlands are, in a word, precious. They support a rich variety of plants and animals that require wet conditions for their survival. They are the home of large mammals, including White-tail Deer and Moose, and a variety of furbearers such as muskrat, American Beaver, American Mink and River Otter.

Wetlands are important in the control of flooding, as they slowly release water from snowmelt and heavy rains. Surrounding groundwater levels are maintained for the benefit of all life forms. Sediments and Toxins are filtered by wetland vegetation.

Stop 1—Viewing Platform

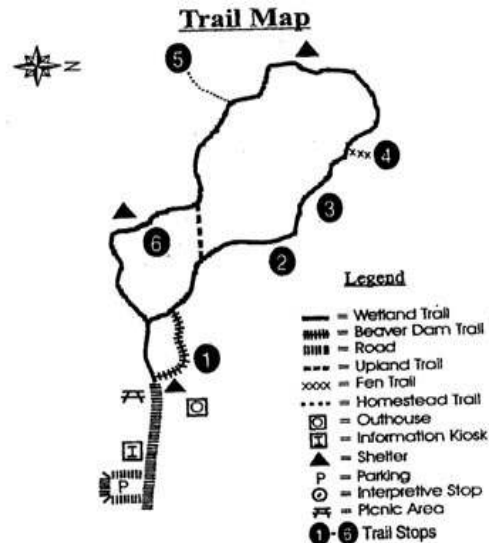
From this point you can see a shallow open-water marsh wetland with both floating leaved (Water Shield) and emergent plants (rushes and cattails). Floating leaves provide homes for many kinds of invertebrates, which use both sides of the leaves. The succulent roots and stems of the Water shield are a favourite of the Moose. The heads of the cattails contain overwintering larvae which are eaten by the Black-capped Chickadee who also use the fluffy seeds for their nests. Cattails and sedges, with their upright and often dense growth, provide hiding places for birds, including the American Bittern.

In the distance to the far left can be seen the large wetland that drains into this marsh. Water flows slowly through two old beaver dams to the left of the platform. The beaver dams and edges of the wetland are rich in grasses, sedges and herbs. The very poisonous Bulbiferous Water Hemlock can be found here, along with the colourful yellow Bur-Marigold and the white-flowered Boneset.

Welcome to Snowden Park, a 45—hectare (110-acre) wetland and forest preserve established through the cooperation of the Township of Snowden and the Haliburton Field Naturalists. It is located 0.3 km south of the junction of County Road 1 and South Lake Road (County Road 16) and 0.7 km west of County Road 1. The self guided trail follows a level route through and upland mixed forest. The main Wetland Trail is about 2.9 km in length. There are several short side trails and loops. Along the route are excellent examples of wetlands, including a shallow open water marsh adjacent to a viewing platform (wheel chair accessible), a large fen complex and a swamp hardwood forest. Users of the trail are advised to wear appropriate footwear, especially in wet times of the year. Boardwalks have been constructed to ensure the protection of the ground surface and natural water flows.

This brochure provides you with some background on the ecology and human history of Snowden Park. Stops along the trail highlight some of the more interesting features.

We hope you enjoy the experience, and ask that you respect the environment here. Please leave nothing behind, and do not remove any vegetation or wildlife.



Welcome to Snowden Park Wetland and Forest Preserve



Enjoy the Experience...

The Township of Minden Hills

The Haliburton Field Naturalists

Muskrats often inhabit the shallow waters of a marsh. They live in bank dens. They also build a smaller cone-shaped version of a beaver house from the leaves of cattails, rushes and water lilies, after they have consumed their succulent roots. In their constant quest for food, they create patches of open water which benefit water flow.

Stop 2– Swamps

Swamps are wetlands in which water is standing still or slow moving, and are dominated by trees or shrub thickets. Seasonal “drying out” of swamps improves oxygen levels for plant growth. Treed swamps, with Red Maple, Yellow Birch, Black Ash and White Elm (to name a few!) are thus often extremely rich in herbs, ferns, mosses and liverworts. Cinnamon Fern and Interrupted Fern are present. Examples of treed swamps exist adjacent to the wetlands and along the trail, in poorly drained areas.

Treed swamps provide habitats for woodpeckers, Wood Ducks, Tree Swallows, Common Grackles, Black-capped Chickadees, Northern Raccoons and bats. Grackles, with their distinctive raspy call, visit the swamp edge and feast on aquatic insects, whereas Tree Swallows sweep through the air in search of flying insects. Woodpeckers eat ants and beetles that live in the decaying snags.

Stop 3—Snags and Logs

As you proceed along the trail you will notice large snags (standing dead trees) and logs. Many species of wildlife (birds, mammals, amphibians) use dead or dying trees for nesting, feeding, hiding den sites, resting sites and travel routes. Decomposing logs also act as nurse logs for the regeneration of some tree species, for example, Yellow Birch. As much as possible, these features are being protected in Snowden Park .

Stop 4 - Fen

The Large wetland in front of you is a fen, which has a large floating mat of sphagnum (peat) mosses, with shrubs such as Leatherleaf, Labrador Tea and Bog Laurel. Amongst the sphagnum mosses are pitcher plants, highly specialized plants that obtain their nutrients from decaying insects. Insects are attracted to the stiff hairs of the “hood”: ultimately the insects fall into the water filled “pitchers”, and the bacteria go to work to break them down. Rough Cottongrass, with its fluffy white heads, is visible in mid to late summer. Many species of orchids can be found in fens. In the distance and around the edges are stunted Tamarack trees. This part of the fen is called a treed fen. Patches of speckled alder shrubs are scattered around the wetland. To the far right you can see open water. This is the main channel which drains through the beaver dams near the viewing platform. Fens are richer than bogs which are more acidic wetlands isolated from water flow. Bogs rely on rainfall for the nutrients. Water channels slowly run through the fen, providing nutrients to the wetland. Fens and bogs take centuries to develop. We ask that you observe from the edge. Aside from damage one can do by disturbing this very sensitive habitat, there is an element of risk in walking on a quaking peat mat!

Stop 5—The Old Farm Site and Well

As records show, this site was occupied in the late 1800’s as a farm. Remaining is the clearing, an old well, evidence of a barn and some stone fence. Scattered around the farm site and along the trail are remnant large Eastern White Pine and White Spruce from that time. Owing to the proximity and easy access to the Drag River to the east, it is quite likely that many pines and spruces were harvested and moved to the river for the spring river drive. More suitable for growing trees than crops, these moist but infertile sandy soils would have been marginal for farming. Today a host of pioneering species remain on this site .

Stop 6—Windfall

At this stop you can see a large pit exposed from the falling of a Balsam Fir tree. This tree, with its shallow root system, likely fell during a local windstorm event. During its relatively short life span, this tree has no doubt provided a home for many species, and as it decays, it will continue to play a role in the ecology of Snowden Park.

From this point, the mail trail continues to a boardwalk spanning a thicket swamp. Thicket swamps are dominated by shrubs such as Speckled Alder or willows.

The main Wetland you saw at the start of the trail drains through this area to yet another wetland to the east .

Snowden Park in Winter and Spring

Although most people will visit Snowden Park during the summer and fall months, there are things to be seen at all times of the year. Throughout the often harsh months of winter, there are animals that frequent the wetlands and forest, as evidenced by tracks in the snow. Mosses have been observed walking across the fen. Muskrats, when they emerge from their homes, become vulnerable to predators including owls and foxes.

In the spring, many migrant birds arrive. On spring evenings, the mating calls of Spring Peppers, Wood Frogs, Northern Leopard Frogs, American Toads and Gray Treefrogs fill the air.

We encourage you to visit Snowden Park throughout the year . Our plant and animal inventories are ongoing , and we would appreciate your reports of any interesting sightings. We hope you have enjoyed your visit to the Park!