

Little Tract

The white pine in the Little Tract shows what the timber in this area looked like prior to settlement in the 1800s. In 1870, the clearing near Airport Road held 15 houses for loggers. A sawmill was located beside the creek. At that time, the large white pine you see today were too small to be logged. Since the County purchased the property from Mr. Robert Little in 1971, there has been one small-scale logging operation, at the north end of the Tract. The "natural" designation given to the Little Tract in the County's long-term forest management plan in 1995 was affirmed in 2016 in the new long-term forest management plan. This means that there is no hunting, fishing, logging, or other resource extraction in this Tract, and only very low impact recreational activities such as hiking and cross-country skiing are permitted. The Tract is 40.4 hectares (100 acres) in size, and is square in shape (each side is 620 metres or 673 yards long). The interpretive trail winds in an about 2 km loop, marked with square white signs, starting and ending at the parking area. There are nine descriptive and informative stops that are marked by a wooden post with a number that correlate to this pamphlet. Enjoy your walk in the woods!



white pine
Ontario's provincial tree

1 The first stop takes you back to the time of the

first European settlers - large, old white pine trees dominated the landscape. Many of these were cut to make ship masts and for building. Today, few of the original white pine trees remain, but we will one day see "old growth" here again.

2 The area around this stop is dominated by trembling and largetooth aspen. Aspen needs more light to grow than tolerant hardwoods (e.g. sugar maple, American beech) do. The aspen shades the site, allowing maple and beech seedlings to develop. Gradually, the maple and beech will take over and the aspen component in the stand will disappear until another disturbance occurs. This is the natural process of forest succession.



largetooth aspen

3 The forest floor is very diverse. Not only are there seedling trees (mostly sugar maple, American beech, and white ash), there are also many shrubs and plants. Depending on the time of year you visit, you can see bracken fern, Canada mayflower,



alternate-leaf dogwood

partridgeberry, starflower, sarsaparilla, false Solomon's seal, and alternate-leaf dogwood at this stop.

4 Dead and dying trees are a very important part of the forest ecosystem. They provide food and homes for insects, fungi, birds, small mammals, raccoons, and many others. Grouse use fallen trees for drumming during mating season. You will see trees in all stages of death and decomposition as you walk along the trail. The decomposing log gives life to many kinds of mosses and is a nutrient-rich seedbed for the next generation of trees.



white ash

5 Here you can compare two species of pine common to the area - red and white. White pine has needles in bundles of five (an easy way to remember this is that there are five letters in "white"), while red pine has very long needles in bundles of two. The bark is also quite different - on white pine it is black and



small white pine in foreground, large red pine in background

furrowed, whereas on red pine it is red and scaly. If you look up at the crowns of the trees, you will see that white pine has a "softer" look to it than red pine.

6 Look about 10 metres (30 feet) into the forest and you will see several hemlock. Hemlock is a shade tolerant conifer - something unusual in this part of Ontario, where native conifers tend to be intolerant of shade. This means that hemlock can readily mix with other shade tolerant species such as sugar maple, white ash, and American beech. Its dense foliage is also important in providing winter cover for white-tailed deer and other animals - the needles keep the snow from reaching the ground, resulting in significantly reduced snow depths. Hemlock foliage is similar to that of balsam fir, but the needles are shorter, more densely packed on the stem, darker in colour, and lack the balsam fir's "Christmas tree" smell.



hemlock

7 Red oak, which you see at this stop, is semi shade tolerant, and has difficulty outcompeting sugar maple, American beech, and white ash in an area where the canopy is closed. To regenerate, red oak



red oak

generally requires a wildfire that removes the leaf litter (exposing the soil for acorn germination) and kills the competing maple, beech, and ash. For this reason, you are unlikely to see any oak seedlings even though there are mature oaks. If you do happen to see seedlings, they will most likely be growing on the path or in a larger clearing. In 2005, as part of the celebrations of the 75th anniversary of the Dufferin County Forest, red oak was designated the official tree of Dufferin County.

8 The wetland that you can see through the trees is a significantly different habitat from the upland forest you have been walking through. The borders of the wetland are dominated by cedar, spruce, and birch. The wetland itself is overgrown with “alder swail” - shrubby alder trees that are able to grow on the wet, nutrient poor site.



marsh marigold

9 At the end of your walk take a look around the parking area just off Airport Road. This part of the Tract was once maintained as a picnic area. There are some Scots pine here, remnants of a Christmas tree plantation. These are in the process of



Scots pine

being removed, as Scots pine is an exotic invasive species. You will also notice trees with yellow ribbons around their trunks. These are American chestnut trees, planted as part of a study into the spread and impact of the chestnut blight fungus.



American chestnut



white trillium
Ontario's provincial flower

Dufferin County Forest

The Little Tract is just one of the fourteen tracts that make up the 1,066 hectare (2,636 acre) Dufferin County Forest. The largest of these tracts is the Main Tract (607 hectares or 1,501 acres) located in Mulmur Township, just north of the hamlet of Mansfield.

Major tree species in the County Forest include red pine, red oak, sugar maple, white ash, black cherry, white pine, white spruce, eastern white cedar, larch, white birch, and poplar. Together with other biota, these represent a variety of ecosystems, including conifer and hardwood plantations, upland tolerant hardwoods, upland oak forests, bottomlands, wetlands, and creeks.

The Forest is managed by the County of Dufferin on a sustainable, multi-use basis. The Forest serves many important functions in terms of erosion and water control, natural heritage protection, biodiversity, wildlife habitat, recreational opportunities, and support of the rural economy through timber production and employment opportunities.

For more information:

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519-941-1114 or 877-941-7787
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Dufferin County Forest



A walk in the woods

This pamphlet guides you along an interpretive trail at the Little Tract of the Dufferin County Forest. The Little Tract is located at 938130 Airport Road (on the west side, about 15 km north of Highway 89).

Please respect the Little Tract:

- No camping
- No campfires
- No vehicles
- No littering or dumping
- No hunting

