

Thunder Bay Field Naturalists Club McTavish Wetlands Acquisition

From the December 2024 Newsletter.

For this issue of the newsletter, the Conservation Corner is an article and images from Janet Anderson of the Thunder Bay Field Naturalists Club detailing the history of the club and the recent addition to the McTavish Wetlands that SOOS helped to fund earlier this year. Enjoy!

Many THANK YOUs to the Southern Ontario Orchid Society (SOOS) for supporting the Thunder Bay Field Naturalists Club's land purchase addition in the McTavish Wetlands, Thunder Bay District to ensure the conservation of the orchids there!

The Thunder Bay Field Naturalists Club (TBFNC) is a non-profit organization dedicated to the study of natural history, the preservation and protection of all natural areas and the understanding and wise use of natural resources. Since the founding of the group in 1933, TBFNC has established itself as a well-recognized and respected voice for the natural world in the Thunder Bay area.

The main purpose of the Thunder Bay Field Naturalists Club Nature Reserves is to protect the habitats of the flora and fauna that live in these special places. We do not maintain trails, parking lots, fences, gates or any other facilities at the nature reserves. Motorized vehicles, including ATVs, snowmobiles and dirt bikes, are not allowed. Hunting, overnight camping, and campfires are also prohibited. Visitors are welcome to spend time and quietly enjoy the reserves while respecting their distinctive and often unique natural attributes.

In January 1994, TBFNC heralded the acquisition of what became the Nipigon River Mouth Nature Reserve, the first property in the organization's Nature Reserve Program. As such, this healthy, naturally functioning ecosystem protects a wetland as well as peregrine falcon habitat. Another purchase in 1999 expanded the reserve's footprint thereby preserving the area from the ongoing threat of development and logging. One of the defining features of the acquisition, and of interest to orchid lovers, was the Eastern White Cedar swamp supporting hundreds of Yellow Lady's-slippers. It is a little-known fact that the Lake Superior Basin hosts 58 species of the family Orchidaceae. Regionally, the earliest orchids can be found in May while some late blooming species don't appear until August.

Although not all of TBFNC's nature reserves are distinguished by the appearance of orchids, Caldwell Lake Nature Reserve is the richest in this type of flora with 16 species documented growing around the lake, many in large numbers. This includes *Arethusa bulbosa*, commonly called Dragon's-mouth, Rose Pogonia, Heart-leaved Twayblade, Blunt-leaf Orchid and Hooded Ladies-tresses. Granite Point Nature Reserve has showings of Large Yellow Lady's Slipper and Northern Green Orchids. The Pine Bay Nature Reserve which lies within the Great Lakes Heritage Coast is one of the few large wetlands along Lake Superior's rocky northern shore. Auricled Twayblade is common at both of the reserve's shorelines on Pine Bay. This is a provincially rare species found only along the north shore of Lake Superior. William Bog Nature Reserve is a Provincially Significant Wetland within Thunder Bay's city limits. Ragged Fringed Orchid is of particular interest at this location. It emits a fragrance at night that attracts night-flying moths that are the plant's primary pollinators. It is a northern specialty and is on our own regionally rare plant species list. Lots of others here too including *Arethusa*, Hooded Ladies-tresses, Rose Pogonia, Tall White Bog Orchid,

Liparis loesseli (common names are Fen Orchid, Yellow Widelif Orchid or Bog Twayblade) and Ram’s-head Lady’s-slipper which is provincially rare. The William Bog fen/swamp complex is used by Lakehead University students as a laboratory for natural history and ecology studies.



With the help of the Southern Ontario Orchid Society, the Thunder Bay Field Naturalists Club has purchased a 160-acre addition to our McTavish Wetlands Nature Reserve in Shuniah, east of Thunder Bay. With this addition, the 3rd in the last three years, this reserve grew to over 1,500 acres. TBFNC now owns and stewards over 10,000 acres of conservation lands at 23 different locations in Northern Ontario. Most of the reserve lies within the McTavish Provincially Significant

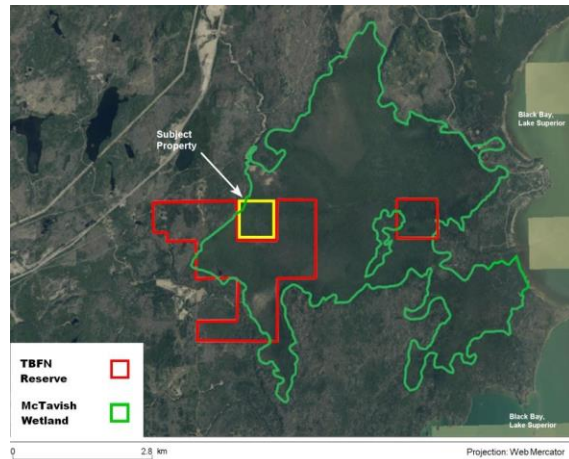
Wetland, an enormous area of open and treed fen and cedar swamps rich in orchids. Although it is home to the Round Leaf Orchid, (as shown) the plant is not common. The property is open to the public (a road touches one side and an abandoned rail bed is adjacent) the site is obviously challenging to visit given its vast size and wilderness character. There are no trails or facilities (see attached map showing location of this recent acquisition).

The purpose of the reserve is to protect the species and habitats there for conservation. The wetland has deep layers of peat which sequester carbon and also act as a large sponge holding ground water, and keeping temperatures cooler. Water flowing down the Pearl River and Welsh Creek through the wetland supply clean water sources to nearby Lake Superior.

This year’s donation to TBFNC’s McTavish Wetlands Nature Reserve is SOOS’s first to a field naturalists’ group. Field naturalists’ groups are the “boots-on-the-ground” and are attuned to changes. SOOS believes “it makes sense to support each other on local projects” which can protect targeted areas under the radar of larger national organizations. How lucky for TBFNC! The Thunder Bay Field Naturalists Club is grateful to the Southern Ontario Orchid Society for supporting the McTavish Wetlands purchase.



Map showing location of McTavish Wetland



Detail of acquisition area