

Welcome to the Slab Creek Provincially Significant Wetland

The Amazing Beaver

Beavers, our continent's biggest rodent, are brilliant hydrological engineers and are the keystone species of wetlands. Beavers create dams to protect their lodges, where they give birth to and raise their young. Through their damming practices they create, expand and maintain wetlands, providing habitat for a multitude of species and valuable protection for our water supply.

After building a dam, beavers maintain it - repairing breaks and monitoring the height of the water in the wetland surrounding it. Once a wetland is established they build lodges, the homes in which they give birth.

Like all rodents, beavers have teeth that never stop growing. Gnawing on trees and branches helps keep the length of their teeth under control. The longest beaver dam in the world, found at Wood Buffalo National Park in Alberta, is over 800 metres long!



Beaver Dam



Beavers use their flat, paddle-shaped tails as rudders for steering when they swim underwater, and as a prop to help them sit on land. Beavers will slap them loudly to create a thundering splash when they feel under threat.

One of the main food sources for beavers is tree parts - fresh bark, buds, stems and twigs. Beavers will store piles of cut branches from trees and shrubs in cold water, refrigerating them to ensure a fresh food supply in later months.

Most trees and saplings cut down by beavers turn

into shrubs, providing habitat for many species and a banquet of fast food twigs for beavers on the go.



Beaver Lodge



Beaver with Tail



Beaver Cut

What Is a Keystone Species?

A keystone species is a species on which other species in an ecosystem largely depend. The removal of the keystone species would change the ecosystem drastically.

Some of the Wetland Species Who Benefit from the Work of Beavers:



Green Heron



Painted Turtle



Great Blue Heron



Leopard Frog



Swamp Milkweed



Damselfly

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Wetlands and Watersheds

You are standing in the middle of the Hubbs Creek/Slab Creek watershed, in a depression in the land that acts as a reservoir in the movement of water from its sources – north and east of where you are standing – to its outlets down into Lake Ontario through Huycks and Pleasant Bays.

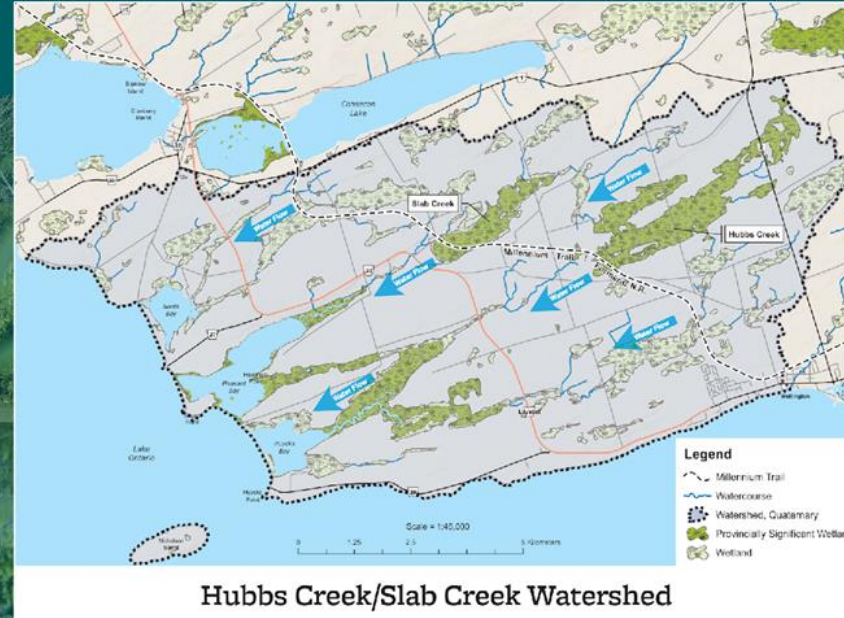
Look around you. This depression in the land is now a complex forested wetland that receives water from Hubbs Creek, Slab Creek and many other small water bodies, especially during spring runoff and extreme weather events.

Wetlands play a vital role in the life cycle of a watershed, filtering, holding and releasing water. They provide a wealth of habitat for a great variety of life – from microscopic insects to some of our largest birds, including many Species at Risk. Wetlands combat climate change by removing vast amounts of carbon from the atmosphere.

It is easy to overlook the importance of the many kilometres of small waterbodies that are also a part of a watershed. These features – swales, streams and human-made ditches – collectively form the circulatory system of the watershed that drains into this wetland complex. Managing the small waterbodies properly is essential in ensuring that a wetland's capacity to filter, hold and release water is not undermined.



Seasonal Stream



Hubbs Creek/Slab Creek Watershed



Cattails

Pour lire ce panneau en français
et accéder à d'autres informations
sur les terres humides et le Sentier
du Millénaire, visitez Mtrails.ca

To read this sign in French
and to access other interactive
information on wetlands and the
Millennium Trail, please visit Mtrails.ca

Marsh Birds Who Nest in the Cattails of the Hubbs Creek/Slab Creek Wetlands



Least Bittern – one of the smallest herons in the world



Virginia Rail – a small bird who can make a very large sound



American Bittern – stretching its neck to blend in with the surroundings



Sora – a bird that can lay 13 or more eggs in a single nest

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Life in a Wetland



Photo credit: ©Dane Vaughan

Swamp Milkweed – A relative of the Common Milkweed, the more vibrantly coloured Swamp Milkweed attracts many pollinators. Monarch Butterflies feed on the leaves as caterpillars and on the flower nectar as adults.



Photo credit: ©Dane Vaughan

Monarch Butterfly – Monarch Butterflies (Special Concern) contain a chemical as a defense mechanism that makes them distasteful to birds. This chemical (an alkaloid) is produced in milkweed leaves and is ingested by the caterpillars when they eat them. Through trial and error, predators learn to associate their bright colouring with a bitter taste.



Photo credit: skydabbay.com

American Bittern



Photo credit: ©Dane Vaughan

Great Egret with Leech



Photo credit: skydabbay.com

Marsh Wren



Photo credit: ©Dane Vaughan

Painted Turtle



Photo credit: ©Dane Vaughan

Great Blue Heron



Photo credit: ©Dane Vaughan

Red-winged Blackbird



Photo credit: skydabbay.com

Common Gallinule



Photo credit: skydabbay.com

Mallard Family



Photo credit: skydabbay.com

Bull Frog



Photo credit: ©Dane Vaughan

Virginia Rail



Photo credit: ©Dane Vaughan

Damselfly – Among the many insects that live in and around a marsh are Dragonflies and Damselflies. Both feed on mosquitoes as their main food source.

Dragonflies are usually larger than damselflies, are strong fliers and hold their wings out flat when resting on twigs or vegetation. Damselflies are smaller and more delicate, with slender bodies. They generally hold their wings together over their backs when at rest.



Photo credit: ©Dane Vaughan

Dragonfly



Photo credit: ©Dane Vaughan

Duckweed and Invasive European Frog-bit

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Why Are Wetlands Important?

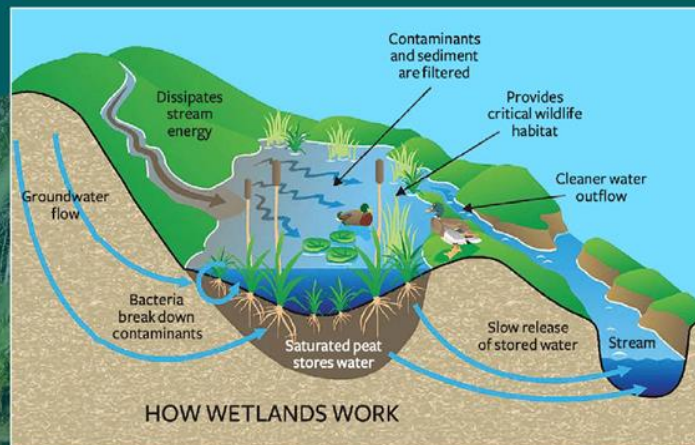
Wetlands are amazing ecosystems that provide numerous ecological benefits. They remove toxins from our water supply, protect us from flooding and drought, keep our soils intact by curbing erosion and mitigate climate change



Hubbs Creek Marsh

many Species at Risk. Wetlands brim with life and are beautiful, mysterious places to explore and enjoy.

by absorbing vast amounts of carbon from the atmosphere. Wetlands promote biodiversity by providing habitat and food for thousands of species, including



There are two types of wetlands in the Hubbs Creek/Slab Creek sections of the Millennium Trail - a swamp, which is a wetland dominated by trees, and a marsh, which is a wetland usually dominated by grasses and sedges.



Slab Creek Swamp

Wetlands act as both a sponge and a filter. They temporarily capture and slow down the flow of water, allowing them to replenish the surrounding water table in times of drought and to protect land downstream from erosion in times of flood. As filters, wetlands purify water by removing toxins from it.

Species at Risk Found in and near the Millennium Trail Wetlands



Blanding's Turtles (Threatened) are distinguished by their bright yellow chins and high-domed carapaces. They can live up to 80 years. All native turtles are considered Species at Risk in Ontario. The Blanding's Turtle is at greater risk because it doesn't start reproducing until it is 20 years old. Most are killed by cars or predators before they reach maturity.



Black Terns (Special Concern) are sleek acrobatic flyers who sport dark heads and chests during breeding season. They hover over the surface of wetlands as they prey on aquatic insects and small fish and build floating nests in shallow cattail marshes.



Barn Swallows (Threatened) are beautiful aerial foragers who snap up insects as they fly. They are distinguished from other swallows by their forked tails. Barn Swallows build their cup-shaped mud nests almost exclusively on human-made structures - in open barns, under eaves and bridges and in culverts.



Red-headed Woodpecker (Special Concern) is a medium-sized woodpecker easily recognized by its vivid red head, dark back and white belly. During nesting season, its main food source is insects, but in winter, it subsists on nuts. Red-headed Woodpeckers rely on upright dead trees for their nesting habitat.



Eastern Milk Snake (Special Concern) is a semi constrictor; it coils around its prey, mostly mice, until the prey is suffocated. The name "milk snake" originates from the myth that it takes milk from cows in barns where it is often drawn to by the abundance of mice. Human persecution is a substantial threat to Milk Snakes. People often mistake them for the venomous Massasauga Rattlesnake due to similar colouring and a tendency to vibrate their tail when disturbed.