

## Little Tract

The Little Tract white pine shows what the timber in this area looked like prior to settlement in the 1800's. 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. In 1995, the Little Tract was designated "natural area" as part of the County's 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 100 acres (40.5 ha) in size, and is square in shape (each side is 673 yards or 620 m long). Enjoy your walk in the woods!



**white pine**

**1** The first stop takes you back to the time of the first 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 do tolerant hardwoods such as maple and beech. 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 rich with species. Not only is there regeneration (mostly sugar maple, American beech, and white ash), there are also many species of shrubs and plants. Depending on the time of year you visit, you can see trilliums, starflowers, and wild columbine (early spring); kidney-leaved violet, bracken fern, and Canada mayflower (summer).

**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. Look inside the holes and under the logs (and please put them back after you're done) to see many species of wildlife. The decomposing log gives life to many kinds of mosses and is a nutrient-rich seedbed for the next generation of trees.

**5** White pine produces an abundant seed (and cone) crop every 3 to 5 years. A significantly lower number of seeds are produced in the "off" years. In a good seed year, you will see hundreds of cones scattered on the

ground under a large, old tree. You may even see piles of scales where squirrels have torn the cones apart to get at the seeds. Squirrels are responsible for much of the dispersal of white pine seeds.



**white pine cone**

**6** Even though about half of its living tissue has been removed, this butternut is still alive. The hollowed-out trunk provides shelter for a variety of wildlife. In this, as in all trees, the cambium, which is the part of the tree that carries water, nutrients, and food to and from the roots is all around the tree just under the bark, the centre of the tree (the heartwood) is actually dead. Across their range, butternuts are succumbing to butternut canker, a disease characterized by the formation of cankers that in the spring exude a thin inky-black fluid. There is research ongoing into the development of butternut varieties that are resistant to the canker.



**butternut**

**7** Red oak, which you see at this stop, is semi shade tolerant, and has difficulty outcompeting maple, beech, and ash in an area where the canopy is closed. To regenerate, red oak generally requires a wild-fire 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



**red oak**

happen to see seedlings, they will most likely be growing on the path or in a large clearing.

**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.



**speckled  
alder**

**9** At the end of your walk take a look around the open area just off Airport Road. This part of the Tract was once maintained as a picnic area. However, it has not been mown in a number of years, and is slowly returning to nature. Here you can watch succession in action - if you're patient enough to wait over the years. There are a few Scots pine here, remnants of a Christmas tree plantation. You will also notice small trees with green plastic sheets around them and metal tags. These are American chestnut trees, planted as part of a study into the spread and impact of the chestnut blight fungus.



**American  
chestnut**

## Dufferin County Forest

The Little Tract is just one of the twelve tracts that make up the 1,050 hectare (2,596 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 including erosion and water control, natural heritage protection, biodiversity, wildlife habitat, recreational opportunities, and support of the rural economy through timber production.

### For more information:

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# Dufferin County Forest

## A walk in the woods

**This pamphlet guides you through the Little Tract of the Dufferin County Forest. The Little Tract is located on the west side of Airport Road (County Road 18), about 15 km north of Highway 89.**

### **Please respect the Little Tract:**

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

