DeRoche Pond Natural Area

The DeRoche Pond Natural Area totals 371 acres and is located in Blooming Point, Queens County, Prince Edward Island. This was the first natural area acquired by the Island Nature Trust and remains the second largest property we have on the Island, after the Jenkins Complex Natural Area.

Acquisition and Legal Status

The DeRoche Pond Natural Area was acquired in several parts, most recently in 2017. The first property acquired was 69 acres, purchased on December 21\textsuperscript{st}, 1987 and protected under the PEI Natural Areas Protection Act (NAPA) on February 14\textsuperscript{th}, 1989. Shortly thereafter a 140 acre property was purchased on March 2\textsuperscript{nd}, 1993 and protected under NAPA on February 21\textsuperscript{st}, 1995. The largest property totals 162 acres and was purchased on December 22\textsuperscript{nd}, 1994 and protected under NAPA on May 10\textsuperscript{th}, 1995. Most recently, in 2017, Island Nature Trust purchased a 14.5 acre parcel of forested wetland that adjoins two sections that were already protected. This section was protected under NAPA on December 14\textsuperscript{th}, 2018.

Surrounding Land Use

The area surrounding the DeRoche Pond Natural Area has limited active agriculture, and the remaining land bordering the natural area is mainly maturing softwood forest, speckled alder thickets, DeRoche Pond itself and the beach – dune ecosystem to the north along the gulf shore. The natural area is effectively separated into three sections: a standalone western section located west of MacDonald Road, a centre section bordering the south side of DeRoche Pond, and an eastern section intersected by a stream originating at Afton Lake. Provicially-owned land to the north, extending to the shore, is leased by Island Nature Trust to provide continuity in management of the pond.

DeRoche Pond Wetland

The wetland area within this natural area is varied and extensive, including open pond, marsh and cranberry bog areas. The largest pond in the wetland contains a rich community of submergent vegetation including duckweed, water milfoil, white-stemmed pondweed, cattail, cow lily, and meadowsweet. This vegetation is supported by thick speckled alder and sphagnum moss patches and is a productive breeding habitat for a large host of migratory birds, including: yellow warbler, common yellowthroat, swamp sparrow, red-winged blackbird, tree swallow, olive-sided flycatcher and Wilson’s snipe, among others.

Songbirds are not the only inhabitants of DeRoche Pond, as various waterfowl species are plentiful in the summer and fall months as well. Black ducks, blue-winged teals, northern pintails, sora rails, American bitterns, pied-billed grebes, gadwalls, and ring-necked ducks have all been known to raise their young on the pond.
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A pair of common loons has nested in DeRoche Pond as recently as 2018, a very rare and exciting Island visitor. In 2019, INT staff installed a loon nesting platform in DeRoche Pond with the hope that it will provide a stable and safe nesting area away from predators (including disruptive humans!) that the loons may enjoy for many years to come.

Woodland Diversity

The woodland habitat in the DeRoche Pond Natural Area is a great example of how a forest undergoes many successional stages of growth, as there are mature softwood areas, blown over and diseased sections of aging trees, and regenerating white spruce stands. The main tree species you will find in the woodland sections are white spruce, black spruce, red maple, white birch, trembling aspen, balsam fir, and eastern larch.

Shrub species present in this natural area include: beaked hazelnut, black elderberry, northern bayberry, Canada holly, bristly blackcurrant, wild raisin, chokecherry, serviceberry, and large cranberry.

Wildlife Community

Woodland habitat throughout the DeRoche Pond Natural Area provides nesting habitat for species of birds different from those in the wetlands. In 2017, the DeRoche Pond Natural Area was included in Island Nature Trust’s Forest Bird Program. Point count surveys were conducted at 9 locations. Uncommon birds detected include the eastern kingbird, eastern wood-peewee, gray catbird, Canada warbler and the brown-headed cowbird, while common birds detected include hermit thrush, ovenbird, magnolia warbler, black-throated green warbler, chestnut-sided warbler, northern parula, cedar waxwing, ruby-crowned kinglet, alder flycatcher, palm warbler, blackburnian warbler, red-eyed vireo, American goldfinch, purple finch, red-breasted nuthatch, and rose-breasted grosbeak.

Beaver activity is very abundant in the DeRoche Pond Natural Area. Throughout, you will find many trees felled and streams dammed by beavers, also known as nature’s engineers. Work has been done in the past to limit beaver activity in DeRoche Pond, and beavers continue to be an ongoing issue that INT monitors each year in order to maintain a stable woodland habitat. Other wildlife that may be seen in and around DeRoche Pond include muskrat, red squirrel, mink, raccoon, snowshoe hare, and red fox.

Access

The DeRoche Pond Natural Area is located on the north shore of Prince Edward Island between Tracadie Bay and Savage Harbour. The natural area can be accessed via MacDonald Road, which is off of Route 218, by foot or by boat. Canoes and kayaks can be launched from the slip just north of the bridge on MacDonald Road. The eastern parcels can also be accessed via Route 218. There are no walking trails on this property, making access difficult. Walkers should have good physical fitness and come equipped with suitable walking shoes and a compass and map or GPS unit.
Island Nature Trust’s DeRoche Pond Natural Area represented in green, with the most recent acquisition outlined in green. Provincially-owned natural area is represented in orange.