

FORESTS IN P.E.I.'S PROVINCIAL PARKS

An important segment of our provincial parks program is helping people enjoy some of the natural features within the parks. This may include anything from nature walks and slide talks to discussions about our present ecosystems. Depending on which park you choose you may visit tidal estuaries, rivers, ponds, bogs, abandoned fields, or softwood and hardwood forests.

In several of our parks, remnants of the old forests once covering P.E.I. provide a key to past forests and even the history of P.E.I. In the early to mid 1800's, P.E.I. had one of the most concentrated and productive shipbuilding industries in the world. Massive white pines provided most of the decking for ships as large as 212 feet in length. The hard yellow birch, beech and maple provided wood for the keels and ribs. Hardwoods also provided most of the planking. Tall Red Pines provided the long straight wood necessary for masts. The forests provided life to the colony, both in terms of materials for ships, but also for the export of boards. The problem was, a limit to the supply of the timber. By the 1870's almost all of the original large softwoods and hardwoods had been cut. Ships were being built using a higher composition of softwood. A higher percentage of the softwood was spruce rather than pine. Tamarack began to replace the hardwoods in many instances.

The few remnant stands in our parks are being managed to provide seeds and seedlings to re-establish these forests. Access to permit the public to see these relics is being improved. In areas where most or all of the original tree cover was cut out, effort is being made to embark upon a program to re-establish the original forest cover. It is hoped, that with re-establishment of the forest cover, other vegetation and animal communities will more closely represent the communities present on the Island before man first altered the environment.

Townshend Woodlot Nature Preserve Park

One of P.E.I.'s better examples of a mature hardwood forest is located in our provincial park just north of Souris. This forest, typical of the original Acadian Forest, is made up primarily of yellow birch, sugar maple and beech with red spruce occurring along the stream. Although it is unlikely that this forest was ever lumbered, the forest is a mature climax community. Many of the large hardwoods have diameters in excess of 36". Because this park is not of interest to all visitors, and because such a site is prone to vandalism and cutting, the location of the site is not heavily advertised. It has been the location of weekly woods walks conducted by the summer naturalist from the eastern region of P.E.I., as well as numerous school and organization outings.

The size of the original site has been expanded twice, once through the correction of a deed and once through the acquisition of a 30 Ac. parcel of adjacent land.

When you are visiting one of the Provincial Parks check the park pamphlet or bulletin to find out when the naturalist will be presenting a program and learn more about the old forests of P.E.I.