

Old Ausable Channel Fact Sheet

FORESTRY



Forest Community Background

Two distinct forest communities are found adjacent to the Old Ausable Channel, due to very different soils, topography and moisture regimes on which each has developed.

The Old Ausable river flats support lowland or floodplain forests on the silt loam soils deposited by floodwaters in centuries past. Green and red ash, bur and swamp white oak, shagbark hickory and elm are typical of this community.

On the more sterile, excessively-drained sand dune ridges pine-oak and oak woodland has developed. The oak and pine species that grow here – including black, white and red oak and white and red pine – are able to tolerate the dry, infertile soils of the dunes. In more open areas, mainly southern sections within the Pinery Provincial Park, globally rare oak savannah is found.

Tips for Maintaining a Healthy Forest Community

1. Diversity

Diversity in native species, structure and wildlife contribute to a healthy forest. It is often difficult to see the forest for the trees. All parts, seen and unseen, play important roles. A diverse system is best able to adapt to changing environmental conditions and withstand new threats faced by the forests of today.

2. Moving Soil and Planting Grass

Tread lightly in the natural areas surrounding your home. Mowing, addition of topsoil and grade changes affect soil water and oxygen levels and can negatively impact forest health. Try to keep manicured lawn and gardens to areas immediately adjacent your home. Invasive plants such as garlic mustard are spreading rapidly due to soil being brought in.

3. Thinning or Cutting Brush

In general, the cutting of shrubs, saplings and other brush is not necessary to maintain a healthy forest. However, light thinning of sapling and shrubs can have a positive impact on oak woodland grasses and wildflowers providing you do not introduce turf grass or other landscape plants to the area. If you must thin, proceed with caution, taking care not to disturb the native ground flora or soil.

4. Raking/Blowing Leaves

As with brush, leaf litter is a natural component of a healthy forest and need not be removed from natural areas. At the same time, avoid raking excess leaves from the manicured portion of your property directly into natural areas as they can smother the native flora. If possible, compost leaves from lawn and garden areas in a designated spot on your property. Do not dump leaf litter into the Old Ausable Channel. Decomposing leaf litter deprives the waters of the OAC of oxygen, which is required by fish and other organisms to breathe. The litter accumulates over time, filling the river channel up with organic matter.

5. Grape vines

Two species of grape are native to Old Ausable Channel neighborhoods. Summer grape (leaves with whitish underside) is an upland species found in the dry oak-pine forest while its lowland cousin riverbank grape (leaves with green underside) is common along the old channel. Both species of grape vine provide food and habitat for birds and other wildlife and are an important part of a healthy and diverse forest. Remember to leave a few when considering their removal. For more information phone the ABCA's Forestry Specialist.



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Invasive species, such as Eurasian Honeysuckle, Garlic Mustard, or Knapweed, can pose a threat to the unique Old Ausable Channel ecosystem.

6. Hazard Trees

Individual trees of concern, within a full length of people or property, should be assessed by a certified arborist or qualified forestry professional. Standing dead trees and downed woody debris are part of a healthy forest, providing habitat for a host of invertebrates, salamanders and feeding sites for birds and other wildlife. Where they do not pose risk to people or property, standing dead trees can be left to provide habitat and will slowly release their stored nutrients back to the living forest. Downed trees and branches need not be removed. If aesthetics are compromised, consider removing those branches that are detracting, or relocating fallen trunks to less visible areas of your property.

7. Forest Pests

Emerald Ash Borer and Hickory Bark Beetle are currently devastating hardwood stands in parts of Lambton County. Do not import firewood of any type, including pallets or slabs from outside the community. It is illegal to move firewood of any kind out of Lambton County under the County of Lambton Emerald Ash Borer Infested Places Declaration and Order (2006) – see www.inspection.gc.ca or www.invadingspecies.com for more detailed information.

8. Tree Planting, Groundcovers and Landscaping

When planting or landscaping try to do so in harmony with the natural environment in which you live. Use only native trees, shrubs and perennials. Do not plant Norway maple, ornamental honeysuckles, or oriental bittersweet. Avoid plants such as English ivy and periwinkle, as they will slowly creep into the forest and take over native ground flora.

We would like to thank our funding partners

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Ausable Bayfield Conservation Authority

... and our other generous community partners ...

9. Exotic Species

Most introduced species are benign and do not stray far from where they are planted. A few, however, have escaped to natural areas, displacing native plant species and the wildlife dependant on them for food and home. Autumn olive and multiflora rose were planted across the province for erosion, including along the Old Ausable Channel, where they are increasingly invading native vegetation along the bank. Keep an eye out for Norway maple, European buckthorn, Eurasian honeysuckle and other invaders listed on the accompanying species list.

What should you plant?

Where can you find appropriate species and get some more information?

♦ Local Nurseries

♦ *Native Plant Resource Guide for Ontario*. Currently there is a listing out for 2004-2005. The 2007-2008 listing is currently being developed according to their website (www.serontario.org)

♦ ABCA – Forestry Services, contact Ian Jean, Forestry Specialist, at ijean@abca.on.ca or 519-235-2610 or toll-free 1-888-286-2610

♦ ABCA and Partners' 'List of Recommended Native Trees and Shrubs for Restoration Planting along Old Ausable Channel Corridor' available as a factsheet or at www.abca.on.ca



For more information please contact:

Ausable Bayfield Conservation Authority

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