

3.3 Wildlife

The information on this section's wildlife diversity is taken from a regional study conducted by Faune Québec. There was no specific local study conducted for this purpose. The list of all species likely to occupy the four proposed biodiversity reserves is presented in appendix 8.

1) *Mammals*

Species typically found in balsam fir-yellow birch and balsam fir-white birch forests include the snowshoe hare, black bear, red squirrel, Canada beaver, muskrat, North American porcupine, red fox, American marten, American mink, wolf, otter, Canada lynx, moose and white-tailed deer. In total, there are about 50 mammal species in these areas, including seven species of bat (Chiroptera).



Source: Ivan Scarsetti

White-tailed deer wintering grounds are located northeast of Opasatica lake. They are outside the boundaries, however, of the proposed biodiversity reserve.

2) *Avian wildlife*

The species of birds observed are typical of balsam fir stands of mixed forests and contiguous boreal forests of western Québec. In Abitibi-Témiscamingue, about 232 bird species may be observed. In the **Opasatica lake proposed biodiversity reserve**, about 109 bird species were observed by members of the Société du loisir ornithologique de l'Abitibi (SLOA). The number of species observed in the **Piché-Lemoine forest** and **Decelles reservoir** areas is 130 and 48 respectively. The SLOA has no data for the **Des Quinze** territory.

The Île Ronde island on Opasatica lake is designated as a wildlife habitat (heronry) and is protected by the *Act respecting the conservation and development of wildlife*. The heronry has about 40 active nests (2002 census).

3) *Fish*

There are about 48 species of fish in the lakes and rivers of Abitibi-Témiscamingue. Key species are yellow walleye, northern pike, small-mouthed bass and brook trout.

There are yellow walleye spawning grounds in the Hébert and Dufay lakes on the **Opasatica lake proposed biodiversity reserve**. There are brook trout in certain streams in the sector. There are small-mouthed bass and brown catfish on this proposed biodiversity reserve. The brown catfish is an introduced species in this sector.

The Des Guêpes lake, in the Des Quinze lake proposed biodiversity reserve, has a population of yellow walleye and northern pike. There is a northern pike spawning ground in the Baie des Quatre Milles bay.

Two yellow walleye spawning grounds are situated in the Desmarais stream, which feeds the Lemoine lake (**Piché-Lemoine forest proposed biodiversity reserve**).

4) *Herpetofauna (reptiles and amphibians)*

There are 22 species of reptiles and amphibians (snake, turtle, amphibian, salamander).

5) *Species that are or likely to be designated as threatened or vulnerable*

Of the species likely to be found on the territory of the four proposed biodiversity reserves, as mentioned previously, some have been designated as threatened or vulnerable under the *Act respecting threatened or vulnerable species*.

Of the 13 designated mammals, the wolverine is the only one on the threatened species list. The other species, including the pygmy weasel, rock vole, southern bog lemming, cougar, Canada lynx, red fox, smoky shrew and pygmy shrew are on the list of species likely to be designated as threatened or vulnerable. The same applies to the 4 species of bat, which are likely to be designated as threatened or vulnerable, namely, the silver-haired, hoary and red bats.

Nine species of bird have been designated. The horned grebe has been designated as threatened and the golden eagle, peregrine falcon and bald eagle are designated as vulnerable. Barrow's goldeneye, short-

eared owl, sharp-tailed sparrow, Bicknell's thrush and yellow rail are likely to be designated as threatened or vulnerable.

Of the aquatic species, the yellow sturgeon is likely to be designated as threatened or vulnerable.

Finally, there are three herpetofauna species in the region of concern under the law. They are the wood turtle, designated as vulnerable, and the Blanding's turtle and pickerel frog, which are likely to be designated as threatened or vulnerable.

According to information from the Centre de données sur le patrimoine écologique du Québec (CDPNQ), no wildlife species that is or likely to be designated as threatened or vulnerable have been inventoried within the four proposed biodiversity reserves. However, their presence remains possible. The presence of certain species, such as the Canada lynx, yellow sturgeon and bald eagle, is highly likely in the territories concerned by the four proposed biodiversity reserves and their outskirts.

3.4 Flora¹²

There is no specific flora compilation for the Abitibi-Témiscamingue region in the scientific literature. Baldwin (1958) studied the vascular flora of the clay belt of the Abitibi and northeastern Ontario. The four proposed biodiversity reserves are situated in this clay belt. This clay enclave, mainly characterized by boreal flora, covers most of the Abitibi and northern Témiscamingue regions, but does not include the south part of the RCM of the Vallée-de-l'Or.

A few compilations carried out since Baldwin's study provide an estimate of about 1000 vascular flora species in the region. This total is undoubtedly higher since the southern part of the region (Témiscamingue and Vallée-de-l'Or RCMs) have flora that are characteristic of the maple-yellow birch forest which has not been included in recent flora estimates. Moreover, a study of introduced species or of the region's wet regions would add many other taxons to the regional flora.

Of the non-vascular flora, 125 lichen species, 30 hepatic species and 159 moss species are mainly mentioned in the literature. These numbers are well below the likely number of species, a number which is undoubtedly three times higher in the case of lichens and hepatic species and two times higher in the case of the mosses, if the

number of species is compared with that of other regions of Québec (Gagnon, 2006).

As was the case with the vascular plants, flora studies and inventories were carried out mostly in the Abitibi region. No estimates have been done of the mushrooms and algae in the region.

CDPNQ data indicate that 27 flora species in Abitibi-Témiscamingue are likely to be designated threatened or vulnerable. There are 7 species in the RCM of the Vallée-de-l'Or, 13 in the RCM of Témiscamingue and 4 on the territory of Ville de Rouyn-Noranda. In the RCM of Témiscamingue, there is 1 threatened flora species and 1 vulnerable flora species. According to the CDPNQ, there are no flora species that are or likely to be designated as threatened or vulnerable within the four proposed biodiversity reserves. However, their presence remains possible.

3.5 State of the forest

Generally, almost the entire terrestrial territory of the four proposed biodiversity reserves had Timber Supply and Forest Management Agreements (TSFMA) before implementation of the protected areas in May 2004. Each territory has had wood cut, throughout or in part, over the last ten to twenty years.

The terrestrial part of the **Opasatica lake proposed biodiversity reserve** can be divided into three sectors as far as the forests go. The satellite image below illustrates well the general state of the forest cover and the differences between the three sectors (the dark parts indicate a more mature vegetation cover and the light green areas represent areas where the forest has been cut and young forests).

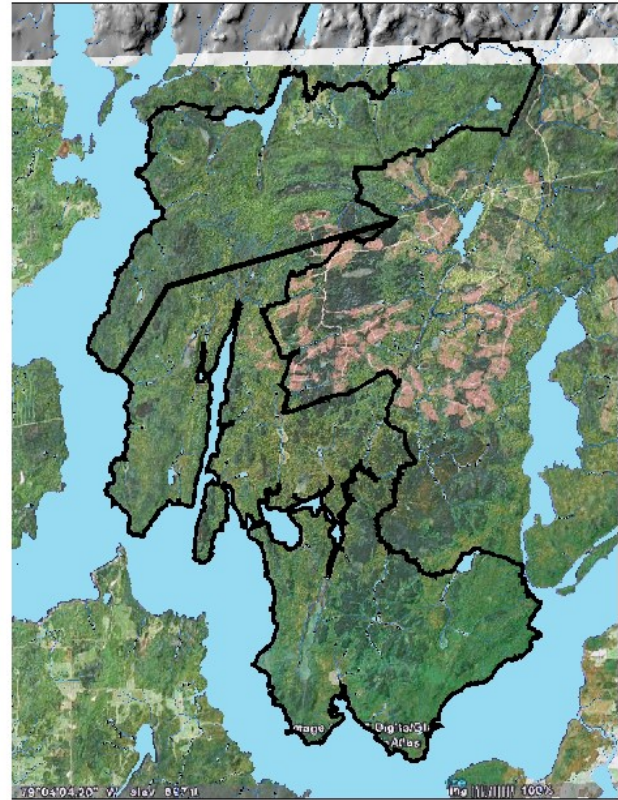
The northern sector was considerably disturbed by woodcutting in the 1990s. It is a regenerating mixed forest. In parallel, certain zones were not cut and have old-growth forests of high interest. As mentioned in the ecological profile, two exceptional forest ecosystems have been designated. The south sector was cut several decades ago. Today the ecosystems are in good shape; there are average age forests and a few mature stands. The last sector, in the west, has been considerably disturbed in recent years. It also has a mix of forest ages. Closer to the south boundary of this sector, woodcutting is underway.

¹² Jean Gagnon, Service des parcs, MDDEP, personal communications



Satellite image of the Opasatica lake proposed biodiversity reserve
 Source: Google Earth, 2006

The **Des Quinze lake proposed biodiversity reserve** has been disturbed very little by woodcutting and by far has the most appealing forest ecosystems. The satellite image shows that woodcutting is underway outside the reserve near the east-central boundary of the protected area. The north, west and south sectors have a high level of old-growth forests. There are black spruce, eastern white cedar and yellow birch stands that are 120 years old and more. On-site studies also revealed a sugar maple forest aged about 120 years. The pink areas in the following satellite image correspond to very recent cuts, after 2000.



Satellite image of the Des Quinze lake proposed biodiversity reserve
 Source: Google Earth, 2006

The **Piché-Lemoine forest proposed biodiversity reserve**¹³ has a forest of unequalled qualities. It has not undergone any intensive woodcutting in recent years, except for the part located southeast of Lemoine lake. The integrity of these forest ecosystems, however, varies a great deal. According to data obtained from the *Inventaire du capital-nature* study carried out in 1984, the Piché-Lemoine forest was in a sorry state due to spruce budworm, clearcutting and selective cutting for firewood. Over twenty years later, the situation has improved. The forest has shown good resilience.

The state of the forests of the **Decelles reservoir proposed biodiversity reserve** is of concern. The forest area may be divided into three sectors. The west sector consists of young mixed forests regenerating after cuts in the 1990s. The central sector, situated on both sides of the Rapide-Sept dam has a mosaic of young and average-age forests. The sector located east of the Dunes-de-la-Moraine-d'Harricana ecological reserve is made up of forests largely undisturbed by cutting, but of average age. Forest cutting was carried out, however, in the middle of the 1980s near the north end of the sector. The area was replanted.

¹³ The satellite images available do not adequately show the state of the forests in the Piché-Lemoine forest and Decelles reservoir proposed biodiversity reserves.