

The History of Laurier Woods

The Nipissing Naturalists Club recognized the value of the Laurier Woods as a nature preserve within the city as early as 1985 because of its varied habitats and position between Trout Lake and Lake Nipissing that served to funnel people and wildlife through the area. Unlike other initiatives related to protecting the environment, local naturalists club members sought to engage the people of North Bay in a constructive manner creating opportunities for people to work together for their long-term common interest and increasing awareness in nature.

In 1989, the non-profit charitable organization called the Friends of Laurier Woods Inc. was established. Together with other organizations, the Friends of Laurier Woods spearheaded a campaign to save the area from urban encroachment. In order to demonstrate the value citizens of North Bay placed on conserving a green space in this area a mass petition was started by the Nipissing Naturalists' Club. The petition quickly garnered approximately 2000 signatures and helped persuade North Bay's City Council to pass a resolution in 1991 to accept in principle that this land be preserved in its natural state forever.

The Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources deemed the wetlands in the Laurier Woods, part of the Parks Creek Wetland Complex, as provincially significant in 1993, which further strengthened the argument for protecting the area. Added emphasis was placed on the protection of the area, when in 1995 an adjacent property owner destroyed a beaver dam causing the major pond complex within Laurier Woods to be nearly ruined. This incident sparked the initial shared purchase of 3.5 hectares (8.63 acres) by the North Bay-Mattawa Conservation Authority, the City of North Bay, the Nature Conservancy of Canada, and the Nipissing Rotary Club in June of 1996. The Conservation Authority became the owner of that first area.

Following that purchase the Friends of Laurier Woods initiated discussions with a private owner to purchase 40 hectares (100 acres) central to the site, assisted by the Nature Conservancy and ultimately representatives from the city. After years of extensive negotiations and a cooperative effort the 40 hectares (100 acres) was protected by

way of a municipal purchase in 2001. After obtaining all necessary approvals, in June of 2006, 94% of that acreage was transferred to the Friends of Laurier Woods and the NBMCA in joint ownership. With this transfer came an additional 3.6 hectares (9 acres) in lands adjacent to the ONR tracks.

In the meantime, aided by city staff, Laurier Woods obtained for free from Tembec, one acre for a parking lot constructed generously by the city, at the end of Brule St. - now the main entrance.

In an attempt to protect more wetland to the immediate south and west of the Laurier Woods holdings the Friends petitioned the City to acquire 10.5 hectares (26 acres) which were part of an unused old tax-sale holding. The transfer was approved in April, 2009.

Most recently, in January 2011, the Friends of Laurier Woods purchased 40 hectares (100 acres) south of the original property from another private landowner. This purchase necessitated the launching of the *Laurier Woods Grows* Fundraising Campaign. In less than 8 months the Campaign raised over \$85,000.00 from over 150 different local donors for the purchase and development of the 40 hectares (100 acres). This has brought the total size of Laurier Woods Conservation Area to its current 97 hectares (240 acres).

Throughout the years the Friends of Laurier Woods have worked diligently to ensure, not only the protection of this unique wetland, but also safe walking trails and environmental awareness. Planning for the area became critical and spurred the development of a Management Plan for the site which was approved by the Friends of Laurier Woods in 2004. The Plan identified five key objectives: conservation, land use planning, tourism, recreation, education and scientific research. Conservation practices for the site will maintain the key features including portions of the Parks Creek Provincially Significant Wetland Complex that exist within the Conservation Area, migratory birds which use the site in the spring and fall, local wildlife which inhabit the site as a refuge from urban sprawl, as well as the overall ecology of the area. In recognition of the significance of land use planning for this urban Conservation Area, the Friends of Laurier Woods works on an ongoing basis with the City of North Bay to encourage provision for the Parks Creek Significant Wetland Complex and adjacent lands in municipal by-laws.

Through planning and encouraging eco-tourism, passive recreation and education opportunities, awareness and protection of Laurier Woods' key features will be heightened. The existing 6.5 kilometres of trail network, observation platform and benches, signage, bird and wildflower charts, guided walks, school programs, newsletter, web site and a brochure are critical components in broadening the base for tourism, recreation and education. Scientific research by Nipissing University has and will continue to be beneficial to understanding the ecosystem and the impacts of the surrounding land uses.

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