



Outing Report: Byrnes Lake White Birch Conservation Reserve

Saturday, March 9, 2019 by Chuck Miller

Byrnes Lake White Birch Conservation Reserve forms part of Ontario's network of natural heritage areas. This conservation reserve was designated for protection as it contains an excellent representation of white birch dominated forest stands on moderately broken, shallow sandy till uplands. The site also features hydrologically significant headwater areas that contribute to local groundwater recharge and that function as tributaries into the Little Thessalon River and Big Basswood Lake.



The Ministry of Natural Resources has established conservation reserves as a tool to protect natural heritage areas on public lands, while permitting most traditional public land uses to continue. These uses include recreational activities, such as hunting and fishing, and the traditional activities of aboriginal communities, as defined under applicable Aboriginal treaties.

Lands designated as conservation reserves are removed from the Sustainable Forest License area, and mining and surface rights are withdrawn from staking under the Mining Act. Regulated under the Provincial Parks and Conservation Reserves Act, they are also important for scientific research and environmental monitoring.



The Byrnes Lake White Birch Conservation Reserve is located 95 km east of Sault Ste Marie, ON or 15 km north of the town of Thessalon at the Phillips Bay Road.

The snowshoe was about 10 km on relatively flat terrain on lake surfaces and along a snowmobile track. Byrnes and Prospect Lakes were our destination. There are no designated trails in the reserve. Five naturalists took to exploring the reserve. It was a near perfect March day with temperatures reaching -3C and full sunshine for most of the day.



The main forest communities within the conservation reserve are white birch, poplar and white pine dominant mixed wood. Pure eastern white cedar and pure white pine stands are located in the Prospect Lake area. Red oak has established on the extensive rock barrens scattered over the conservation reserve. Most of the forest stands in the site are between 30 and 89 years.

A variety of wildlife is associated with

the many habitats of the Reserve. Large mammals such as moose, white-tailed deer and black bears are known to frequent the site. During our visit we observed evidence of snowshoe hares, otter, beaver, red fox, wolf and bobcat (or lynx).



Several sport fish are also found in many of the lakes, including lake trout, rainbow trout, and suckers. Fish stocking has occurred in Byrnes Lake (lake trout), Prospect Lake (rainbow trout) and Rainbow Lake (rainbow trout).

Three parties were observed ice fishing during our visit. We talked with two fishermen about the resource and ice conditions. The ice appeared to be about a meter in thickness, but it was layered slush on about 25cm of solid ice. The fishermen were knowledgeable about changes that had occurred over the last 40 years that had an impact on the fishery.



Byrnes Lake CR is situated in a picturesque area and offers a great mixture of recreational opportunities. In relation to other conservation reserves in the Sault Ste. Marie District, Byrnes Lake White Birch is a large site with limited accessibility. Currently, most of the recreational activity that occurs within the site takes place during the winter months when the interior lakes can be accessed by snowmobile.

Fishing is the primary recreational activity within the conservation reserve. During the winter months, Byrnes Lake and Prospect Lake are the main destinations for ice fishing. Hunting and nature viewing are also activities known to take place in the conservation reserve.

The intention of our visit was snowshoeing, nature appreciation and photography. Winter is perhaps the easiest time to visit as there is an absence of established hiking trails through the reserve.



We found the reserve a valued and beautiful community resource being enjoyed by local people during a nice pre-spring day.

For more photos of this outing: [Byrnes Lake](#)

