

GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF THE DUCK MOUNTAIN MAP SHEET AREA, 62N

The area covered by the Duck Mountain map sheet comprises 5966 square miles between 51° and 52° north latitude and 100° and 102° west longitude along the Manitoba - Saskatchewan border. About 20 percent of the area is in Saskatchewan. Dauphin, Roblin, Grandview, and Gilbert Plains in Manitoba, which have populations of 8655, 1617, 998, and 942 respectively (1966 census), and Kamsack in Saskatchewan, which has a population of 2725 (1966 census) are the main service centers of the area. The economy of the area is based on agriculture, but lumbering and tourism also provide significant employment in the area.

Relief varies from 850 feet above sea level at Sagemace Bay on Lake Winnipegosis to about 1500 feet at the lower slopes of the Duck Mountain escarpment, 20 miles further west. The escarpment rises sharply to about 2000 feet in the central part of the plateau. Baldy Mountain in the Duck Mountain uplands, which has an elevation of 2727 feet, is the highest point in Manitoba.

About half of the area is forested; the rugged central upland and the poorly drained lowlands west of Lake Winnipegosis comprise the largest tracts of forested land. Agricultural land constitutes the rest of the area. Two provincial parks, one in Manitoba and one in Saskatchewan, provide excellent recreational facilities. About 30 square miles along the southeastern fringe of the area comprise part of Riding Mountain National Park.

The area lies within the Lake Winnipeg - Nelson River basin and the Red - Assiniboine River basin. The Duck, Sclarer, Pine, and Garland rivers drain directly into Lake Winnipegosis from the northeast. The southeastern and central parts of the area drain into Dauphin Lake through the Valley, Wilson, and Vermilion rivers. The northwest is drained by the Ruby and Swan rivers and the southwest is drained by the Shell and Assiniboine rivers.

Most of the small lakes in the area are shallow and have reedy offshores and soft, organic bottoms. The larger and deeper lakes, such as Childs, Wellman, Singush, Madge, and Blue lakes, are found in the central upland and are intensively used for water-oriented recreation.

The area is underlain by Cretaceous shales and sandstone. The continental ice sheet receded about 12,000 years ago and the debris from the melting glacier was deposited as ground moraine, end moraine, glacial outwash, and lacustrine sediment. For some time the drainage from the central uplands and the lowlands to the east and north, which originally ran towards Hudson Bay, was blocked by the retreating ice sheet so that glacial Lake Agassiz was formed between the ice sheet and the Manitoba escarpment. Some of the beaches that were formed at various levels of this lake are prominent topographical features along the foot of the escarpment.

The area is divided into five physiographic regions: the Lowland Plain in the east and north; the Valley River Plain in the south and east; the morainic hills of the Duck and Riding mountains in the central and northwestern parts of the area; the Newdale Till Plain between the Assiniboine River valley and Duck Mountain, and the Yorkton - Oxbow - Ryerson Till Plain west of the Assiniboine River.

The Lowland Plain, which is 1000 to 1100 feet in elevation, occupies the former glacial lake bed and is bounded on the west by one of the prominent beach ridges. Surface deposits consist of calcareous ground moraine, lacustrine deposits, and recent alluvial sediments. The Lowland Plain is characterized by flat topography, a large proportion of poorly drained terrain, and a series of gravel and sand beaches. The gently sloping and well-drained Valley River Plain, which is 1300 to 1400 feet in elevation, occupies a former bay of glacial Lake Agassiz between the Riding and Duck mountains. Surface deposits on this plain are lacustrine sand, silt, and clay sediments bordered by boulder till ground moraine.

Grassland soils predominate in the southwest and southeast, whereas forest soils have developed on the central uplands and in the northeast. Soils east of the central uplands have the weakly developed profile often associated with high lime carbonate conditions and poor drainage.

CLIMATE

The climate of the area is subhumid continental and is characterized by short, warm summers and long, cold winters. At Dauphin (957 feet elevation), the mean annual precipitation is 18.0 inches, about 13.5 inches of which falls as rain from April to October and 4.5 inches of which falls as snow from November to March. The mean annual temperature is 36°F and the frost-free period ranges from 90 to 110 days. The central and western parts of the area, which are about 1000 feet above the eastern lowlands, have mean annual temperatures about 4° cooler than in the lowland and higher precipitation than the lowland. The prevailing winds in both summer and winter are from the northwest.

The Saskatchewan part of the area has a mean annual snowfall of 45 inches. In March, the average snow depth is 20.3 inches on top of the Duck Mountain, 16.8 inches at Benito in the northwest, and 9.6 inches at Dauphin in the Manitoba Lowland.

ECOLOGY

The native vegetation of the area represents four Forest Sections of the Boreal Forest Region. These sections are the Mixedwood, Manitoba Lowlands, Aspen - Oak, and Aspen Grove. Mixedwood vegetation covers the morainic uplands of Duck Mountain and extends through to Riding Mountain. The characteristic forest association of these rugged, well-drained uplands is a mixture of varying proportions of aspen poplar (*Populus tremuloides*), balsam poplar (*P. balsamifera*), white birch (*Betula papyrifera*), white spruce (*Picea glauca*), and in older undisturbed stands, balsam fir (*Abies balsamea*). Fire in this forest community has enhanced suckering of aspen poplar, the dominant tree cover, and has precluded a coniferous climax forest. This high incidence of deciduous vegetation results in a wide variety of browse plants for wild ungulates. Jack pine (*Pinus banksiana*) usually dominates on sandy soils and is also found on drier till soils and mixed with black spruce (*Picea mariana*) on the plateau-like tops of higher hills. Black spruce and tamarack (*Larix laricina*) grow on poorly drained sites and on shallow peat deposits. A wide variety of shrubs occur within the Mixedwood Section. Hazelnut (*Corylus cornuta*), red-osier dogwood (*Cornus stolonifera*), roses (*Rosa spp.*), willows (*Salix spp.*), and snowberry (*Symphoricarpos albus*) are the most abundant and widely distributed shrubs. Less common shrubs are red-fruited choke cherry (*Prunus virginiana*), saskatoon (*Amelanchier alnifolia*), pin cherry (*Prunus pensylvanica*), raspberries (*Rubus spp.*), currants (*Ribes spp.*), high bush cranberry (*Vaccinium corymbosum*), and alders (*Alnus spp.*). Ground vegetation in the Mixedwood Section consists of a rich assortment of forbs, including wild sarsaparilla (*Aralia nudicaulis*), vetches (*Vicia spp.*), wild strawberries (*Fragaria spp.*), meadow rues (*Thalictrum spp.*), bedstraws (*Galium spp.*), asters (*Aster spp.*), goldenrods (*Solidago spp.*), and a variety of grasses and mosses.

Vegetation of the Manitoba Lowlands Section occurs in the Lowland Plain east of the Manitoba escarpment and north of the Valley River. Aspen and balsam poplar occur in pure stands or mixed with white spruce and white birch on the flat, poorly drained lands. Repeated fires in infertile sites in the southern part of the region have produced stands of scrubby aspen. In the northern part of this section where fires have not occurred recent years, the prevailing forest cover is black spruce and tamarack lowlands among jack pine ridges. Hazelnut, saskatoon, choke cherry, roses, snowberry, shrubby cinquefoil (*Potentilla fruticosus*), and Canada buffaloberry (*Shepherdia canadensis*) are found on upland sites, whereas dwarf birch (*Betula glandulosa*), alders, willows, and red-osier dogwood grow on imperfectly and poorly drained sites.

The Aspen - Oak Section, which extends eastward from Grandview to Dauphin, covers the southeastern part of the area. In this section, aspen poplar is the most prevalent species and stands range from small clumps bordering wet depressions to large groves and continuous aspen poplar forest. Balsam poplar is found locally throughout this section, but more commonly on moist sites. Bur oak (*Quercus macrocarpa*) is scattered throughout the region and is usually found on shallow, dry soils. Some white elm (*Ulmus americana*), ash (*Fraxinus pennsylvanica* var. *austini*), and Manitoba maple (*Acer negundo*) are found on alluvial soils. Shrubs found throughout this section are red-osier dogwood, roses, willows, choke cherry, saskatoon, and hazelnut.

The Aspen Grove Section occurs along the western boundary of the area and comprises the Newdale Till Plain. Aspen poplar is the dominant species and often occurs in pure stands ranging from low clumps to tall forests. Balsam poplar is frequently present on moist lowlands. White birch has a scattered distribution within the Aspen Grove Section. Saskatoon, roses, and snowberry are the most abundant of a large variety of shrubs associated with the aspen poplar clumps. A variety of forbs, such as meadow rue, vetches, strawberries, wood lily (*Lilium philadelphicum*), thistles (*Cirsium spp.*), sow-thistles (*Sonchus spp.*), goldenrods, and Canada anemone (*Anemone canadensis*), are also present. Prairie and meadow grasses were formerly part of the native vegetation but now there are no natural grassland sites because of cultivation of these soils for agriculture.

Moose (*Alces alces*), elk (*Cervus canadensis*), and white-tailed deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*) inhabit the area. Formerly, mule deer (*Odocoileus hemionus*), bison (*Bison bison*), pronghorn (*Antilocapra americana*), and probably woodland caribou (*Rangifer tarandus*) roamed here.

In 1866 E. T. Seton wrote "Moose may be described as plentiful in the Duck and Riding mountains and in the low country about Lake Manitoba. Today, moose are still abundant in both these uplands and number about 2000 animals on Duck Mountain. Occasionally, moose are found in the flat, northeastern part of the area, but the morainic ridges, isolated hills, depressions, and lakes of the Duck Mountain provide some of the finest upland moose habitat in Manitoba."

Explorers reported that elk were found on the wooded slopes of the Assiniboine and Swan rivers and the surrounding plains. Settlement reduced elk numbers and destroyed their prairie habitat. However, elk still inhabit the uplands of the Duck and Riding mountains. Although they are well adapted to survival in the uplands, elk occasionally forage on surrounding farmlands, particularly when snow is excessively deep in the mountains. Elk hunting seasons were held annually on Duck Mountain during the early 1900s. Between 1921 and 1955 the hunting season for elk was closed. Now there are about 1300 elk in the area. Elk are distributed throughout Duck Mountain, but particular parts of the upland provide important winter habitat. Most of this winter range appears to be at or near its maximum carrying capacity. The lowlands surrounding Duck Mountain have high capability for elk, but because of the extensive agricultural activities at present, it is unsuitable habitat for elk. In Manitoba, elk on Duck Mountain and on the edge of Riding Mountain are the only two herds of seven in the Province that currently have a sufficient density to justify sport hunting.

White-tailed deer followed civilization west and by the 1920s had largely replaced the once abundant mule deer in the area. The rich, rolling landscape of the western third of the area and the rugged valley of the Assiniboine River support larger populations of deer than the eastern two-thirds of the area. This is probably because of greater topographical relief, a more favorable winter climate, and a larger amount of native habitat. The Assiniboine River valley in the area has some outstanding white-tailed deer range, but the habitat diversity may be less now than the bottomland is covered by the water of the Shellmouth reservoir.

The mule deer favors open country, and consequently was more vulnerable to human depredation than the more secretive white-tailed deer. As a result of this and the increased agricultural changes at the turn of the century, the number of mule deer decreased. Individual mule deer have been sighted on Duck Mountain as recently as 1957, but presently this species occurs only in very low numbers or may be extinct in the area.

Woodland caribou are not found in the area today, but probably once inhabited both the Duck and Riding mountains. Caribou may also be found west of Sagemace Bay. In this region, sites that have not been burned are characterized by jack pine ridges and black spruce, willow, and sedge-filled depressions.

Bison once roamed throughout the area and they were probably closely followed by the pronghorn. By selective grazing of some plant species, such as grasses, the bison altered plant associations in favor of the forbs preferred by pronghorn. Today neither bison nor pronghorn are found wild in Manitoba.

LAND CLASSIFICATION FOR WILD UNGULATES

High capability lands (Class 3 or better) for the production of wild ungulates comprise 81 percent of the area. Thirty-four percent of this land is rated Class 1, 17 percent Class 2, and 30 percent Class 3. About 15 percent of these high-capability lands are classed as winter range, a key component of elk and white-tailed deer habitat. Class 4, 5, and 6 lands comprise 19 percent of the area and there are no Class 7 lands. Water bodies comprise 2 percent of the area.

Poor distribution or interspersion of landforms necessary for optimum wild ungulate habitat (G) is the main limitation on 67 percent of the land. Moderate to low soil fertility (F) and excessive or deficient soil moisture (M) affect the quality and quantity of vegetation on 16 percent and 6 percent of the land area respectively. Except for a few winter ranges in the southwest, white-tailed deer production is limited by cold winters (C).

Elk is the indicator species on 40 percent of the land, 39 percent of which is rated Class 3 or better. Twelve percent of the area was classified as having special capability for overwintering elk. Most of this land is in and around Duck Mountain, but the north escarpment of Riding Mountain also received the special winter range designation. The valleys of the Shell and Roaring rivers are favored by elk because of the variety of topography and vegetation which includes many open, native grasslands. The southern escarpment of Duck Mountain supports few elk because of active haying and grazing practices, but this region has a desirable south-facing aspect with excellent grassland - forest intercession. On the northwestern slope, agricultural crops adjacent to the Duck Mountain Provincial Forest provide favorable wintering range. In 1961 fire destroyed a large part of the forest in the central uplands of Duck Mountain, north of Childs Lake and the Blue lakes. Now the burned site is used year round by elk for its mixture of grassland, early succession shrubs and forbs, and regeneration of mixed deciduous and coniferous forest. The fertile soils of the surrounding lowlands have moderately high to high wild ungulate capability and are rated Classes 2 and 3. These lands once supported the forest - grassland association favored by elk but now, because of settlement, very few animals are found here.

Of the 36 percent of the land rated with moose as the indicator species, 21 percent is rated Class 1. The variety of landforms and vegetation and the abundance of water bodies throughout the central upland support one of the largest moose populations in Manitoba. Much of the land between Sagemace Bay and the central upland has a low capability for moose and is characterized by low fertility (F) and poor interspersion of landforms (G).

Twenty-two percent of the area has been rated with white-tailed deer as the indicator species. The Newdale Till Plain in the southwest and the Assiniboine, Shell, and Swan river valleys have the highest white-tailed deer populations, but much of the area is limited in capability by severe winters and poor interspersion of landforms.

Two percent of the land area has been rated Class 3 for woodland caribou. This land is in the northeast and because it has a poor interspersion of lakes, the main limitation is sub-class G. As a result of recent fires, this poorly drained land does not have adequate forest cover and food.

The area has one of the largest regions of high capability wild ungulate range in Manitoba. It is essential that wise land use and game management be continued for the protection and improvement of this wildlife resource.

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ÉCOLOGIE

La végétation indigène du territoire est représentative de quatre sections forestières de la région boréale. Ces sections sont celles de la forêt mélangeée, des basses terres du Manitoba, du chêne et du tremble et de la tremblée. La forêt mélangeée recouvre les hautes terres moraines du mont Duck et s'étend jusqu'au mont Riding. L'association forestière caractéristique de ces hautes terres accidentées et bien drainées est un mélange, dans des proportions variables, de peuplier faux-tremble (*Populus tremuloides*), de peuplier baumier (*Populus balsamifera*), de bouleau blanc (*Betula papyrifera*), d'épinette blanche (*Picea glauca*) et, dans les anciens peuplements qui n'ont pas encore été touchés, de sapin baumier (*Abies balsamea*). Le feu, dans cette communauté forestière, a favorisé le drageonnage et empêché le développement de la forêt coniférée climatique. Cette forte proportion de feuilles favorise la présence d'une grande variété de plantes susceptibles de servir à l'alimentation des Ongulés. Le pin gris (*Pinus banksiana*) domine habituellement sur les sols sablo-sables et on le trouve également sur des tilles plus secs et mêlé à l'épinette noire (*Picea mariana*) sur les sommets plats des plus hautes collines. L'épinette noire et le mélèze laricien (*Larix laricina*) croissent sur les terrains mal drainés et sur les minces dépôts de tourbe. On trouve une grande variété d'arbisseaux dans la section de la forêt mélangeée. Le noisetier (*Corylus cornuta*), les rosiers (*Rosa spp.*), les saules (*Salix spp.*) et la symphore blanche (*Symporicarps albiflora*) sont les plus abondants et les mieux répartis. Parmi les arbisseaux moins communs, se rencontrent le cerisier de Virginie (*Prunus virginiana*), l'amélanchier à feuille d'aunis (*Amelanchier alnifolia*), le cerisier de Pennsylvanie (*Prunus pensylvanica*), les framboisiers (*Rubus spp.*), les gadelliers (*Ribes spp.*), la violette trifoliée (*Viburnum trilobum*) et les aunes (*Alnus spp.*). Dans la section de la forêt mélangeée, le noisetier (*Corylus cornuta*), les rosiers, la symphore blanche (*Symporicarps albiflora*), les fraises sauvages (*Fragaria spp.*), les pigeons (*Thalictrum spp.*), les gaïelets (*Galium spp.*), les asters (*Aster spp.*), les verges d'or (*Solidago spp.*) ainsi que d'une grande variété de graminées et de mousses.

La végétation de la section des basses terres du Manitoba apparaît dans la région de basses terres, à l'est de l'escarpement du Manitoba et au nord de la rivière Valley. Le peuplier faux-tremble et le peuplier baumier forment des peuplements purs ou mêlés à l'épinette blanche et à du bouleau blanc; sur les terrains plats et mal drainés. Dans le sud de cette région, des incendies répétés sur des sites peu fertiles ont entraîné l'apparition de peuplements rabougris de peuplier faux-tremble. Dans la partie septentrionale de cette section, là où aucun incendie ne s'est déclaré au cours des dernières années, le couvert forestier dominant se compose d'épinette noire et de mélèze laricien dans les terrains bas et de pin gris sur les boureux. Dans les régions plus élevées croissent le noisetier, l'amélanchier, le cerisier de Virginie, les rosiers, la symphore, la potentille frutescente (*Potentilla fruticosa*) et la Shepherdie (*Shepherdia canadensis*) tandis que le bouleau nain (*Betula glandulosa*), les aunes, les saules et le comouiller stolonifère croissent sur les sites imperméable et mal drainés.

La section du chêne et du tremble, qui s'étend vers l'est de Grandview à Dauphin, occupe le sud-est du territoire. Dans cette section, le peuplier faux-tremble est l'essence la plus abondante et les peuplements vont des petits bosquets aux grandes forêts. Le peuplier baumier apparaît par endroits à travers toute cette section mais il est plus commun sur les sites légèrement humides. Le chêne à gros fruits (*Quercus macrocarpa*) est dispersé à travers toute la région et sur le tronc habitulement sur des sols minces et secs. Sur les sols alluviaux, on trouve de l'orme d'Amérique (*Ulmus americana*), du frêne rouge (*Fraxinus pennsylvanica* var. *austini*) et de l'érable négundo (*Acer negundo*). Les arbisseaux qui croissent à travers cette section sont le comouiller stolonifère, les rosiers, les saules, le cerisier de Virginie, l'amélanchier et le noisetier.

La section de la tremblée apparaît le long de la frontière occidentale du territoire et comprend la plaine de till de Newdale. Le peuplier faux-tremble est l'essence dominante et il forme souvent des peuplements purs allant des petits bosquets aux grandes forêts. Le peuplier baumier est souvent présent dans les basses terres très humides. Le bouleau blanc est assez dispersé à travers la section de la tremblée. L'amélanchier, les rosiers et la symphore sont les espèces les plus abondantes d'arbisseaux associés aux bosquets de peuplier faux-tremble. On trouve également une grande variété d'herbes telles que le pigeon, les vesces, les fraises, le lis de Philadelphie (*Lilium philadelphicum*), les chardons (*Cirsium spp.*), les isolers (*Sonchus spp.*), les verges d'or et l'anémone du Canada (*Anemone canadensis*). Les graminées de prairie et de prairie humide faisait autrefois partie de la végétation indigène mais il n'existe plus aucune section de prairie naturelle depuis que ces sols sont utilisés à des fins agricoles.

L'original (*Alces alces*), le wapiti (*Cervus canadensis*) et le cerf de Virginie (*Odocoileus virginianus*) vivent sur ce territoire. Autrefois, on y trouvait également le cerf mulot (*Odocoileus hemionus*), le bison (*Bison bison*), l'antilope d'Amérique (*Antilocapra americana*) et, probablement, le caribou des bois (*Rangifer tarandus*).

En 1866 E. T. Seton écrivait: "On peut considérer l'original comme une espèce très abondante sur les monts Duck et Riding et dans