

Habitats

The reaches of the Capital Region River Valley Park provide a variety of habitats or homes for the diverse wildlife and vegetation that thrive within its boundaries. Habitat conditions, such as soil, moisture and sunlight influence the type and growth of plants, which in turn influence the type of animal life attracted to the park. There are four main habitats found in the river valley.

The most dominant habitat of the valley is the river itself. This aquatic habitat supports an enormous amount of life from invertebrates to large mammals. Life in the river is influenced by the speed of the current, the depth of the water and the amount and content of foreign material in the water. The edges of the river, known as riparian areas, are essential to all river life. Protection of riparian habitat helps to stabilize the river's banks, provide protection for fish and other aquatic life and provide nesting areas for numerous bird species.

The second major habitat is the mixed-wood forest. All plant communities develop through a process known as succession. During this process, plants are subjected to natural disturbances that can alter their growth patterns. Floods, windstorms, and insect infestations are some of the disturbances seen in our river valley. In the Capital Region River Valley Park the final stage or climax habitat is seen in the mixed-wood forest visible along the park's 88 kilometers on the north facing slopes, protected valley slopes and in the ravines. Thriving in this mixed wood are white spruce, paper birch, and balsam poplar with an abundance of evergreens or conifers. The most common of the coniferous trees is the white spruce although black spruce can grow as well. Tamaracks (in damp areas) and jack pines (in sandy areas) are also found. During the winter the coniferous trees hold snow on their branches providing insulation for birds seeking refuge and mammals requiring shelter. The deciduous trees of the mixed-woods do not live as long as the coniferous trees and eventually become the deadfall and snags of the forest providing more habitats for animals.

The deciduous forest, which sheds its leaves in winter, is the third habitat. It is composed mostly of aspen poplar, balsam poplar and white birch. The latter two thrive in moister areas and are therefore found with the spruce in the mix-wood. The aspen poplars, which grow in stands, occupy more open and drier areas. Sun penetration in deciduous forests helps the undergrowth flourish. Fruiting shrubs like the chokecherry, saskatoon, pincherry, rose bushes, hazelnuts as well as a variety of herbaceous plants are prolific in providing food and shelter for wildlife. This is the type of habitat seen in most of the parks in the Capital Region River Valley Park.

On the valley's flood plains and farm areas, the fourth habitat of open fields and planted shelterbelts can be seen. Wetlands are sometimes present here. This habitat is more open



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and attracts a different array of birds and mammals. The marshes within the table lands of our area have some of the remaining wetlands within and around the municipal boundaries. Wetlands provide excellent habitat for migratory birds especially ducks and shorebirds.

Within the municipal boundaries, the planted gardens of the mature residential neighborhoods provide a mix of vegetation for animal food and shelter. Mature neighborhoods bordering on larger woodlots or ravines connected to the river valley, also providing corridors for animal movement.

The Capital Region River Valley Park allows visitors the opportunity to experience all of these habitats and to enjoy their associated flora and fauna.