

ORANGE COUNTY NATURAL AREAS SURVEY. SITE DESCRIPTION.

Site name: Sevenmile Creek Sugar Maple Bottom
Site number: E03

Significance: 2 - Regional
Threat Status: 1 - Extreme

Integrity: 1 - Prime

Location: Along Sevenmile Creek between Crabtree Creek and I-85; most of the natural area is on the southeast side of the creek, but also included on the northwest side is a mucky drainage ditch containing the purple fringeless orchid (Platanthera peramoena).
USGS Quad: Efland
Approx. acreage: 70

Jurisdiction: Orange County, Bingham Township

Reasons for significance: This is the richest bottomland remaining in the county. All other rich, basic bottomlands along upland streams have been brought under cultivation. Nowhere else occurs such a large stand of sugar maples (Acer saccharum ssp. floridanum), hackberries (Celtis laevigata), and swamp chestnut oaks (Quercus michauxii). The most important value of this site, however, is the amazingly profuse herb layer. Particularly impressive are the large patches of such regionally-rare species as maidenhair fern (Adiantum pedatum) and blue cohosh (Caulophyllum thalictroides); this is, in fact, the only known site for the blue cohosh in Orange County and much of the surrounding Piedmont. Two other state-listed plants also growing here are the ginseng (Panax quinquefolius), which is documented from only five sites in the county, and the purple fringeless orchid (Platanthera peramoena), which has been documented only at this site within the county.

The creek also possesses a well-developed fish and freshwater mussel fauna, including the notched rainbow mussel (Villosa constricta), a state-listed species of special concern. River otter (Lutra canadensis) and red-shouldered hawk (Buteo lineatus), two regionally rare species, are also present.

General description: Several of the prime features of this site are associated with its topographic occurrence as a narrow bottomland located within an upland stream valley. The deep and rich circumneutral soil is the result of a long, gentle alluvial deposition on the floodplain and lower slopes, and the richness and depth of this soil in turn are responsible for the outstanding growth of plant life. The trees illustrating the lush condition of the bottomland include sugar maples (Acer saccharum ssp. floridanum), swamp chestnut oaks (Quercus michauxii), hackberries (Celtis laevigata), walnuts (Juglans nigra), and northern shagbark hickories (Carya ovata), while the shrub layer is likewise composed of such basophilic species as bladdernut (Staphylea trifolia), redbud (Cercis canadensis), and hazelnut (Corylus americana).

The basic pH of the soil together with the cool, moist conditions provided by the lengthy north-facing lower portion of