

History Of Unity Pond



Moulton's Mill on 25 Mile Stream in Unity Plantation

Unity Pond has an extensive and documented history of human impact dating back to the late 1700's. European settlers, arriving in 1785, cleared much of the vast virgin white pine forests that characterized the area. One Unity historian claimed some white pine stumps were large enough to serve as a turn-around for a team of oxen. By the early 1800's Carlton Stream, Bithers Brook and Sandy Stream all supported numerous sawmills. These tributaries also served to transport the industry's logs, which were driven through Unity Pond to the Twenty-Five Mile Stream outlet to the Sebasticook River and into the Kennebec River Drainage in Winslow.

Deforestation soon led to the forced closure of most sawmills supported in the Unity Pond drainage. Only a few mills remained in operation by 1830, on both Bithers Brook and Sandy Stream.



Sawmill on Albion Rd. just below Bacon Brook

Permanent settlers arrived and burned remaining less valued forests in preparation for agricultural use. Farming was extensive on the lakeshore and occurred throughout the Unity Pond, Carlton and Sandy Stream watersheds, with the exception of boggy areas. These practices continued in the area for approximately 150 years. Initially dairy operations dominated the area along with sustenance and sale crops.

In the early 1920's agricultural advances increasing local crop productivity brought industry to the area through the establishment of several canneries. In Unity a cannery was constructed less than one mile from the south shore of Unity Pond. The seasonal plant processed and packed peas, beans and carrots during the months of July and August and disposed of effluent through an underground conduit pipe directly into the lake at the south shore. The Unity pea cannery began operations in 1923 and it is estimated that 2500m³ per day of effluent was discharged until it's closing in 1952.



Unity Pond from Quaker Hill Rd.

The abandoned cannery site was first leased to "Ready Peel," a producer of canned and frozen potatoes. The potato plant remained in operation from 1960 until 1978 when EPA ruled the potato/plant waste silaged behind the facility on Depot St. posed environmental concerns.



Connor's Mill on Sandy Stream in the town of Unity

The 1940's are marked by the decline and abandonment of small shoreline farms and shifts in production from dairy to poultry. These abandoned shoreline properties encouraged camp development. Prior to 1940 approximately 70 residences, mostly seasonal camps, were located on the Unity Pond shore, compared to 278 (17 year round residences and 261 seasonal camps) in 1974.



Sandy Stream behind Depot St. in Unity

In 1932 the Constable Egg Hatchery of Waldo County was established on Quaker Hill Rd. in Unity. The poultry hatchery produced 30,000 chicks/week in 1948 and by 1953 production had increased to 700,000 hatched/week. The hatchery relocated to Belfast Maine in the early 1960's when production rates were 500,000 hatched/week. The Unity College campus now occupies the former Constable Egg Hatchery site.

In 1946 the towns of Unity, Troy and Thorndike established a site for the cooperative disposal of household waste for the three towns. The open style landfill was situated on the Dump Road in proximity to the north fork and floodplain of Halfmoon Stream in the Sandy Stream drainage. The Unity Waste Disposal Site underwent official closure procedures with the Maine Department of Environmental protection in the 1990's.

Unity Pond has three major tributaries. Meadow Brook originates in a tamarac bog and flows from the northwest. Bithers (Bog) Brook flows from the east, and Carlton Stream originates in Carlton Bog and flows from the northeast. Unity Pond possesses a single outlet, which drains into a wetland area on the southwestern shore at a site, locally referred to as the train trestle in the town of Unity. Portions of the wetland and abutting grasslands are designated as the Sandy Stream Division of the Sunhaze National Wildlife Refuge, managed by USFWS. The pond outflow continues into Twenty-Five Mile Stream, flowing into the Sebasticook River in Burnham, and on into the Kennebec River in Winslow.

The Unity Pond outlet has been a source of controversy over the years. Local residents have, historically, blamed the outlet problems on the design of the train trestle, which created the wetland area into which the pond now drains. Originally the Sandy Stream watershed, primarily a forested and agricultural area draining 16,736 hectares including Freedom Pond and Halfmoon Stream, which enters near the Thorndike – Unity town line, served as a direct drainage flowing from the south directly into Unity Pond at the southwest shore. A number of smaller perennial and intermittent streams also contribute to the Sandy Stream drainage. The construction of the train trestle in 1870 and the development of a wetland area have altered the natural flow of Unity Pond’s outlet, Twenty - Five Mile

Typically Sandy Stream flows from the south and into the wetland area southwest of the Unity Pond outlet and then into Twenty-Five Mile Stream. However, during significant rain events and when lake water levels are low Sandy Stream bypasses Twenty-Five Mile Stream and flows directly into Unity Pond. When backflushing occurs at the pond’s outlet, the Sandy Stream sub-drainage system almost doubles the Unity Pond watershed to 32,825 hectares.



Sandy Stream

According to historical records water quality in Unity Pond has deteriorated due to cultural eutrophication (domestic and industrial wastes). Dating back to the 1930’s, an oxygen deficiency in the bottom waters had prevented a cold-water fishery from being established. The blame was largely held on the discharge from the pea factory and after its closing water quality was noted as to have improved and a cold water fishery was introduced. Although point source pollution contributors have since been removed, non-point source pollution continues to affect the water quality of Unity Pond.



Lower Sandy Stream in October 2004

The Maine Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) includes Unity Pond on Maine's list of "impaired" waterbodies [(Clean Water Act Section 3039d) list, aka "the TMDL list"] because Unity Pond does not attain State water quality standards. Unity Pond has had a long documented history of water quality impairment. In 1998, the Maine Land & Water Resources Council designated Unity Pond as a "nonpoint source priority watershed" (Public Law 1997 Chapter 519 (38MRSA section 2013) due to algae blooms and a sensitivity to change.