

Assessment of Algonquin Park Zoning Changes Proposed by the Ontario Parks Board of Directors: Wilderness Recreation, Tourism and Cultural Heritage Values

Ontario Parks
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1. Introduction

The Minister of Natural Resources has asked the Ontario Parks Board of Directors (“the Board”) to provide recommendations on *lightening the ecological footprint of logging* in Algonquin Provincial Park. The Board’s proposal focuses largely on protecting aquatic, ecological and recreational values (*Wilderness, Nature Reserve, Natural Environment and Historical Zones*) by removing certain areas from commercial forest management activities (*Recreation-Utilization Zone*).

Since the release of the original Algonquin Provincial Park Master Plan (1974), policies, guidelines and standards for the protection of Park values have changed in Algonquin Park, particularly since the passage of the *Crown Forest Sustainability Act* (1994). Application of policies and prescriptions for the protection of Park values from forest management activities were in some cases more explicit in the original Master Plan and have since evolved to follow provincial forest management guidelines applied on unregulated Crown land for the protection of natural, cultural and recreational values. If no guideline or standard is described in the Park management plan for the protection of a specific Park value, generally, provincial forest management guidelines have been applied.

Zoning Proposal

The Board has identified four components to the zoning proposal, in order of priority:

Component 1: Central Lakes and Lake Louisa areas

Component 2: Areas with a 200 metre setback from identified waterways

Component 3: 120 metre setback on all remaining canoe routes and lakes with self-sustaining brook trout populations, and 60 metre setbacks on portages

Component 4: Areas with a 200-500 metre setback from identified waterways

These four components of the proposal focus on increasing the level of protection for some ecological and wilderness recreational values on the Algonquin landscape. These values include:

1. Algonquin's 262 naturally self-sustaining brook trout lakes;
2. Canoe routes of significant wilderness character, including portages and campsites; and
3. Certain species at risk, particularly wood turtle and Blanding's turtle

The proposal would also increase the protection of cultural heritage values, which tend to be concentrated near waterways and shorelines.

On August 3rd, the Board confirmed that its zoning proposal was finalized, and asked MNR to prepare three assessments. This is one of the three requested reports. This report addresses wilderness recreation, tourism and cultural heritage values associated with implementation of all four components of the Board's zoning proposal.

The information presented in this report is based on existing sources of information. Information obtained from survey research with wilderness/backcountry users at several provincial parks is used to help quantify wilderness values. The economic impacts associated with visitor spending are used to characterize the tourism and recreational values of Algonquin Provincial Park.

2. *Assessment summary*

Algonquin Provincial Park provides a wide range of recreational and economic benefits to individuals, Ontarians and society at large. Hundreds of thousands of visitors visit Algonquin Park annually to pursue backcountry recreation in expansive natural settings that support a desire to experience solitude and leave the urban fabric of their lives behind.

The following provides a synopsis of the assessments of the Board's zoning proposal on brook trout fishing, wilderness recreation, cultural heritage values and economic benefits.

Brook Trout Fishing

Increased protective zoning has the potential to reduce the number of anglers accessing brook trout lakes via forest access roads. Less pressure on brook trout populations may improve catch rates, satisfaction levels and support the development of a unique fishery. In

addition, since many of the brook trout lakes are located well into the Park interior, issues related to unauthorized vehicle access may be reduced.

Wilderness Recreation

The zoning proposal affords better connectivity between *Wilderness* zones and contributes to the protection of the wilderness attributes of Algonquin. New roads would not be constructed within the zones and existing roads would be phased out where possible.

The zoning proposal may support enhanced wilderness experiences for backcountry travellers. The greater distances from access roads and forest harvest activities may contribute to increased visitor satisfaction levels. A reduction in the size of the forest access road network may provide an opportunity for the development of new overnight backpacking trails.

Cultural Heritage Values

The proposed 120-500m level of protection to many of the Park's waterway corridors would likely further protect the cultural heritage sites within the interior of Algonquin Provincial Park.

Economic Benefits from Wilderness Use

It is not expected that the Board's zoning proposal would increase the economic impact associated with use at the existing 1,374 interior campsites. The proposal may increase overall visitor satisfaction with interior canoe tripping, thus sustaining the annual economic impacts associated with interior travel.

The total annual direct expenditure made by visitors using the existing 1,374 interior campsites is estimated to be \$8.7 million. Spending associated with the use of these campsites contributed close to \$10 million in Value Added to the provincial economy.

3. *Effect of Zoning Proposal on Brook Trout Fishery*

As lake based brook trout fisheries disappear elsewhere, Algonquin's brook trout fishery is increasingly unique in the provincial context. The mere chance to fish for native brook trout is a special experience coveted by anglers. The majority of the brook trout lakes are located well within the Park interior. Most interior canoeists practice catch and release fishing, which is vital for the long term sustainability of the resource. The most recent independent audit for the Algonquin Park Forest (KBM, 2003) noted that "virtually all the naturally reproducing brook trout lakes in the Recreation/Utilization Zone have road access within 500 metres".

Increased protective zoning may reduce the number of anglers using vehicles to access brook trout lakes close to forest access roads, potentially reducing heavy fishing pressure and improving catch rates. This, in turn, may lead to increased levels of satisfaction among canoeists accessing brook trout lakes. In time, the zoning proposals could help support the development of a regulated catch and release trophy fishery.

Additional protection for the Park's brook trout lakes and associated habitat is consistent with MNR biodiversity objectives. The threat of road access and exploitation of this sensitive fishery and introduction of exotic baitfish is of concern.

4. Effect of Zoning Proposal on Wilderness Recreation

Algonquin is renowned for affording wilderness experiences to visitors traveling into the interior of the Park. Visitors' expectations of a wilderness experience generally increase as they travel further into the interior from the Park's perimeter or Parkway Corridor access points. Therefore, many of Park's lakes are prized destinations for their wilderness character, even though they are physically located outside a *Wilderness Zone*. Canoe tripping, has and continues to be, a significant recreational activity, enhanced by the Park's wilderness character.

As a means of connecting existing natural areas, the Board is proposing protective zoning of 120 to 500 metres in width. The variable approach (120-500m) would reduce the discontinuous or fragmented nature of the present landscape, particularly in the central lakes region and other significant canoe routes. In these areas, a greater emphasis on reducing the forest access road network system and associated aggregate pits is encouraged. This would reduce the impact on future access and potential impacts on naturally functioning ecological systems within the Park. Other benefits include reduced noise and visual impacts of logging along the waterway corridors.

Table 1 depicts the number of campsites, trails and portages within the proposed zoning scenarios.

Table 1: Backcountry Campsites, Trails and Portages within the Proposed Zoning Scenarios

Zoning component	Campsites (interior)	Length of trails and portages (km)
Component 1	178	45.6
Component 2	913	198.4
Component 3	280	249.9
Component 4	3	24.1
TOTAL	1,374	518.0

A variable 120-500m level of protection for significant canoe routes and brook trout lakes could potentially support enhanced wilderness experiences for backcountry travellers. A greater distance from access roads and forest harvest activities could increase overall satisfaction levels among Algonquin visitors.

Currently there are only three backpacking trails within Algonquin Park. There has been a significant increase in the interest in back country hiking over the past few years. Currently, the Park has limited future options for wilderness backpacking trails due to logging roads and forestry activity near lakes and waterways, which are the preferred routes for such trail development. Reducing the extent of the forest access road system in the proposed zones may provide opportunities for the development of new interior trail networks.

Algonquin's Canoe Routes

The application of these four components to Algonquin's significant wilderness waterway areas would be more consistent with current Ontario Parks *Waterway Class* park policy and protection standards. Presently, *Waterway Class* parks, outside of Algonquin, generally are afforded a minimum 200m level of protection on each side of the waterway to protect natural, cultural and recreational values. This compares to the variable 30 to 90 metre level of protection normally afforded to lakes, rivers and canoe routes situated in the Park's *Recreation-Utilization Zone*. The majority of these areas currently receive 30 metre protection. Several popular canoe routes originate in Algonquin and extend to *Waterway Class* parks such as the Big East and Oxtongue River Provincial Parks. Visitors using these canoe routes experience greater separation from forestry operations once they leave Algonquin Park.

The Board proposal would increase the level of protection afforded to the majority of Algonquin's canoe routes to be more consistent with protection afforded in *Waterway Class* parks. This wider protective zoning may reduce the likelihood of visitors encountering the effects of forestry operations within Algonquin Park.

5. *Effect of Zoning Proposal on Cultural Heritage Values*

Known cultural heritage sites in the *Recreation-Utilization Zone* are identified as Areas of Concern (AOCs) in the current Algonquin Park FMP and are afforded a 150 metre reserve. The level of protection proposed by the Board would be relatively consistent with the MNR's revised *Forest Management Guide for Cultural Heritage Values* that suggest a minimum 200-metre level of protection (Reserve) on known cultural heritage sites.

Since the majority of known cultural heritage sites (approximately 800), registered archaeological sites (approximately 300), and areas of high cultural heritage potential are situated along waterway corridors, the Board's proposed 120-500 metre level of protection for many of the Park's waterway corridors would provide greater protection for the historical, cultural and spiritual integrity of these sites.

Status of Land Claim

Ontario is involved with Canada and the Algonquins of Eastern Ontario in a negotiation process to address the Algonquins' Aboriginal rights and title claim to 14,000 square miles of the Ottawa and Mattawa watersheds, which includes most of Algonquin Park. The negotiation is actively considering how a wide range of land, natural resource, financial and associated economic development issues will be dealt with in the context of a possible claim settlement - one that will be considered a modern day treaty with constitutional protection.

Central to any claim settlement, as well as the Algonquin interests, is Algonquin Park, what role the Algonquins will want to play, and what Ontario may be prepared to entertain. The Park is probably one of the most sensitive issues that arises in the Algonquin claim. Accordingly, any plan to amend the current underlying assumptions about how the Park is to be managed or the uses or activities that can take place within it is certain to trigger extreme Algonquin interest.

Given the sensitivity of this matter, and its direct relationship to the ongoing negotiations, the Algonquins will expect very substantive consultation efforts with them by Ontario in order to explore the nature of possible impacts upon their asserted rights before any proposed changes are advanced. Failure to do so by Ontario almost certainly will invite a challenge from the Algonquins, one that very likely could end up in the courts, thereby frustrating Ontario's objectives in a very public fashion. Ontario's Chief Negotiator for the Algonquin claim will also have to be involved in any deliberations or proposed changes of substance being contemplated for the Park and in the way consultation initiatives with the Algonquins will be met respecting this matter.

6. Effect of Zoning Proposal on Economic Benefits from Wilderness Use

Algonquin Park is considered a wilderness canoeing destination rivalling similar areas such as the Boundary Waters Canoe Area/Quetico Provincial Park in Minnesota and northern Ontario and the Allagash Wilderness Waterway in Maine. For this reason, the Ontario Tourism Marketing Partnership (OTMP) and the Canadian Tourism Commission (CTC), in collaboration with Ontario Parks, promote Algonquin as a significant Canadian wilderness destination in tourism marketing for the province. OTMP and Ontario Parks marketing efforts have been instrumental in nearly doubling the international visitation (15%) to Algonquin in the past ten years. International travel trade marketplaces, such as *Rendezvous Canada*, promote Algonquin Park in 20 or more countries around the world.

There has been strong growth, notably in overseas visitation, in interior travel in the past ten years. Growth in backcountry trips has exceeded the rate of growth in visitation in day use and car camping and canoeing. Backpacking has increased dramatically in the fall season. These visitors desire remote experiences into areas which have the highest level of wilderness character. This increased interest in backcountry tripping has been attributed to the lack of availability of canoe trips of shorter duration and distance as well as a greater demand for solitude and landscapes of wilderness character. There are currently 305,000 backcountry visitors annually in Algonquin, an increase of 14% in the past 10 years.

With the anticipated population increase in southern Ontario of 4 million people in the next 20 years and the increasing urbanization of the landscape, the demand for backcountry or wilderness experiences may continue to increase. However, an aging population and increased travel costs related to fuel and transportation may limit the future growth of backcountry canoeing.

Presently, the *Recreation Utilization Zone*, where forest management occurs, comprises approximately 78% of the Park. The remaining 22% of the Park is designated under a number of other Zones, such as *Nature Reserve*, *Wilderness*, *Natural Environment*, *Development*, *Historical* and *Access*. The proposal of the Board would increase this area from the current 22% to 42%.

The effect of the zoning proposal is expected to be largely an improvement in the quality of the backcountry experience and result in higher levels of visitor satisfaction.

The growth in backcountry canoeing and backpacking over the past ten years has supported growth in the local business community. A number of new ecotourism businesses have been established just outside the Park boundary. Communities such as the Town of Huntsville are

using Algonquin Park as the featured attraction to the tourist region and they describe themselves as the “western gateway” to Algonquin.

The following tables (Tables 2-4) provide an estimate of the economic impact from visitor expenditures associated with the use of the existing 1,374 campsites within the Board’s zoning proposal. It should be noted that the provincial economic impact figures in this assessment are for total effects (direct+indirect+induced) and generated using MNR’s Social and Economic Impact Model (SEIM). Details of the calculations are outlined in Appendix 1.

Table 2: Algonquin Interior Impacts – Regular Trip - Visitor Spending Associated with 1,374 Campsites in the Proposed Zones

Algonquin	Initial Expenditure	Value Added	Person Years of Employment	Provincial Taxes Collected
Visitors	\$2,856,000.00	\$3,255,000.00	56	\$371,000.00

Table 3: Algonquin Interior Impacts – Capital Goods - Visitor Spending Associated with 1,374 Campsites in the Proposed Zones

Algonquin	Initial Expenditure	Value Added	Person Years of Employment	Provincial Taxes Collected
Visitors	\$4,928,000.00	\$5,617,000.00	97	\$640,000.00

Table 4: Algonquin Interior Impacts – Outfitter Services - Visitor Spending Associated with 1,374 Campsites in the Proposed Zones

Algonquin	Initial Expenditure	Value Added	Person Years of Employment	Provincial Taxes Collected
Visitors	\$961,000.00	\$1,095,000.00	19	\$125,000.00

In summary, interior visitors to the existing 1,374 campsites in the proposed zones annually spend an estimated \$8.7 million on fuel and transportation, food and beverages, capital goods and outfitter services. These expenditures contribute close to \$10 million in Value Added to the provincial economy and support 170 provincial person years of employment.

The economic benefits associated with backcountry travel expenditures are distributed across the province. Locally, benefits extend to communities and businesses primarily in the Muskoka and Ottawa Valley regions, with lesser impacts in the Nipissing (North Bay) region.

It is not expected that the Board’s zoning proposal will increase the economic impact associated with use at the existing 1,374 campsites. However, the proposal may increase overall visitor satisfaction with interior canoe tripping.

Acknowledgements

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APPENDIX 1

Economic Benefits from Existing Interior Campsites

Interior campers in Algonquin Provincial Park have two primary expenditure areas: fuel and transportation, and food and beverages. The expenses are made by interior visitors in support of their trips. Roughly one quarter of interior visitors make expenditures on attractions and entertainment or miscellaneous items. Should visitors make expenditure in these areas, the amounts are relatively small. For the purposes of this analysis, interior visitor spending is limited to the two primary expenditure areas: fuel and transportation, and food and beverages. According to the most recent Algonquin Interior Survey (1999), average expenditures per party on fuel and transportation and food and beverages were \$94.00 and \$109.00 respectively. The average expenditures for these items were not adjusted for inflation.

Data regarding interior group size and length of stay data are required to formulate the per person/ per night expenditure amounts. The average interior group size is 4.6 people and the average length of stay is 3.4 nights in the interior. For use in the economic impact model, group expenditures were converted to per person per night expenditures of \$6.02 for fuel and transportation and \$6.97 for food and beverages.

The following calculations were used to arrive at the estimated total expenditure associated with interior visitor spending at the 1,374 campsites in the proposed zones:

$\$94.00$ (entire trip expenditure on fuel & transportation)/4.6 people/3.4 nights = \$6.02 per person per night
 $\$109.00$ (entire trip expenditure on food & beverage)/4.6 people/3.4 nights = \$6.97 per person per night
 1,374 campsites supported 219,899 camper nights (71% of the total interior camper nights recorded in the 2005 operating season)
 219,899 camper nights X \$6.02 (per person per night - fuel & transportation) = \$1,323,791.98
 219,899 camper nights X \$6.97 (per person per night - food & beverage) = \$1,532,626.33
 $\$1,323,791.98 + 1,532,626.33 = \$2,856,418.31$ (total initial expenditure)

In 2005, interior visitors spent an estimated \$2.8 million on fuel and transportation and food and beverages using the 1,374 interior campsites. These expenditures supported over \$3.2 million in Value Added to the provincial economy and over fifty provincial person years of employment. In addition, close to \$400,000.00 in provincial taxes were collected from the initial expenditure of \$2.8 million. A summary of the economic impacts is provided in Table 2.

Table 2: Algonquin Interior Impacts – Regular Trip - Visitor Spending Associated with 1,374 Campsites in the Proposed Zones

Algonquin	Initial Expenditure	Value Added	Person Years of Employment	Provincial Taxes Collected
Visitors	\$2,856,000.00	\$3,255,000.00	56	\$371,000.00

Interior visitors also spend money each year on equipment and clothing to support their trips to provincial parks. As reported in the 1999 Algonquin Interior survey, the average amount spent per group on equipment was \$265.00 followed by clothing at \$87.00. In 2005, the estimated number of camper nights associated with the 1,374 camps in the proposed zones was 219,899. The camper nights number can be used to calculate the number of interior camper groups (219,899/4.6 avg. group size/3.4 avg. length of stay = 14,060). Approximately 14,000 camper groups each spend a total average amount of \$352.00 on equipment and clothing in support of trips to provincial parks. This spending activity results in an initial expenditure of \$4.9 million and a Value Added contribution of \$5.6 million to the provincial economy. Expenditures on camping capital goods support 97 person years of employment in the provincial economy. Finally, the provincial taxes collected from the initial expenditure total over \$600,000. See Table 3 for a summary of the economic impacts.

Table 3: Algonquin Interior Impacts – Capital Goods - Visitor Spending Associated with 1,374 Campsites in the Proposed Zones

Algonquin	Initial Expenditure	Value Added	Person Years of Employment	Provincial Taxes Collected
Visitors	\$4,928,000.00	\$5,617,000.00	97	\$640,000.00

Interior visitors do not always choose to purchase and own all the goods necessary to access and travel in the backcountry of Algonquin Provincial Park. Approximately 44% of groups used the services of an outfitter to support their trips into Algonquin. Groups on average spend a total of \$155.00 on outfitter services such as canoe and tent rentals. Therefore, 6,200 groups spending an average of \$155.00 create an initial expenditure of \$961,000.00. The initial expenditure results in over \$1 million in Value Added to the provincial economy and supports nineteen person years of employment. The provincial taxes collected from expenditures on outfitter services total \$125,000.00. A summary of the impacts associated with spending for outfitter services are provided in Table 4.

Table 4: Algonquin Interior Impacts – Outfitter Services - Visitor Spending Associated with 1,374 Campsites in the Proposed Zones

Algonquin	Initial Expenditure	Value Added	Person Years of Employment	Provincial Taxes Collected
Visitors	\$961,000.00	\$1,095,000.00	19	\$125,000.00