

Hydro One Plan to ‘Hasten the Demise of Caribou in Ontario’

Backgrounder by CPAWS Wildlands League, March, 2010

THE NEW THREAT. Hydro One is planning on building a new 430km (230kv) transmission line from the Nipigon area to Pickle Lake (alongside Wabakimi Provincial Park in northwestern Ontario). As a new permanent linear corridor, this is a known threat to caribou and healthy intact Boreal Forests. Hydro One says this corridor is designed to support new hydro generation and regional economic growth. It will also open up remote areas.

WHY WE ARE CONCERNED. As stated in the Lake Nipigon Signature Site Ecological Land Use and Resource Management Strategy, “the Lake Nipigon area is strategically important to long-term woodland caribou recovery due to its high quality and quantity of caribou habitat and its location near the southern limit of continuous caribou range¹.” Routing a new permanent line on the east side of Lake Nipigon is at odds with recovering woodland caribou. It will erode the remoteness of the Lake Nipigon Signature Site and undermine the province’s implementation of the *Endangered Species Act*.

To compound matters, the northern section of this proposed line will sever caribou habitat in Wabikimi Provincial Park from the intact habitat further north. It is widely acknowledged that Wabakimi is not nearly big enough to support healthy caribou populations and as one scientist lamented, this new permanent disturbance “will only help to hasten the demise of caribou in this part of Ontario”.

Finally, the hydro corridor is being narrowly scoped in a piecemeal and ad hoc manner, in the absence of comprehensive, big-picture planning for the region and in the absence of a cumulative impacts analysis of all developments (existing and proposed).

SUMMARY OF WILDLANDS LEAGUE ADVICE TO HYDRO ONE WITH RESPECT TO THE PROPOSED NORTHWEST TRANSMISSION EXPANSION PROJECT

#1 Minimize the creation of new linear disturbances on the landscape.

#2 Identify and propose alternative routes that parallel existing permanent roads, railways and linear features to preserve the remoteness of Lake Nipigon and protect the ecological integrity of Wabakimi Provincial Park;

#3 Make the findings about the alternatives and associated costs and benefits publicly available so all Canadians can participate in determining the best route for this infrastructure especially since it’s being touted as the basis for creating a ‘new era of economic development across the region’;

#4 Assess the cumulative impacts to caribou from this line and all development (existing and proposed) at the landscape scale; and

#5 Devise and implement a plan with Ontario to increase permanent protection for caribou at the landscape scale in the four local ranges affected before any approvals are handed out, and in order to meet the requirements of the ESA.

¹ Lake Nipigon Basin Signature Site Ecological Land Use and Resource Management Strategy. 2004. Available at http://www.ontarioparks.com/english/laken_planning.html