

New Directions in Ontario's Forests

Nurturing Diversity Through Ecotourism

This is the eighth in a series of fact sheets making the economic links between healthy forest ecosystems and the long-term viability of resource-dependent communities in Ontario. This fact sheet considers the potential of ecotourism and nature-based tourism to contribute to the development of a healthy and diverse economic base in these communities.

For a more stable future, Ontario's logging-based communities would do well to encourage a range of industries and enterprises that support long-term forest health and sustainability. One of these compatible industries could be ecotourism.

Tourism makes a significant contribution to Ontario's economy, generating \$11.5 billion in direct expenditures in 1994.¹ It is the province's fourth largest export, close behind the wood products industry.² It is even more important in northern resource-based communities, where the employment generated by tourism often rivals the forestry, mining or manufacturing sectors.³

Although the term "ecotourism" may be new, activities based on the enjoyment of nature and natural surroundings have always been an important part of Ontario's tourism sector. What distinguishes ecotourism from other nature-based recreation is its emphasis on managing for low ecological impact, encouraging conservation and sustainability, generating and retaining economic wealth locally, and providing options that appeal to families, retirees and young adventurers in addition to the more traditional clientele (attracting "Dave and the family rather than just Dave and the guys").³

There is evidence that Ontario's nature-based tourism has already begun to reflect more of these ecotourism values. The number of hunters declined by 14% over the 1981-91 decade, while the number of non-consumptive wildlife tourists engaging in bird

watching, photography, wildlife viewing, and nature studying increased by 8%. For each Ontarian who hunts today, there are three or more people in Ontario who participate in non-consumptive wildlife viewing; their tourism activities generate more than double the revenue Ontario gathers from hunters⁴ (see graphic on page 3).

Ecotourism is the fastest growing sector of a worldwide tourism market that is expected to double between 1994 and 2005.² According to a US travel survey, 8 million U.S. travellers have taken ecotrips, while 35 million more say they are likely to take one over the next three years.⁵ Many of these travellers (27% of actual ecotourists and 13% of potential ecotourists) live in the Great Lakes Region.⁵ With a large, ready market of potential clients in the Great Lakes Basin, Ontario has the potential to benefit significantly from this growing sector if it can fulfil the necessary conditions for ecotourism.

Ecotourism in Ontario:

Is there a market demand?

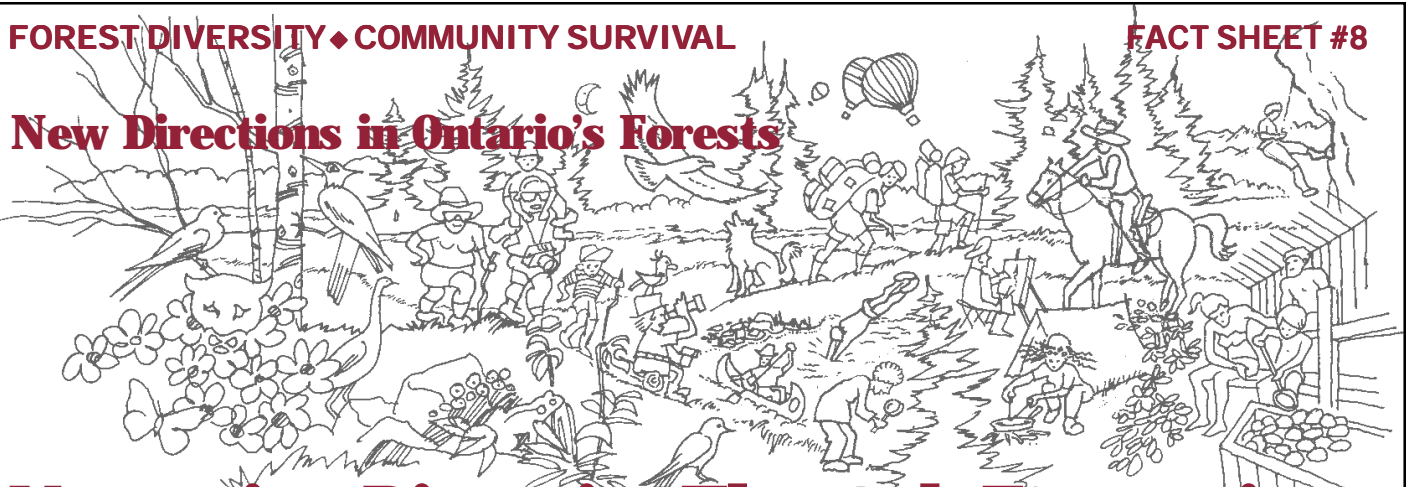
Undisturbed natural places and wilderness areas are the primary ecotourism attractions in Canada and Ontario — particularly if they feature opportunities to view native wildlife and plants.⁶ Favourite activities include visiting parks, enjoying lakes and rivers, hiking and canoeing.⁷ The least desirable settings for ecotourists are places

A definition of ecotourism: Travel to relatively undisturbed or uncontaminated natural areas to enjoy the scenery and understand the culture of the environment. Taking care not to alter the integrity of the ecosystem while producing net benefits to help further protection of the natural and/or cultural resources.

watching, hiking and canoeing.⁷ The least desirable settings for ecotourists are places

continued next page

ILLUSTRATIONS BY CHARLES DREVER



Nurturing Diversity Through Ecotourism from page 1

within audible range of human and industry influences such as logging, all terrain vehicles or powered water craft.^{7,8}

Ontario has a number of advantages that make it attractive as an ecotourist destination. Primary among them are the still-remaining regions of the province with significantly large, relatively undisturbed, healthy forest ecosystems. These areas offer major ecotourist attractions such as thriving populations of woodland caribou, pine marten, lynx, wolves and other increasingly rare wilderness-dependent species. Ontario also has much of the necessary infrastructure for ecotourism already in place in the form operator-outfitters, tourist accommodation and transport facilities.

Interest in Ontario's wilderness and natural areas is well documented. More than 130,000 people hiked the Bruce Trail from July to November, 1994.⁹ Visitors enjoyed 60,000 days canoeing on Temagami's lakes and rivers from May to September, 1994, averaging 500 people per day.¹⁰ Provincial parks in Ontario received 8.4 million visitors in 1993, a 62% increase from 1981.¹¹ In Algonquin Park, the province's oldest and best known provincial park, quotas are needed to avoid overcrowding by the more than 800,000 visits a year by people who come for camping, canoeing or day visits.¹² One thousand people have turned up on a single evening for a Public Wolf Howl.¹³

Parks and Protected Areas:

Their role in ecotourism

Ecotourism developers, researchers, operators and tour guides agree: areas of old growth white and red pine forest, deciduous forest, unpolluted, unsilted lakes and waterways, and native wildlife make up an essential resource base for Ontario's ecotourism.

Natural areas protected from major disturbances

such as logging, mining and hydroelectric development provide a critical draw for ecotourists, generating economic benefits that go well beyond park boundaries. For example, in 1992 visitors spent \$14.5 million on Ontario provincial park fees and a total of \$299.5 million on their trips to the parks.¹⁴ People in the local community can benefit economically — particularly if they take the initiative to work together in promoting the region's natural values and providing facilities and services that cater to the new clientele.

The experience of the Bruce Peninsula National Park and Fathom Five Marine Park in Ontario is a case in point. Where only one park-operated campground existed in the 1970s,¹⁵ today there are 6 other privately operated campgrounds and the facilities are at capacity during high season. With park visitors directly spending \$8 million annually in the region, 90% of the local economy is tourism based.¹⁵

Two key reasons were cited for this success.¹⁵ First, the wide range of available activities, including boat tours, hiking, guided birdwatching, scuba diving and visiting the islands, encourage multiple-day excursions. Secondly, Bruce County and parks personnel have collaborated with the private sector to form the Bruce Peninsula Tourism Association to promote and market the area.

Communities around Algonquin Park have taken advantage of similar opportunities, surrounding the park with lodges, outfitters and suppliers.

Resources and Roadblocks:

Making the most of ecotourism's potential

At the moment, the largest proportion of Ontario's ecotourists come from Ontario, with a significant potential market in Quebec, Manitoba and the northern US states.⁸ To compete in the international market and benefit from the worldwide boom in ecotourism,¹⁶ the province will have to develop an international profile² and a competitive product. This requires a commitment to protect Ontario's wilderness and natural areas and to energetically market these assets abroad. Such a commitment has yet to be demonstrated.

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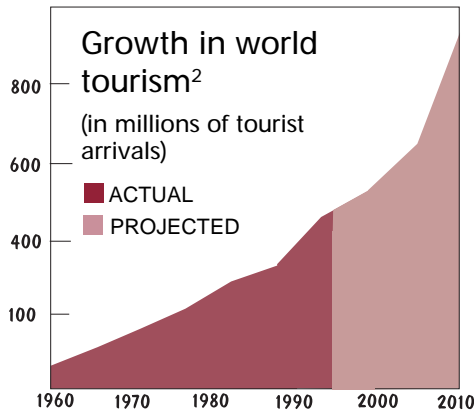
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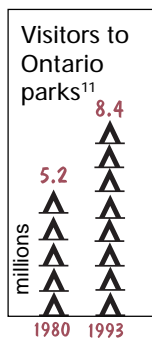
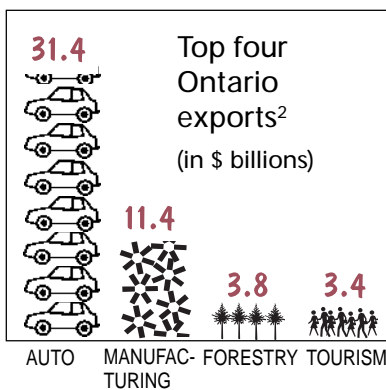
FACT SHEET #8

THE ECOTOURISM BOOM – IS ONTARIO READY FOR THESE NEW TRENDS?

Worldwide tourism is set to double in the next 10-15 years.

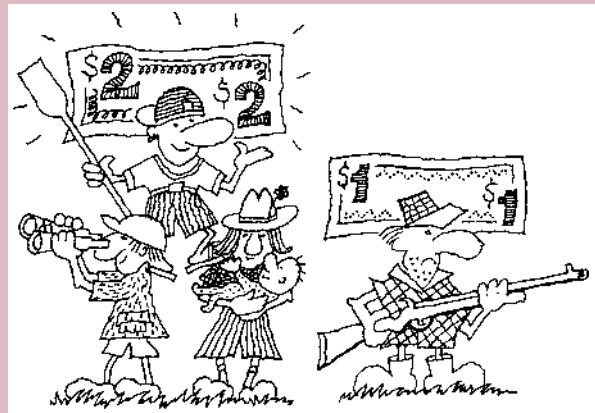


Export earnings from international tourists coming to Ontario already rival forestry.

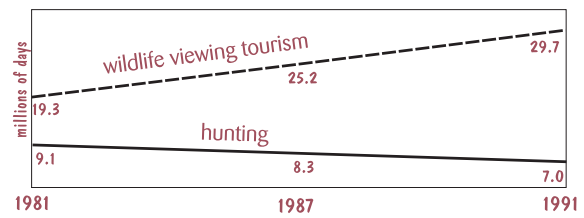


Demand for ecotourism experiences is reflected by increasing numbers of park visitors

Ontario Wildlife Tourism⁴



For every Ontarian who goes hunting, 3 times as many people take wildlife viewing trips, generating twice the revenue of hunting (\$700 million compared to \$325 million in 1991).



Among Ontario residents, non-consumptive wildlife tourism is increasing while hunting is on the decline.

In fact, ecotourism may be at odds with the current approach and practices in Ontario's forest. The provincial government appears to be backtracking on its commitment to establish and maintain a comprehensive system of protected areas in the province. Its poor effort on protected areas was reflected in the failing grade (F) given to the province by the World Wildlife Fund in 1996. Existing provincial parks have had expenditures "severely reduced" over the last 20 years despite increased visitor numbers, losing an estimated 60% of their purchasing dollar since 1974.¹¹

Around the province, many sites with high ecotourism potential are open for logging and mining (see map next page). These practices can cause major disturbances to forest ecosystems and riddle wilderness areas with extensive road networks. Even existing nature-based operations in the area can be forced out of business.¹⁷ Once its forests are cut and wildlife habitats destroyed, a region has lost the option to join the ecotourism boom.

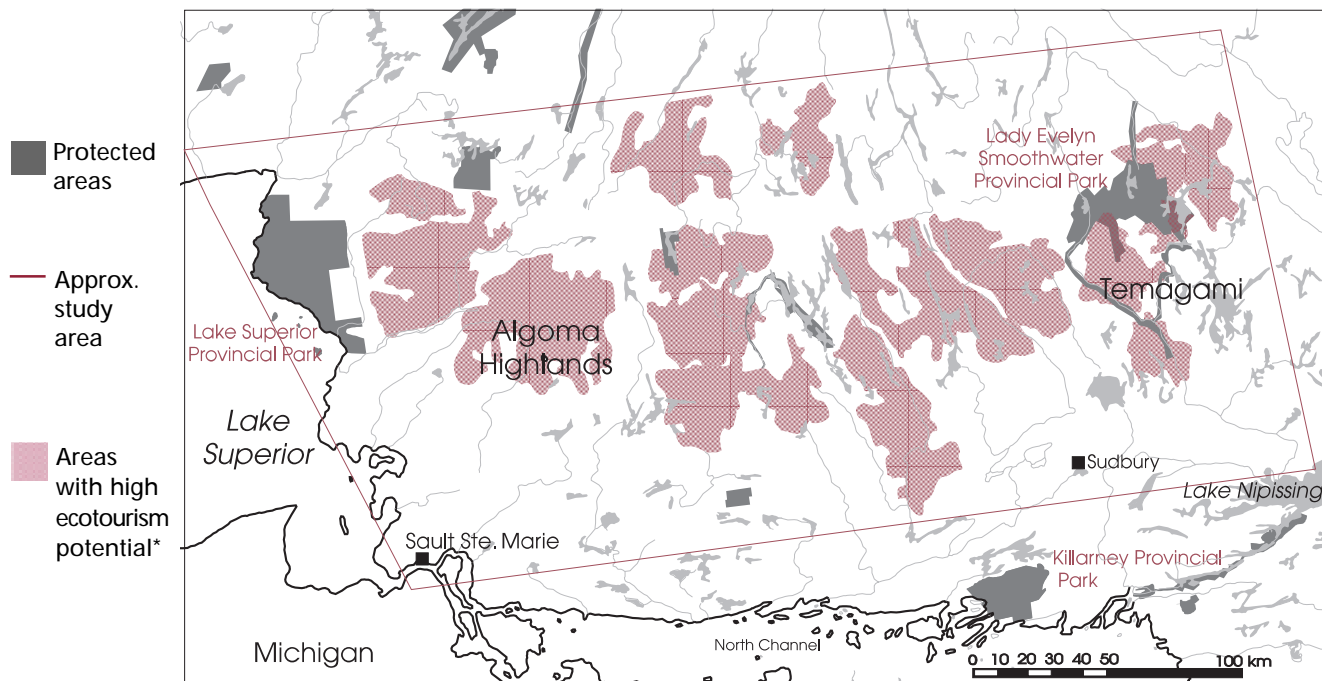
Ecotourism and Diversity:

Supporting forest ecology and community economies
Ecotourism fits well in a forested landscape which combines protected areas and ecologically sustainable forest uses. Instead of replacing one dominant industry with another, ecotourism can coexist with — even enhance — a diversified community economy based on the principles of sustainability. In addition to the more traditional attractions of wildlife viewing and adventure travel, there are cultural and educational aspects of compatible forest industries such as maple sugar operations, skilled craft workshops and sustainably managed woodlots that can provide new ecotourist opportunities.

If Ontario is to take advantage of the potential in this growing ecotourism market, local communities, the tourism industry and all levels of government must take a proactive stance. They must protect the resource on which this market is based: healthy forest ecosystems.

ECOTOURISM IN ONTARIO— THE CHOICE WE FACE

Of the areas with of highest potential for ecotourism,¹⁸ only a tiny fraction are protected and made accessible through Ontario's provincial park system. The rest remain open for logging and mining.



* According to a study by the Canadian Forest Service, these areas came closest to matching the following ideal criteria: no permanent human settlement; no forestry or mining activities; mixed forest type; 300 square kilometres or larger; at least 2 km. from the nearest road of any kind; wildlife viewing opportunities and attractive landscape features such as water bodies or rugged terrain.

Produced by the **Wildlands League** through its Forest Diversity ♦ Community Survival Project, this series seeks to promote constructive dialogue between resource-dependent communities and forest conservation advocates (see *Fact Sheet #1* for more details). We hope the information will be useful in developing economically sound approaches to forest stewardship in Ontario that can help to ensure sustainable economies and sustainable communities.



● **In this series to date:**

- #1 *Where Have All the Loggers Gone?*
- #2 *Cutting the Future Out of Prosperity?*
- #3 *A New Appetite in the Forest*
- #4 *Undercutting Our Natural Capital*
- #5 *Biodiversity at the Crossroads*
- #6 *Ecological Forestry ... A Cut Above*
- #7 *Crafting More Jobs with Less Wood*
- #8 *Nurturing Diversity Through Ecotourism*

Upcoming:

Planting the Seeds of a New Forest Economy

Forest Diversity ♦ Community Survival is a project initiated by the **Wildlands League**, and financially supported by the Richard Ivey Foundation and Ontario Hydro. For more information, mail or fax this coupon.

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The Wildlands League, an Ontario chapter of the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society, has been working for more than 25 years to promote forest protection and sustainable forest management practices in the province.

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