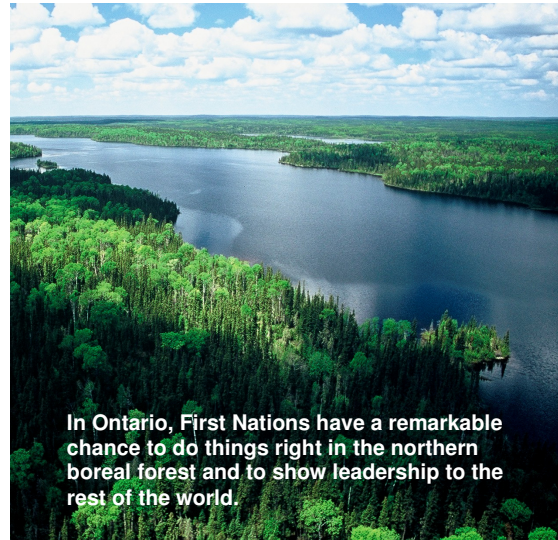


Planning for Balance in the Boreal Forest

Changes are coming to the forests.

Many aboriginal communities are now facing tough questions about new industrial activities in their traditional lands. What will new development mean for communities? What are the best options for economic renewal? How will these new developments impact fish and wildlife? How will these new developments impact First Nations' way of life? Aboriginal youth need a future where they will regain strength and prosper – how can this be accomplished?

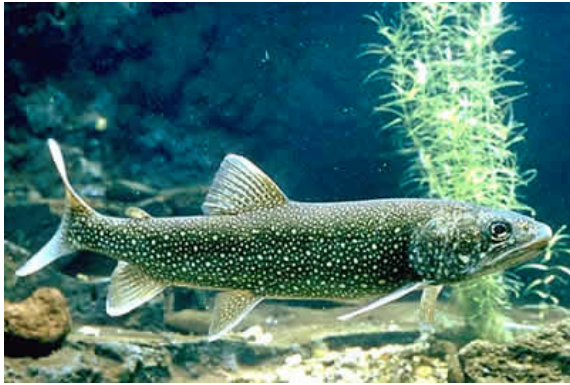
There are diverse opinions within and among communities. Some would like the land to stay the way it is; some are ready for big changes. In most cases, the ideal solution may be to achieve a balance between the two, to create a future where the community can still engage in traditional land uses, such as fishing, hunting and trapping, and to find new economic opportunities that are appealing to the community – not just through financial gain, but through a good quality of life.



Part of a good quality of life is ensuring that new activities do not cause significant damage to the forests, water and wildlife that are the source of traditional foods and materials.

Some compare our impact on our natural environment to a footprint. If you can imagine walking along a forest path, a light footprint may leave virtually no sign at all that a person has been there. But a heavy footprint might leave broken branches, and ruts in the mud. It would be very obvious that a person had been using that area. Now, for something as small as a trail, that footprint is not very significant, but if you multiply that across the forest, the impact can be devastating. The “heaviness” of the human footprint can be measured both by its size and how long the activity and its future impacts last.

Unfortunately, heavier footprints are often more appealing because they tend to create



wealth more quickly. For example, a large diamond mine has a very heavy, and potentially irreversible, footprint. However, the potential to generate wealth for community members very quickly is large. Many mines have a lifespan of less than a couple of decades, after which the benefits end and only liabilities, such as pollution, may remain. On the other hand, hunting can have a very light footprint, but its benefits are spread over a longer time period, if well-managed. In the long run, an economy based on activities with a light footprint will be more likely to provide economic benefits long into the future. This concept of footprints is a tool that can help us make clear decisions about our relationship to the land, and the world we want to leave for future generations.

Through planning for uses on traditional lands, communities may be able to balance the footprints of various activities. One approach would be, for example, to allocate roughly half of the traditional lands to potential new industrial developments, such as mining, forestry, hydro and associated roads: the heavy footprint activities. The other half could be devoted to lighter footprint activities, such as tourism,

hunting, fishing, and trapping and to support healthy fish and wildlife populations.

Another approach might be to identify nodes of development (areas of heavy footprint activities) in a largely conserved landscape, where hunting, trapping and fishing, healthy watersheds and wildlife populations, ecotourism and small community enterprises dominate (light footprint activities).

In both cases, communities need to have a real say in decisions so that uses can be carefully managed and that communities benefits from decisions, including revenue sharing with industry and government, highest environmental standards and monitoring, and the ability to ensure a legacy for future generations.



Ontario Nature and **CPAWS-Wildlands League** are working to build capacity and share information with communities on balancing the footprint of activities in their traditional territories. If you would like more information, call 807-474-2285 or see our websites at www.wildlandsleague.org or www.ontarionature.org.