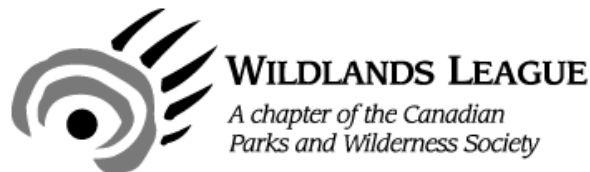


Protected by Law:

A Discussion Paper on the Need for a New *Provincial Parks Act*



September 2002



www.wildlandsleague.org

Protected by Law: A Discussion Paper on the Need for a New *Provincial Parks Act*

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The Wildlands League is a charitable organization founded in 1968 and is an Ontario chapter of the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society (CPAWS). The Wildlands League promotes forest protection and sustainable forest management practices. It supports the protection of wild places through the completion of a system of ecologically representative protected areas while also promoting ecologically centred resource use and planning. The Wildlands League relies on public donations and foundation grants for funding. It has thousands of individual supporters in Ontario.

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Thanks to MEC for their
financial support

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FOREWORD

This discussion paper is intended to generate and inform debate about the need for a new Act to protect Ontario's Provincial Parks. It is based on a review of written commentary about protected areas legislation generally and about Ontario's existing *Provincial Parks Act* specifically. Where appropriate, the general points of discussion make reference to pertinent provincial policy and summarize ideas for improvement from other sources and jurisdictions. These references are intended to provide a broader context for considering options for legislative reform. To assist CPAWS-Wildlands League in developing recommendations, we invited and received comments from more than twenty qualified individuals, including scientists, lawyers, academics, conservationists, business people and civil servants. Their insights have shaped and refined considerably the discussion and recommendations which follow.¹

RATIONALE FOR LEGISLATIVE REFORM

Ontario's Provincial Parks system is one of the finest in Canada, with 634 parks and conservations reserves covering 8.74% of the province's lands and waters. Of the province's natural regions, 36.4% are moderately or adequately represented according to standards set by the Endangered Spaces Campaign². At the policy level, the provincial government is committed to protecting provincially significant elements of the natural and cultural landscape within Provincial Parks, a commitment which confirms Ontario's pre-eminent role in setting a high benchmark for parks management.

The government's expressed intent to expand the Provincial Parks system, so that it adequately represents Ontario's natural history and diversity, is in keeping with an emerging international emphasis on the ecological and cultural importance of protected areas. Today, worldwide, there is a clear and scientifically-based consensus that protected areas have a crucial role to play in sustaining both biological diversity and human communities. Indeed, as Ontario's Ministry of Natural Resources (OMNR) strives to realize its vision of sustainable development for the province (OMNR, 2000), the Provincial Parks system will be key to the success of the overall effort.

Despite the government's leadership in the areas of park creation and policy, these recent conservation gains have yet to be enshrined in legislation. As a result, they remain at risk. The existing *Provincial Parks Act* was last substantially revised in 1954, when the system was made up of only eight parks. It places no onus on maintaining and restoring the ecological integrity of parks and fails to reflect the important provincial policy emphasis on protecting natural features and values. It allows for the exploitation of Provincial Parks in a variety of ways, including logging, mining, and hydro-electric development. In a recent review of laws governing parks and protected areas across Canada, Ontario's legislation received the worst rating in the country (Boyd, 2002). The inconsistencies between legislation and policy have undermined the ability of parks to meet provincial and international conservation goals and have weakened, over the years, the standards set for protection in Provincial Parks.

The need to maintain and restore the natural features, communities and processes within Ontario's Provincial Parks is no less urgent than the need to complete the system itself. Internal and external pressures on parks are significant and are likely to increase in the future as a result of population growth, urban expansion, air-borne pollutants, climate change, habitat fragmentation and disturbance, recreational and industrial demands, and the like. At the same time, conservation of the overall landscape will depend upon maintaining the health and integrity of these core protected areas by ensuring that they are minimally impacted by development. It is vital, therefore, that the *Provincial Parks Act* be revised so that it embodies and upholds ecological protection as the first priority. As OMNR itself acknowledged in a 1992 discussion paper, "the preservation of natural heritage cannot be achieved without a strong legislative framework" (1992a:4).

WHAT ISSUES NEED TO BE ADDRESSED IN NEW LEGISLATION?

Ontario's Provincial Parks are intended to achieve a range of objectives, including the protection of natural and cultural heritage values, and the provision of opportunities for outdoor recreation, heritage appreciation, and tourism. All four objectives should be taken into consideration when revising the *Provincial Parks Act*. This discussion paper is based on the assumption that the ability of the park system to meet these multiple objectives is contingent upon ecological protection. It focuses, therefore, on the legislative changes needed to ensure that the natural features and values of Ontario's Provincial Parks are protected in perpetuity.

1. Clear Statement of Purpose, Objectives, and Guiding Principles

In order to create a clear mandate for ecological protection for the agencies which implement it and the courts that interpret it, the *Provincial Parks Act* should include clearly worded statements about the purposes, objectives and principles guiding the establishment and management of protected areas (Eagles, 1984; Swaigen, 1982, 2001; Wilkinson & Eagles, 2001). Also needed is an explicit commitment to maintain and restore the long-term health of the natural systems, features, and values which parks are intended to protect. Mechanisms geared to this purpose, such as park classification, zoning, and definitions of permitted uses, are also strongly recommended (Lausche, 1980).

Currently, Ontario's *Provincial Parks Act* promises to maintain Provincial Parks for the benefit of future generations. Beyond this broad dedication, however, the *Act* does not explicitly state the purposes, objectives and principles that should guide managers and decision-makers. It sets no priorities and provides no mechanisms for resolving conflicts between protection, development and recreation interests. In Recreation Parks, for example, it is often accepted practice that recreational activities take precedence over the need to maintain the integrity of natural features. At the same time, it is recognized that recreational experiences themselves are largely dependent upon protecting the natural environment. The Cabinet-approved policy goal for the park system puts forward a dual mandate, and so provides no clearer guidance: "To provide a variety of outdoor recreation opportuni-

ties and to protect provincially significant natural, cultural and recreational environments” (OMNR, 1992b: 11). The resulting ambiguity leaves park staff without clear direction as to management priorities and invites conflicting views.

The four objectives of the park system, as outlined in provincial policy directives (OMNR, 1992b: 11), are:

1. Protection Objective: To protect provincially significant elements of the natural and cultural landscape of Ontario.
2. Recreation Objective: To provide Provincial Park outdoor recreation opportunities ranging from high-intensity day-use to low-intensity wilderness experiences.
3. Heritage Appreciation Objective: To provide for exploration and appreciation of the outdoor natural and cultural heritage of Ontario.
4. Tourism Objective: To provide Ontario’s residents and out-of-province visitors with opportunities to discover and experience the distinctive regions of the Province.

The park system’s ability to provide quality recreation, tourism and heritage appreciation opportunities is contingent upon protecting the natural and cultural features and values of Provincial Parks. Policy developments over the past several decades have focused a great deal of attention on the need to protect the natural and cultural landscape of Ontario. Simply by incorporating existing parks policy into legislation, much more stringent protection could be afforded for significant park features and values (OMNR, 1992a: iii).

Areas where the legislation should further improve upon policy are to clearly state the primacy of the protection objective over other park objectives which are dependent upon it, and to stipulate that the protection mandate must guide and inform all parks operations and decision-making. Along these lines, Christopher Wilkinson and Paul Eagles (2001) propose that the goal of biodiversity conservation be adopted as the guiding legal mandate for the provincial system and for Provincial Parks legislation. In the federal context, the maintenance or restoration of ecological integrity is the legislated first priority for the management of Canada’s National Parks system. Clearly, experience, precedent and opinion suggest that Ontario should take a similar approach.

1.1 Protection in perpetuity

The existing *Provincial Parks Act* stipulates that “provincial parks shall be maintained for the benefit of future generations.” A 1973 court decision determined, however, that this dedication, as worded, “does not establish a public trust which would obligate the government not to take any actions that harmed parks” (Boyd, 2002). This weakness could be addressed if the *Act* contained an explicit commitment to maintain parks unimpaired from an ecological perspective. A revised *Act* should build upon existing parks policy which makes specific reference to permanently protecting significant earth and life science features within parks (OMNR, 1992b: 2, 12):

“Provincial parks are established to ensure that features representing the most significant aspects of Ontario’s natural and social history are protected now, and in the future.”

“Park designation ensures that the public will always be able to enjoy these areas, protected as they are from the pressures of development.”

On this point the federal act sets an example for revisions of the *Provincial Parks Act*. A strong legislative commitment has been made with regard to National Parks to maintain or restore their ecological integrity, including “abiotic components and the composition and abundance of native species and biological communities, rates of change and supporting processes” (*Canada National Parks Act*, sections 2(1) and 8(2)).

1.2 Greater ecosystem-based approach to management

OMNR acknowledges the need for an ecosystem-based approach to Provincial Parks management:

“Park planning and management decisions based on ecosystem management will help integrate parks and protected areas into their surrounding landscapes, so that parks do not function as isolated islands.” (OMNR, 1996)

A revised *Provincial Parks Act* should include, as a guiding principle, a provision requiring a greater ecosystem-based approach to management. This principle could be supplemented, where appropriate, by more specific provisions in the legislation and regulations, including, for example, requirements for greater ecosystem studies, the establishment of buffers around and linkages between protected areas, and active involvement of park staff in land use planning exercises beyond park boundaries (see also sections 2.11, 2.12, and 5.1 below).

2. Expanding the Provincial Parks system

In response to the Endangered Spaces campaign, the provincial government expressed its intent to represent all of the natural regions of Ontario in the Provincial Parks system. At the close of the campaign, however, only 36.4% of the 65 regions were moderately or adequately represented. A revised *Provincial Parks Act* should require that parks be added to the system according to a specified framework of principles and standards. The means to implement and evaluate the degree to which these principles are being met should be included in the regulations.³

The *Act* should recognize the natural region classification system and suggest that it be used as a framework for new park establishment. (Note that this ecological framework is not suited to Historical Parks and should not restrict their future creation and management.) It should also require that the minister responsible maintain a list of candidate parks for future expansion of the park system.

Principles that should be included in the *Act* to guide the expansion of the system are discussed below: representation; replication; significance; integrity; and interconnection.

2.1 Representation principle

The 'natural region' concept refers to geographic areas characterized by broad similarities in landform, geology, climate and vegetation cover. Such areas comprise a 'natural region.' The system of natural regions for Ontario was first developed by Angus Hills in 1959 and has been modified by OMNR staff as new or more refined criteria or knowledge have become available.⁴ Adequately representing natural regions within a wider network of carefully selected protected areas is considered key to protecting biodiversity. Representation is a scientifically-based approach that has provincial, national and international endorsement. It is one of the nine guiding management principles of the Provincial Parks system:

"Provincial Parks are established to secure for posterity representative features of Ontario's natural and cultural heritage. Wherever possible, the best representations of our heritage will be included in the park system." (OMNR, 1992b: 12)

2.2 Replication principle

In concert with the principle of representation, the principle of replication should also guide the selection of protected areas in Ontario, for reasons outlined by the OMNR:

"Where feasible, rare and sensitive features will be replicated within the system to ensure against the loss of diversity due to natural and/or man-influenced environmental change and catastrophic events." (OMNR, 1992a: 7)

2.3 Significance principle

The principle of significance underlies both the overall goal for the Provincial Parks system ("To provide a variety of outdoor recreation opportunities and to protect provincially significant natural, cultural and recreational environments") as well as the protection objective ("To protect provincially significant elements of the natural and cultural landscape of Ontario"). From an ecological perspective, the principle of significance points to the need to protect, within the park system, unique, highly productive, sensitive, rare, and endangered geological and biological features located on public lands. A revised *Provincial Parks Act* should recognize the importance of including critical habitat such as interior forest, old growth forest, wetlands, mating and nesting sites, large roadless areas and the habitat of species at risk when establishing Provincial Parks.

2.4 Integrity principle

The following is the definition of ecological integrity recommended by the Panel on the Ecological Integrity of Canada's National Parks:

An ecosystem has integrity when it is deemed characteristic for its natural region, including the composition and abundance of native species and biological communities, rates of change and supporting processes (Parks Canada Agency, 2000: s.1:15).

A park is thus understood to exhibit integrity when it has the full complement of native species and processes intact. Threats to ecological integrity include: habitat fragmentation (e.g. roads, trails), the loss of large carnivores, airborne pollutants, pesticide use outside parks, alien species, and growing levels of human-use (Parks Canada Agency, 2000: s.1:11-14)

An important factor to consider, in terms of establishing a protected area, is whether its size and configuration are sufficient to include the full range and habitat needs of all species. As OMNR policy states, bigger is generally better when it comes to biodiversity conservation:

“As a general rule, the larger the area set aside, the more effectively plant and/or animal species and communities will be protected.” (OMNR, 1992b: 27)

Large size provides an important safeguard against species loss by accommodating, for example, the ranges of large predators or migrant ungulates and such natural processes as wildfire.

2.5 Interconnection principle

It is widely acknowledged that if parks are to exhibit ecological integrity over the long term they cannot be managed in isolation from the surrounding landscape.

“Unfortunately, even carefully selected islands of green like Provincial Parks and areas of natural and scientific interest, cannot guarantee the maintenance and health of the environment. Instead, a more comprehensive ecological approach must be taken to ensure the protection of our natural heritage.” (OMNR, 1992a: 3)

The principle of interconnection underlines the need to maintain or restore functional connections between parks and other protected areas or regional open spaces. (see also section 2.12 below.)

2.6 Conservation Reserves

Ontario’s Provincial Parks policy outlines a system of six park classes including: Wilderness Parks, Nature Reserves, Historical Parks, Natural Environment Parks, Waterway Parks and Recreation Parks. Each class of park is defined according to its purposes that determine, in turn, the types of activities and developments allowed therein.

In addition to the six classes of protected areas included in the Provincial Parks system, the government has also established Conservation Reserves under the *Public Lands Act*. This new tool offers protection for natural heritage areas on public lands while permitting compatible land uses to continue. In Conservation Reserves established prior to the new policy direction outlined in *Ontario’s Living Legacy (OLL)*, industrial resource extraction activities such as mining, commercial forestry, and hydro-electric development are permanently excluded under *Public Lands Act* regulations. Policy further prohibits the extraction of aggregate and peat.

Although Conservation Reserves count as ‘protected’ according to the standards of the Endangered Spaces campaign, there is some question as to whether they meet biodiversity conservation objectives since they do not have the comprehensive policy and assigned administration to fully support them. There is no requirement for public involvement in the production of the planning document which guides the management of most reserves, the Statement of Conservation Interest (SCI). The SCIs that have been put in place so far tend to be piecemeal and barebones, with inadequate mapping of existing features such as roads and trails and little specific information about earth and life science features. The OMNR does little on the ground management of human activities, and signs of over-use and misuse are apparent in some reserves. Reserves are especially vulnerable to the impacts of motorized access (snowmobiles, ATVs), on- and off-trail.

To better address these concerns, Conservation Reserves should be considered for inclusion as a seventh class of Provincial Park under a revised *Provincial Parks Act*. Given the fact that the vast majority of the protected areas established under the Lands for Life planning exercise⁵ were Conservation Reserves (271 out of the 332 new areas established - OMNR, 1999:6), the need to ensure that they are adequately protected is paramount.

2.7 Aquatic areas

The protection of aquatic areas has received little attention within Ontario’s Provincial Parks network. Provincial aquatic natural regions have not yet been identified. While Waterway Parks offer some protection, they are chosen on the basis of outstanding recreational features, not ecological features, and are managed primarily to provide quality recreational and educational experiences.

Promising steps towards protecting aquatic areas have been taken with the establishment of Canada’s first National Marine Park (Fathom Five) in Lake Huron and Ontario’s first underwater Conservation Reserve (Lake Nipigon Waters) in Lake Nipigon. The latter covers 48,500 hectares and includes five bays containing unique and representative fisheries habitat, critical spawning areas, wetlands and aquatic vegetation.

A revised *Provincial Parks Act* should build upon these efforts by recognizing aquatic systems and requiring that representative areas, including an ecologically appropriate land base, be identified and protected. One or more classes of aquatic protected area might be established. Activities known or suspected to cause large-scale, long-term habitat disruption should be prohibited. These should include, for example, non-renewable resource exploration and extraction, large-scale dredging, dumping, and bottom-trawling or dragging (Recchia and Broadhead, 1995: 15). Given overlapping federal, provincial and Aboriginal jurisdiction with regard to such issues as fisheries, shipping and navigation, pollution, aquatic animal management, aquatic vegetation management, cultural features and water quantity, legislation should enable cooperative management mechanisms.

2.8 Park reserves

In Ontario, when an area is proposed as a park, it is given reserve status under the

Public Lands Act. This designation is intended to ensure that identified values are not altered prior to regulation. Nonetheless, the boundaries of park reserves can and have been greatly reduced prior to regulation. In the case of Mississagi Provincial Park, for example, pressure from forestry and mining interests meant that the original 39,250 hectare park reserve was eventually abandoned and the park itself opened to logging. One of the more obvious consequences was the alteration of forest communities in the region where very little now remains of the original old-growth red and white pine.

A revised *Provincial Parks Act* should afford a greater degree of protection to park reserves by recognizing them in the *Act*, and by defining a process for moving from the status of park reserve to Provincial Park (OPPC, 1979).

2.9 Park establishment and de-designation

Currently, Provincial Parks in Ontario are established and/or de-designated (i.e. removed from the system) by Regulation (i.e. by the Cabinet, not by the Legislature). There is no legal requirement for public notification, consultation or review (aside from *Environmental Bill of Rights* notice requirements). A revised *Provincial Parks Act* should define a more open, transparent process requiring public consultation (Eagles, 1984).

A key question to resolve is whether decisions about the establishment and de-designation of Provincial Parks should be by the Cabinet or by the Legislature. On one hand, setting up parks through the Legislature can be a slow and cumbersome process which may delay or undermine initiatives to add more parks to the system. On the other, parks will enjoy more permanent protection if they are established or de-designated by a more formal, public process subject to debate in the Legislature. After all, Provincial Parks in Ontario can and have been de-designated by acts of Cabinet (e.g. Holiday Beach Provincial Park, Peche Island Provincial Park).

An innovative approach to resolving this issue, one which ensures that parks are relatively easy to set up, yet difficult to dismantle, has been successfully adopted federally under the new *Canada National Parks Act* (sections 5 and 7): The Cabinet may establish a park, but only the Parliament may de-designate it. A similar approach should be outlined in a revised *Provincial Parks Act*, whereby Provincial Parks can be created by Regulation, but de-designated only by an act of the Legislature.⁶ Decisions about de-designating a park would thus be subject to public scrutiny.

2.10 Park boundaries

An issue similar to that of park establishment and de-designation arises with regard to park boundaries. In Ontario, park boundaries are set and altered by Cabinet, which means they are subject to change on the basis of immediate political pressures. Barbara Lausche (1980) of the IUCN and others (e.g. Boyd, 2002) recommend, however, that park boundaries be legislated so that they cannot be reduced without the approval of the highest government authority. John Swaigen (1982) further suggests that procedures for changing park boundaries be outlined in the legislation.

Federally, the new *Canada National Parks Act* (sections 5 and 7) allows the Cabinet to establish park boundaries, but requires an act of Parliament to alter them. This approach should be adopted in a revised *Provincial Parks Act*, permitting the designation of boundaries by Cabinet, but requiring an act of the Legislature to alter them.

An additional consideration which should be addressed in the legislation has to do with determining park boundaries. The *Act* should require that ecological integrity, including features and functions at the landscape level (e.g. watersheds), be taken into consideration when determining boundaries for new parks.

2.11 Buffers

Canada and its jurisdictions have committed to finding and developing buffer zone techniques under the international *Convention on Biological Diversity*. The need for buffer zones is argued by Lausche who explains that internationally “there is a growing number of examples where entire protected areas or certain zones are being adversely affected or destroyed by activities outside their boundaries.” In response, modern legislation is increasingly providing “for the creation of peripheral buffer zones outside the protected area and authority for regulation in those peripheral zones to control certain activities which may threaten furtherance of the objectives of the adjacent protected area” (1980: 57, 40).

In its 1992 discussion paper, the OMNR acknowledged that regulating and controlling use is “especially important adjacent to ecological reserves and provincial parks” (OMNR, 1992a: 6). One instance where concern about the impacts of human use has led to the regulation of an activity adjacent to parks is the November 2001 decision by the OMNR to place a 30 month moratorium on wolf hunting around Algonquin Park. The moratorium is intended to protect wolves, who regularly move across park boundaries, from high levels of human-caused mortality, which, it is feared, may be leading to the decline of the park’s wolf population. ⁷

Planning principles and land use practices in areas adjacent to parks must be compatible with and supportive of the objectives that protected areas are intended to fulfill. In support of an ecosystem-based approach to management, a revised *Provincial Parks Act* should recognize the importance of buffers. Provisions such as the following (from McNamee, 1993, and Attridge, 1994) could also be considered:

- the mandate to secure cooperative agreements with other government agencies and private landowners to ensure that lands adjacent to parks are managed to protect park values (these agreements could include the ability to examine surrounding lands, to enter into legal agreements, to pursue enforcement actions, and to contact landowners/managers and promote stewardship initiatives)
- posting of bonds in case of adverse impacts on parks
- a requirement for environmental impact studies for activities within a defined region around a protected area
- standards to be met by all activities within a defined region

2.12 Linkages

High quality linkages between core protected areas should be maintained or restored at the regional ecosystem level (Parks Canada Agency 2000: s:1:15). They are needed to relieve critical constraints on movement caused by habitat fragmentation. Wooded corridors between forested areas, for example, are key to maintaining species diversity and abundance. Linkages increase habitat, allow genetic dispersal and interchange, facilitate seasonal movements and range shifts, and foster repopulation after catastrophic events.

In its definition of natural heritage areas, the OMNR underlined the importance of including “the open spaces, corridors and flyways that provide the linkages needed to maintain viable plant and animal populations” (OMNR, 1992a: 1). In support of an ecosystem-based approach to management, a revised *Act* should recognize the importance of ecological linkages at the landscape level. In addition, Attridge (1994) suggests that the *Act* could recognize the need to include linkages in management plans: “legislation could recognize connectivity as an objective, and require a park’s management plan to include a strategy to retain and restore corridors of sufficient size and quality between that site and two other significant locations.”

2.13 Acquisition of private land

Where it is anticipated that private land will need to be acquired to expand the parks system (providing linkages and otherwise improving prospects for protection, for example, in southern Ontario), parks legislation should provide a general power encouraging the Minister to expand the system by acquiring private lands through available means. Currently in Ontario, parks legislation enables the acquisition of unopened municipal road allowances and allows the donation of personal property to the parks system. A revised *Provincial Parks Act* should recognize and outline procedures to acquire private lands through other mechanisms such as donations, bequests, and purchase.

3. Accountability and Enforcement

3.1 State of the park/parks reports

Given growing concerns about the health of the natural environment, the OMNR anticipates that the public will expect and demand resource information and status reports on the state of natural resources and the environment. In response, the Ministry has committed to creating “an effective framework for the sharing of this information” (OMNR, 2000: 16). If Provincial Parks are to meet their objectives, there is a need for regular monitoring and assessment. A revised *Provincial Parks Act* should require that such assessments be reported on a regular basis in “state of the parks” reports (Boyd, 2002). Reports should be required for each individual park and for the park system as a whole.

With regard to a system-wide “state of the parks” report, Kevin McNamee (1993: 314) recommends that the report include: a list of no fewer than ten candidate areas that are being examined for parks and protected area status; an update on

government action to meet its protected area objectives; an outline of the ecological health of the Provincial Parks by listing the internal and external threats to the areas; an assessment of where improvements could be made; an assessment of where additional resources and personnel are required to achieve management plan targets; and information on investigations, charges and convictions. To this list could be added Paul Eagles' (1984: 30) recommendations that the report should outline: park visitor usage; the size and location of all Provincial Parks, park reserves, special recreation areas and wilderness areas; the number of parks with approved management plans; the degree of implementation of approved plans; and any approved amendments to approved plans in the past year.

With regard to the National Parks system, a report on the state of the parks and on progress made towards the establishment of new parks must be tabled in the House of Commons every two years (*Canada National Parks Act*, 12(2)). A revised provincial *Act* should similarly require that a system-wide report be tabled and that it be subject to review by an external auditor.

3.2 Public participation

Provincial policy provides detailed guidelines regarding public consultation in park management planning processes. For example, project managers are to issue public notice announcing the preparation of a management plan and inviting public involvement at least 45 days prior to commencing the planning process.

In contrast, the existing *Provincial Parks Act* places no responsibility on the government to consult with the public regarding park policies and management plans. Recently, for example, the new west gate in Algonquin Provincial Park and the permit/staff structures at Canoe Lake within the park were put in place without any public discussion even though both had significant impacts on visitor use and environmental quality. While parks policy and Ontario's *Environmental Bill of Rights* ensure that some degree of public consultation does occur, a revised *Provincial Parks Act* should require that decisions affecting the planning and management of parks be subject as a matter of right to public participation and scrutiny.

The new *Canada National Parks Act*, s. 12(1), contains, for example, the following provision:

"The Minister shall, where applicable, provide opportunities for public participation at the national, regional and local levels, including participation by aboriginal organizations, bodies established under land claims agreements and representatives of park communities, in the development of parks policy and regulations, the establishment of parks, the formulation of management plans, land use planning and development in relation to park communities and any other matters that the Minister considers relevant."

3.3 Enforcement

With regard to enforcement powers, Lausche (1980: 59) contends that a prerequisite for effective protected areas legislation is the provision of adequate enforcement duties and powers:

“The provisions must include three primary elements - first, the types of officers to have the various enforcement duties and powers; second, the kinds of enforcement powers which should be granted; third, a strong focus on public participation in enforcement and on public education about the law and the protected areas programme.”

McNamee (1993: 313) and Attridge (1994) have suggested that Ontario’s *Provincial Parks Act* could be strengthened in a number of areas including: provisions for public enforcement; the consolidation of powers scattered in other Acts; the increase and expansion of fines for offences; creative sentencing opportunities, like community service; and a provision granting investigators jurisdiction to enter onto neighbouring lands where external activities may be affecting a protected area. There should also be a power for the court that convicts someone of an offence to make a repair or restoration order as part of the sentence.

4. Aboriginal Issues

Given the protection which has been afforded to Aboriginal and Treaty rights by virtue of s. 35 of the *Constitution Act, 1982*, and given the numerous actual and potential conflicts that exist between these rights and parks policy, a revised *Act* will need to address Aboriginal issues and take into account the important role of Aboriginal peoples in the protection of natural areas (Attridge 1992, 1994; see also Boyd, 2002).

The new *Canada National Parks Act* makes the following provision:

“For greater certainty, nothing in this *Act* shall be construed so as to abrogate or derogate from the protection provided for existing aboriginal or treaty rights of the aboriginal peoples of Canada by the recognition and affirmation of those rights in section 35 of the *Constitution Act, 1982*.” (*Canada National Parks Act*, s. 2(2))

It also sets out provisions for regulating aboriginal harvesting (hunting, trapping, fishing, gathering) and cultural activities in parks and park reserves (*Canada National Parks Act*, ss.17, 37, 40, 41).

Attridge (1994) recommends that, in order to set a framework which will stand the test of land claim negotiations and potential court resolution, legislation should present an explicit conservation mandate and rationale, prescribe fair compensation for any expropriated rights, and set out an effective Aboriginal and public consultation process.

5. Park Management and Planning

5.1 Coordination with other governments, agencies, interests and legislation

In Ontario, Provincial Parks tend to be managed in isolation from the surrounding landscape. According to Attridge, this orientation “has been rationalized on the

basis that to extend park managers' influence beyond the boundaries would interfere with other agencies' and interests' jurisdictions and would provoke a backlash against parks" (1996: 352). A greater ecosystem approach to parks management will require, however, a new outlook which recognizes the need for regional integration and welcomes the cooperation and contribution of all levels of government, communities, adjacent land-owners, non-governmental organizations and industry in matters affecting protected areas.

Regarding the planning context for parks, the OMNR acknowledges the need to look at Forest Management Plans, Areas of Natural and Scientific Interest, conservation easements, old growth sites and significant wetlands on adjacent landscapes (OMNR, 1994: B-3). In order to establish links between the Provincial Parks system and regional open spaces of significance, a revised *Provincial Parks Act* should require such intergovernmental planning and coordination. It should specify that, within or near a park, the park agency may impose additional conditions on any permits which may be granted under other statutes. It should also clarify the duties, powers and responsibilities of park managers so as to acknowledge their role as advocates of protected areas beyond park boundaries and enable them to enter into agreements with public agencies, private corporations and individuals. It should enable them to participate in decisions which have the potential to affect Provincial Parks (Boyd, 2002).

5.2 Park classification: purpose, planning standards

Ontario's Provincial Parks policy outlines a system of six park classes including: Wilderness Parks, Nature Reserves, Historical Parks, Natural Environment Parks, Waterway Parks and Recreation Parks. Each class of park is defined according to its purpose which determines, in turn, the types of activities and developments allowed therein. Each Provincial Park falls into a particular class, and the management plan for each is supposed to conform with the policy direction set for that class of park. This is not, however, always the case.

To help ensure that the standards and goals of the park classification system are upheld, these should be included in a revised *Provincial Parks Act*. The Act should also give the Minister the power to create policies and allowable uses for each class of park, by regulation.

5.3 Park management plans

Provincial Parks policy stipulates that management planning documents will be prepared for all existing and new protected areas (OMNR, 1999: 7). To date, however, only about one third of all Provincial Parks have an approved management plan (Wilkinson & Eagles, 2001).

Park management plans are not required under the existing *Provincial Parks Act*. While provincial policy provides detailed guidelines about the necessary contents and planning process for park management plans, parks legislation needs to be updated to reflect, uphold, and in some areas improve upon policy.

The new *Canada National Parks Act* contains the following provisions:

“The Minister shall, within five years after a park is established, prepare a management plan for the park containing a long-term ecological vision for the park, a set of ecological integrity objectives and indicators and provisions for resource protection and restoration, zoning, visitor use, public awareness and performance evaluation, which shall be tabled in each House of Parliament.” (*Canada National Parks Act*, s. 11(1))

“The minister shall review the management plan for each park every five years, and any amendments to a plan shall be tabled with the plan in each House of Parliament.” (*Canada National Parks Act*, s. 11(2))

A revised *Provincial Parks Act* should include:

- a requirement to produce a management plan for each park within a specified time frame.
- direction on the purpose of plans and the priority that each plan must give to ecological protection
- a requirement that management plans reflect the best available science on protected areas and biodiversity conservation
- a requirement for public consultation
- a requirement that each plan be reviewed within a specified time frame (e.g. every ten years as specified in policy)

5.4 Plan amendments

Parks policy requires that a major amendment to a management plan include a public consultation component. A major amendment is defined as a proposed change to policy that “may have a potentially significant impact on the park’s environment, has an impact on adjacent landowners or users, or is likely to result in significant public reaction on a local, regional or provincial scale.”

The new *Canada National Parks Act* requires that amendments to plans be tabled in the House: “The minister shall review the management plan for each park every five years, and any amendments to a plan shall be tabled with the plan in each House of Parliament” (*Canada National Parks Act*, s. 11(2)).

Revised Provincial Parks legislation should ensure that major amendments to a park management plan (as defined in policy) are subject to the same level of public input and scrutiny as the plan implementation process itself.

6. Development and Use

Under existing parks legislation, Cabinet can approve virtually any activity, including the licensing of trades, businesses, amusements, sports, boat and air traffic, and exploration and development by logging, mining and aggregate companies.

A revised *Provincial Parks Act* should include a principle permitting, prohibiting and limiting specific uses so as to ensure that the ecological protection objective is upheld. In a discussion paper, the OMNR recommended, for example, that the *Act* recognize the need to “strengthen regulations that restrict exploitation of minerals, aggregates, timber and other provincial resources.” (OMNR, 1992a: 21). To the same end, the *Act* should require that economic activities operate within an ecological framework, and that development proposals be assessed in light of the precautionary principle.

6.1 Mining

Section 21(1) of the existing *Provincial Parks Act* gives Cabinet the power to make regulations to permit prospecting, staking and development of mineral interests within parks. Regulation 954 currently lists twenty-three parks, including five Wilderness Parks and eleven Nature Reserves, where these activities could occur if a licence of occupation or a lease were issued under the *Mining Act*. While 1988 policy revisions prohibited mining and mineral exploration, a “more flexible approach on mineral exploration” was allowed in 1999 for the protected areas identified under the Lands for Life planning exercise. More specifically, *OLL* policy allowed mineral exploration and development to occur in portions of new parks where provincially-significant mineral potential had been identified. Policy did not specify any restrictions as to the types of areas (e.g. Wilderness zones, Nature Reserve zones) that would be considered open for development (OMNR, 1999: 11, 20).

Later, however, in response to concerns expressed by the Partnership for Public Lands (Wildlands League, Federation of Ontario Naturalists, and World Wildlife Fund with the assistance of Sierra Legal Defence Fund) this policy was changed. In a letter dated March 15, 2002 and jointly signed by the Ministers of Natural Resources and Northern Development and Mines, the government indicated that there would be no further mineral exploration permitted within Provincial Parks and Conservation Reserves and that a process would be established to address issues related to existing mineral tenures in new protected areas.

To prevent future backsliding at the policy level, a revised *Provincial Parks Act* should strictly prohibit prospecting and mining in Provincial Parks so that their protection in perpetuity is firmly enshrined.

6.2 Aggregate Extraction

While aggregate or soil/peat extraction is prohibited by policy in all classes of parks, it is not prohibited in the *Act* itself. Aggregate extraction for building logging roads occurs in Algonquin Provincial Park.

A revised *Provincial Parks Act* should prohibit aggregate extraction, and thus making the *Act* consistent with policy.

6.3 Logging

While the 1988 policy revisions prohibit logging, the *Provincial Parks Act* allows it. Logging currently occurs in only one park, Algonquin, where about 75% of the land base is zoned for this industrial activity. A revised *Provincial Parks Act* should prohibit logging in all parks and stipulate that logging in Algonquin be phased out by a specified date.

6.4 Roads

National Park research has shown that the greater the density of roads in protected areas, the greater the impact on ecological integrity. The costs of maintenance, policing and the need for mitigating measures also increase. (Parks Canada Agency, 2000, s. 12:8).

The existing *Provincial Parks Act* lacks any constraints on road openings or closures. *OLL* policy permits logging roads to be built across waterway parks. Further, since many of the Provincial Parks and Conservation Reserves recommended in *OLL* encompass mining claims and leases, road access necessary for exploration or development of these claims or leases across recommended and regulated Provincial Parks and Conservation Reserves will be permitted. A work permit will be used to authorize road construction and major maintenance in these situations.

A revised *Act* should specify the purposes and circumstances for which road openings and closures in parks are permitted. It should permit roads to be constructed for park purposes only, and prohibit the construction of through roads or roads to facilitate resource use outside the park. It should require and set principles of least impact.

6.5 Development of facilities

The existing *Act* allows many types of development to occur in Provincial Parks. Since the creation of the Ontario Parks agency and its promotion of a business ethos with regard to parks management, the push to maximize development is on. Examples include proposals for roofed accommodations, stores, restaurants, conference centres, a golf course and even an IMAX theatre in Provincial Parks.

Federally, the Panel on Ecological Integrity has pointed out ways in which the built environment directly affects the ecological integrity of National Parks. It recommends that approaches to development in parks be based on such principles as: the maintenance of ecological integrity; no net negative environmental impact; demonstrated need; and consideration of the cumulative environmental effects of facilities and infrastructure (Parks Canada Agency, 2000, s. 12:9).

A revised *Provincial Parks Act* should reflect a recognition of how the built environment in protected areas affects ecological integrity. It should aim to limit the size and impact of developments according to principles such as those proposed by the Panel on Ecological Integrity. At the same time, it could allow higher levels of development in some classes of parks (e.g. Recreation Parks) than in others (e.g. Wilderness Parks).

6.6 Sport hunting

The existing *Provincial Parks Act* (section 4) allows Cabinet to overrule the 'no hunting in parks' clause of the *Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act*. Indeed, sport hunting is currently allowed in many Provincial Parks. While the 1988 policy revisions prohibit hunting in Wilderness and Nature Reserve Parks and zones, all of the new parks identified under the Lands for Life exercise (with the exception of Nature Reserves) will be open to hunting. This stance is characteristic of *OLL* which aims to maintain and enhance hunting opportunities generally.

A poll conducted in 1999 indicates that 77% of Ontarians are opposed to hunting in parks (Oracle Poll). A revised *Provincial Parks Act* should prohibit sport hunting in some if not all classes of parks (e.g. Wilderness Parks, Nature Reserves), while making provision for hunting by Aboriginal peoples in Provincial Parks and Conservation Reserves within their traditional territories. The *Act* should further stipulate that decisions regarding hunting in particular parks be based on the sustainability of the activity (in light of all human activities in the area) and on the ability of park staff to monitor and control hunting and its impacts.

6.7 Fishing

A revised *Provincial Parks Act* should prohibit commercial fishing and bait fishing in Provincial Parks. With regard to sport fishing, the *Act* should enable park managers to prohibit fishing where native stocks have been degraded.

6.8 Recreational use

Revised parks legislation must pay special attention to recreational use, which increasingly is in need of greater controls. As Lausche contends, in many protected areas, recreational overuse now threatens the survival of natural sites (1980: 55-56).

A revised *Provincial Parks Act* should stipulate that all activities in parks be assessed for their ecological impacts (e.g. on plant communities, wildlife and water quality) and sustainability (e.g. with respect to power usage, sewage and storm drainage disposal, waste management) in light of the precautionary principle. Of particular concern are the impacts of cottages, commercial camps, sport hunting and fishing (at times involving the maintenance of deer yards and the stocking of non-native fish species), overflights and landings of aircraft, snowmobile use, sea-doo/jet-ski use, ATV use and mountain biking.

7. Financing

In recent years, the number of parks in Ontario has increased significantly (by 50%), as has the number of park visitors (by 60%). The parks management budget, in contrast, has been cut dramatically (by 62%) (Boyd, 2002). The number of staff per park in Ontario is one of the lowest in the world (Eagles, pers. comm.). In light of chronic under-financing, and so that Provincial Park goals and objectives can be met, a revised *Act* should include provisions to ensure adequate financing for the system.

According to Lausche, financing for protected areas programmes should be identified or referenced in the legislation (1980: 51). Swaigen recommends that the *Provincial Parks Act* provide for the financing of the acquisition of parks (1982: 58). Attridge (1994) points out that legislation can assist in raising more funds and decreasing expenses through several mechanisms. These include retaining revenues in a trust fund (though pressures will grow to increase income through increased and intensified use), rationalizing user fees to meet market demand, generating revenue from new sources, developing new relationships with the private sector, generating revenues from the use of park resources, and reducing park operation costs (Attridge, 1994).

CONCLUSION

The provincial government has made commitments to revise the *Provincial Parks Act* for several years⁸, but has not yet acted. Meanwhile, those who are working inside and outside government to expand and properly manage the parks system are saddled with legislation that is weak, outdated and inconsistent with provincial policy. The legislative changes needed to set an unequivocal conservation mandate for the Provincial Parks system have been discussed for twenty years now, and there is general agreement that these must include, at the very least, a provision for public consultation, the prohibition of industrial activities and a clear statement of purpose and guiding principles. The need to address Aboriginal issues within the *Act* is also paramount. The province should act now, in the public interest, to protect the ecological integrity of the Provincial Parks system.

ENDNOTES

¹ The Wildlands League would like to thank the following individuals for reviewing an earlier draft of this paper: Ian Attridge, Peter Carson, Ken Boshcoff, Jerry DeMarco, Michael DePencier, Paul Eagles, George Francis, Michael Hough, Gerald Killan, Bruce Litteljohn, John McCutcheon, Erica Nol, Eva Riccius, Justina Ray, Norm Richards, Walter Ross, John Swaigen, George Warecki, Christopher Wilkinson, Paul Wilkinson. The views expressed in this paper are those of CPAWS-Wildlands League only, and not those of individual reviewers.

² The goal of the Endangered Spaces campaign, launched in 1989 by World Wildlife Fund Canada, was to create a network of representative protected areas throughout Canada by the year 2000. The goal was endorsed by every province and territory and by the federal government.

³ For example, in British Columbia, the *Park Act* (R.S.B.C. 1996, c.344) imposes a minimum area of protected park land.

⁴ The Hills classification of site regions/districts as a basis for systems planning itself should be reviewed. The Canadian ecological land classification system combined with the Ontario Natural Heritage Information Centre's classification of vegetation/habitats could be a basis for refinements.

⁵ Lands for Life was one of the Ontario government's responses to the Endangered Spaces campaign. One of its goals was to complete Ontario's system of Provincial Parks and other protected areas. Announced in February 1997, it led to the protection of 2,386,679 hectares of Crown land (OMNR, 1999:6), to be designated as either Provincial Parks or Conservation Reserves.

⁶ Canada's national parks are not the only parks which require legislative sanction for their establishment or de-designation. Currently, three other jurisdictions require the legislative body's involvement for particular types of parks. Saskatchewan's provincial parks and protected areas are established by a boundary description in Schedules I and II to the *Parks Act*, and thus a statutory amendment of the Schedules is required to change the boundaries. For the Class A parks in British Columbia, any de-designation requires a statutory amendment. The Northwest Territories also requires its Legislative Assembly to recommend the designation of natural environment or outdoor recreation parks before the Minister may proceed to establish them (Attridge, 1992).

⁷ The ban on killing wolves around Algonquin Park has been undermined by a loophole that allows the continued killing of coyotes, which are easily mistaken for the smaller Algonquin wolves. At a wildlife seminar in July 2002, Ray Bonenberg, the District Manager for MNR in Pembroke said the ban was essentially unenforceable because of this problem.

⁸ In his paper published in 2001, John Swaigen lists a number of commitments, which we have paraphrased here: The OMNR in *A Natural Heritage Strategy for Ontario: Responding to the Endangered Spaces Challenge* (Draft for Discussion, OMNR 1992) notes that "Major revisions also should be made to the *Provincial Parks Act* as part of the park centennial celebration." The park centennial was in 1993 but the Act was never revised. The government also accepted a recommendation from the Lands for Life land-use planning Round Tables that "MNR should carry out a broad public review of the *Provincial Parks Act* and the policies governing parks, and, in particular, policies on permitted uses." (Province of Ontario, *Ontario Government Response to the Consolidated Recommendations of the Boreal West, Boreal East and Great Lakes - St. Lawrence Round Tables*, March 1999.) The now-governing Conservatives also promised in 1995 that "We will review and amend the *Provincial Parks Act* to ensure that the legislation is current, workable and protects the integrity of the provincial parks system." ("Election Special: Natural Heritage Questionnaire," *Seasons* 35:2).

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