

## Meeting Algonquin Park

As an immigrant kid who came of age in the burgeoning 1960s metropolis of Toronto, I ventured with my family to many "wild" places in and around the city. On weekends, we explored High Park, river and ravine networks, the shoreline of Lake Ontario, the Toronto Islands and the splendid arboretums of the Necropolis and Mount Pleasant cemeteries.

None of these encounters prepared a dreamy, brooding teenager to meet, for the first time, the immense beauty of Algonquin Park. Urban specimens of spruce, black locust, horse chestnut, oak and countless maples that seemed monumental in childhood, instantly shrunk to mortal proportions when compared to the godlike expanse of Algonquin's forests.

On my first portage I stopped in my tracks and looked up - 30 feet? 40? - into the mixed green canopy. Hungry eyes ate up the building-high trunks as I hunted for words to describe and record the extraordinary experience. None came and I simply gaped.

That trip happened in 1974 and was the final summer adventure with my best friend before she went off to university. We had planned to cross the country by Greyhound bus with our boyfriends, but our protective parents scuttled the scheme and we compromised by signing on for a ten-day canoe trip offered by the

University of Toronto.

Our only previous canoeing experience took place on the placid and shallow waters of a small lake, the site of our summer camp in relatively tame Muskoka. There, we carried only our novels and suntan lotion, lolled for hours in faux birch bark canoes and slept on flannel sheets in cosy cabins.

Our motley company of adventurers numbered six, including an athletic and well-organized guide and we travelled in two aluminium canoes.

The women: a 60-something Buddhist-cum-feminist grandmother from Vancouver; a quiet, serious physics student on a break from her PhD thesis; my friend and myself, both healthy, pint-sized high school graduates. The only other man was a shy exchange student from Singapore who spoke very little English. "How fast you get to know people," I wrote in my diary, "when you canoe two long lakes and carry 100-pound packs over roots and rocks on the first day!"

We entered the park from Highway 60 and began our trek in the south-western quadrant at Canoe Lake. Our destination was Kiosk, some 100 km due north, at the top of the park. It was the Vancouverite who pointed out that Canoe Lake is where the Group of Seven

### what's inside



MEETING ALGONQUIN PARK



FRAGILE ONTARIO CARIBOU



AN IMPORTANT MESSAGE TO OUR SUPPORTERS FROM THE DEVELOPEMENT DIRECTOR

### Make Contact:

CPAWS Wildlands League  
401 Richmond Street West  
Suite 380  
Toronto ON M5V 3A8  
416•971•9453  
[www.wildlandsleague.org](http://www.wildlandsleague.org)



painter, Tom Thompson, died mysteriously in the summer of 1917. Here were Thompson's famous waters and skies, his iconic lone jack pines, swaths of Canadian Shield and sun-bleached birch stumps, even the colourful canoes of backcountry paddlers, made breathtakingly real.

We would have to paddle 20 km per day to make the round trip in the allotted ten days, but on day three, rain, wind and white-caps forced us to make camp in a sheltered bay. Unaccustomedly grubby, my friend and I spent a long while boiling enough water to bathe and wash our hair. We made bannock for the first time and I know I ate more than my fair share. I acquired a new respect for those old-time immigrants, the coureurs de bois, who doggedly plied and charted the lakes and rivers of the New World in all weathers and under threat from exposure and starvation.

The rain broke the next morning, but the water remained too choppy to paddle. We lashed our canoes together to form a kind of catamaran, made sails out of rain ponchos raised on paddles and cruised to our next stop. We were well behind schedule, so our guide and the older woman set out for Kiosk and fresh food, dropping the rest of us at a very pretty island on Manitou Lake.

From our island perch, we were lucky enough, one night, to see the sky transformed into a dome of dancing light. We paddled out under the aurora borealis and looked up through a hole in the centre of the red, blue and yellow dome, to find a myriad of glittering stars, clotted in their round black frame.

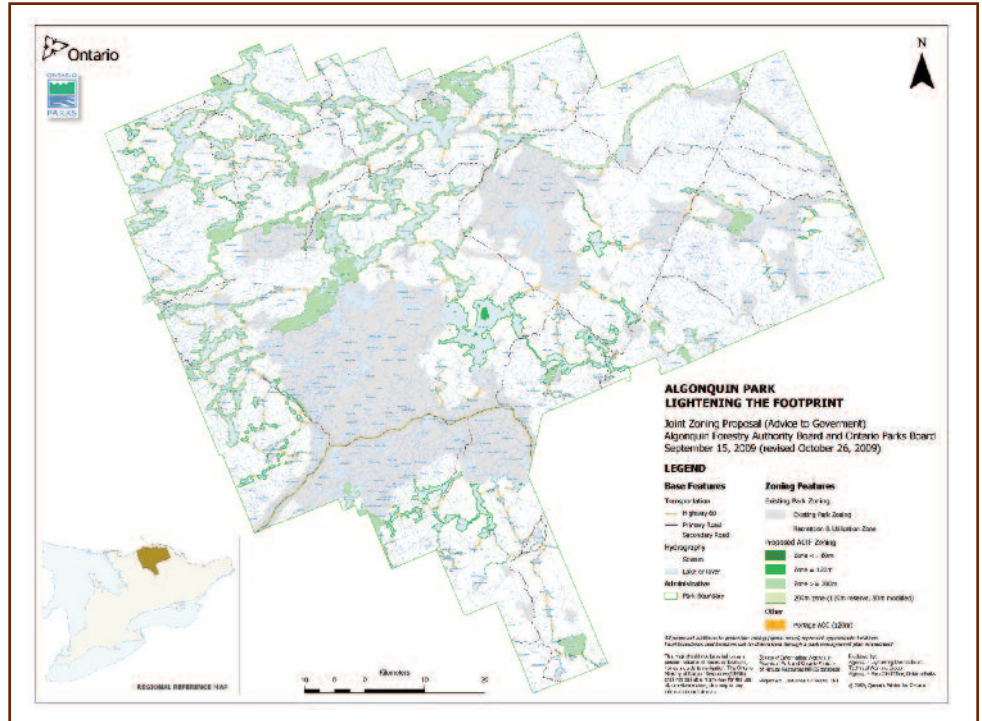
We journeyed home by a different route and rivers opened onto lakes like seamless movie shots, each scene bearing some new plot twist or important clue. We passed an island whose windward side bore signs of a recent hurricane, a fallen army of birch trees piled to one side like corpses. We paddled past a huge scar on a hillside - my first, shocking sight of a clear-cut - surrounded by majestic, doomed stands of white pine. Further up, behind a screen of trees, a road ran along a crest, parallel to the lakeshore. I had not known that the park sustained commercial logging operations, nor did I understand their impact on the habitats of birds, mammals and fish. It frightened and saddened me to witness this assault on the innocent land.

In my youth, I returned many times to Algonquin Park. I can think of few places in the world whose beauty - natural or cultured - has impressed me more.

Remembering my first encounter with Algonquin has sparked a desire to

return, perhaps with my friend and our children. I hope that everyone who explores this magnificent gift of nature does so with respect, and an affirmation that it will be enjoyed and protected forever.

Anna Camara is a Toronto-based writer and communications specialist with an interest in contemporary arts and culture.



## Call to Action

CPAWS Wildlands League has worked since 1968 to protect the ecological integrity of Algonquin Park. The expansion of protection in Algonquin Provincial Park is proceeding with the submission of the Joint Proposal for Lightening the Ecological Footprint of Logging in Algonquin Park (LTF), revised in October 2009. The proposal, brought forth by Ontario Parks and the Algonquin Forestry Authority, would increase protection from the current 22 percent to 49 percent. However, there is some ambiguity in the language of the proposal that could water down this increase and the Ontario government has yet to act on its recommendations. With amendments to the Algonquin Provincial Park Management Plan still in process, it is critical that citizens of Ontario take action to increase protection for Algonquin Park. **Please write to your MPP and ensure that protection of this natural, cultural and historical icon is on the agenda during and after the provincial election.**

Request your MPP ensures that:

- 49% of the Park is fully included in the 'Protection Zone'
- the significant negative ecological impacts of roads in the Park are reduced



<sup>1</sup> Forests once covered roughly half of the Earth's land mass. Now, significant forests remain only in the Amazon, Russia and Canada. Canada has responsibility for 25% of the world's remaining intact forest, and Ontario has responsibility for 15% of that. Together with Manitoba, Ontario's northern forests constitute the largest proportion of Canada's remaining Boreal Forest.

# Fragile Ontario Caribou Ranges Face Increased Risk Under Proposed Federal Recovery Strategy

Canada's Federal Government has developed a draft Recovery Strategy for woodland caribou that would permit increased habitat disturbance in most ranges in Ontario's commercial forest area. CPAWS Wildlands League's analysis indicates that a majority of these caribou ranges has already exceeded a level of disturbance that would provide a realistic chance for caribou survival. Environment Canada must set a much better precedent for provincial governments if caribou are going to survive.

Boreal woodland caribou are listed nationally as "threatened" within Canada. The federal government is required under the Species At Risk Act to develop a recovery strategy for them. A key component of any recovery strategy is identifying critical habitat - habitat that a species at risk needs for recovery and survival. A Scientific Review was initiated to help identify this habitat. Because of the high cost and long time-frames required to properly assess the population health of caribou, assessing range condition has provided a useful surrogate until the population studies can be done for every range. This Scientific Review has indicated that, in the absence of population data, using the percentage total disturbance (fire plus human caused) is the best predictor of range condition. They found a close negative relationship between the amount of disturbance and caribou population health with those few ranges that had population data. That is, the more total disturbance, the worse the prospects for a particular population, especially beyond a critical threshold.

In 2009, CPAWS Wildlands League published a report on the range condition of caribou in Ontario following the methodology used in the

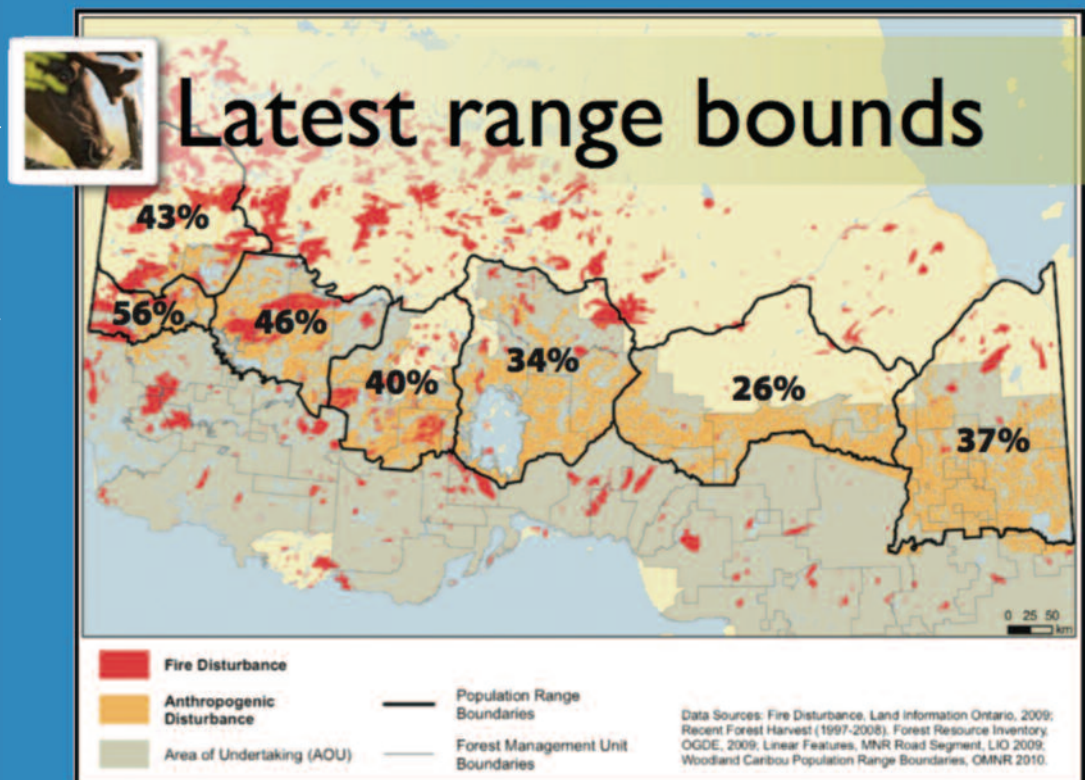
Scientific Review . At that time the Scientific Review did not cover discrete Ontario ranges, because they had not been identified. We used the newly identified MNR range boundaries for 7 ranges that overlap Ontario's commercial forest along with fire, road and harvest disturbance less than 50 years old to identify areas as disturbed within each caribou range.

What we found was itself disturbing.

A majority of caribou ranges in

In August, Environment Canada released their long awaited proposed Recovery Strategy . Unfortunately, instead of providing increased protection, the Strategy, would actually allow increased risk to 6 out of the 7 caribou populations in our study. Only the far eastern range along the Quebec border would be expected to have strong recovery measures implemented.

The Recovery Strategy actually permits anywhere from 35% to 95% of a



Ontario's commercial forest are well beyond the level of disturbance where they can be considered self-sustaining. The Scientific Review says that a range with 35% disturbance has only a 60% chance of having a stable population. Our study found that 5 of the 7 ranges had more than 35% disturbance - up to as high as 56% disturbance. Of the other 2 ranges, one had 34% disturbance and one had 26% disturbance. Most Ontario ranges cannot tolerate any more disturbance if caribou are going to have a reasonable chance of persisting.

range to become disturbed, depending on various criteria. Environment Canada's own scientists say that a range with 35% disturbance has only a 60% chance of being self-sustaining. If ranges are allowed to be 95% disturbed, caribou have virtually no chance to recover.

Environment Canada also proposes that only the undisturbed portions of a range be regulated. Coupled with the irresponsible permissiveness on what is allowed to be disturbed, this means that as little as 5% to at most

65% of a range will be regulated. Applied to Ontario, this translates into 40% of the total area of caribou ranges being unregulated. The implications for industrial damage are frightening. Imagine under Canadian Federal Law, clear cutting, road building, mining and hydro transmission throughout 6.3 million ha of undisturbed caribou habitat would not be considered destroying habitat. And over 19 million ha of undisturbed caribou habitat would be left out of regulation nation-wide.

Environment Canada is clearly not listening to its own scientists and the Recovery Strategy needs to be strongly overhauled. CPAWS Wildlands League is calling on the federal government to amend the strategy so that it places much

stricter limits on the amount of permitted industrial development in already fragmented areas where Boreal woodland caribou still survive. Caribou need at least an 80% chance of persistence, which means capping or restoring ranges to a maximum of 20% disturbance according to the latest science.

Wildlands League would like to see the federal government undertake the following to improve the draft strategy:

- Regulate all of the area of ranges as critical habitat
- Increase protection for all remaining undisturbed habitat that currently falls outside critical habitat designation

- Standardize the approach to recovery. All herds should be managed to maintain or increase the amount of undisturbed habitat in large interconnected patches so that populations have at least an 80% chance of being self sustaining.

Only with these necessary changes will the Federal Government be able to provide a strong precedent for Provincial Governments to follow.

To take action on behalf of caribou go to ***caribouandyou.ca***

1. Environment Canada. 2008. Scientific Review for the Identification of Critical Habitat for Woodland Caribou (*Rangifer tarandus caribou*), Boreal Population, in Canada. August 2008. Ottawa: Environment Canada. 72 pp. plus 180 pp Appendices.
2. Environment Canada. 2011. Scientific Assessment to Inform the Identification of Critical Habitat for Woodland Caribou (*Rangifer tarandus caribou*), Boreal Population, in Canada: 2011 update Ottawa, Ontario Canada. 102 pp. plus appendices.
3. Wildlands League. 2009. A snapshot of caribou range condition in Ontario. 14 pp. <http://www.wildlandsleague.org/attachments/Caribou.Range.Condition.in.Ontario-2009-LOW%20RES.pdf>
4. Environment Canada. 2011. Recovery Strategy for the Woodland Caribou, Boreal population (*Rangifer tarandus caribou*) in Canada [Proposed]. Species at Risk Act Recovery Strategy Series. Environment Canada, Ottawa. vi + 55 pp.

## An important message to our supporters from the Development Director

Wildlands League places a high value on our relationship with you, our donors. Without your financial support and willingness to respond to calls to action, we would not be able to achieve our mission to save, protect and enhance Ontario's wilderness.

We truly thank you for your commitment to us.

In a world increasingly faced with the realities of climate change and species at risk, wilderness is ever more precious. Ontario has more carbon stored in the forests and peatlands of the north than is emitted from automobiles globally in 10 years. The global significance of these ecosystems in capturing even more carbon while providing clean water and clean air for the planet cannot be underestimated. And these forests are home to indicator species like woodland caribou that provide an early warning system to ecosystem health.

Your support is making a difference that will be felt by many generations to come.

We have included with this newsletter a form and return envelope for a donation to help offset the cost of producing this newsletter. Many of you will be receiving your annual membership renewal mailing in a few weeks. We hope you will consider renewing your membership and helping to defray the cost of this newsletter.

Thank You

Nicole Thouard

