

WABAKIMI PROVINCIAL PARK

– HISTORY

Wabakimi Provincial Park was created and regulated in 1983. In 1997, it was expanded six-fold and as such, contributed to achievement of the government's ambitious goal to set aside 12% of the province's land mass as protected areas. The park was created to provide protection and representation of a wide range of natural and cultural heritage resources as well as opportunities for backcountry recreation. Wabakimi incorporates a substantial area of prime woodland caribou habitat, representative landscape features from the days of glacial Lake Agassiz, a number of pictograph sites, as well as remote tourism and world-class wilderness canoeing opportunities.

Wabakimi Provincial Park does not yet have a management plan. It is managed in accordance with the Interim Management Statement (1999) as well as the [Ministry of Natural Resources & Forestry](#) (MNR) and [Ontario Parks](#) regulations and policies that include the Provincial Parks and Conservation Reserves Act (2006), Ontario Provincial Parks: Planning and Management Policies (1992), Ontario Provincial Park Management Planning Manual (1992), Ontario's Living Legacy Land Use Strategy (1999) and the general policies contained in the Nipigon District Land Use Guidelines (1983) and the Thunder Bay District Land Use Guidelines (1983).

Development of the park's first management plan was officially launched in August 2003 with publication of a formal notice in both print media and electronic media. This [Notice of Proposal](#) coincided with an invitation to participate in the planning process and to inspect the approved [Terms of Reference](#) (PDF) in which Ontario Parks announced its intention to consolidate development of a management plan for both Wabakimi and Kopka River Provincial Parks into a single planning exercise. The proposal is still under consideration but is currently on hold while documents related to the next stage of the planning process are prepared and approved.

In 2006, the Provincial Parks Act was replaced by the [Provincial Parks and Conservation Reserves Act](#) which extended legislative protection to include the province's conservation reserves. On September 4, 2007, three sets of regulations that set out how the Act will be implemented were proclaimed into law: [Ontario Regulation 347/07](#) (Provincial Parks: General Provisions); [Ontario Regulation 319/07](#) (Conservation Reserves: General Provisions); and, [Ontario Regulation 346/07](#) (Mechanized Travel in Wilderness Parks).

One of the most intriguing aspects of this legislation was the imposition of firm deadlines for development and approval of management directions for provincial parks and conservation reserves. Section 10 (1a) stated, "The Minister [of Natural Resources] shall ensure that the Ministry prepare a management direction that applies to each provincial park and conservation reserve, by the fifth anniversary of the day this section is proclaimed in force, for provincial parks and conservation reserves that exist on the day this section is proclaimed in force and for which no management direction has been deemed to have been approved under this section". Section 10 (1b) stipulated the same five-year deadline for any new park or conservation reserve created after the act is proclaimed in force. Section 10 (2) confirmed that, "A management direction may apply to one or more provincial parks, one or more conservation reserves or to a combination of provincial parks and conservation reserves". Ontario Parks had already announced its intention to develop a single management plan for Wabakimi and Kopka River Provincial Parks.

In the 2012-13 provincial budget, in an effort to be more efficient and effective, the government amended the Provincial Parks and Conservation Reserves Act to provide more flexibility in areas such as park management planning. The five-year deadline for the development and approval of management directions was replaced by a simplified Section 10 (1) which stated that "The Minister [of Natural Resources] shall ensure that the Ministry prepares a management direction that applies to each provincial park and conservation reserve."

In September 2012, the MNR released a policy paper entitled, [Modernization of Approvals - A Proposed Policy Framework for Modernizing Approvals for Ontario's Natural Resources](#) "to inform the public, stakeholders and Aboriginal peoples on the modernization of approvals initiative being proposed by MNR and [to] seek input on a policy framework that will help direct the future modernizing and streamlining of approvals (e.g. licences, authorizations, permits) delivered by the MNR". The proposed three-year transformation plan outlined how

the ministry would take “a hard look at everything it does to make sure we’re modernizing our business where we can, focusing more closely on our core mandate, and reviewing our programs and services to become more efficient and sustainable”.

The [*Provincial Parks and Conservation Reserves Act*](#) states that “a planning manual to guide the preparation of management statements and management plans for provincial parks and conservation reserves” shall be prepared and made public by the second anniversary of the day the Act became law. After public consultation, the [*Ontario Protected Areas Planning Manual*](#) was approved on June 30, 2009.

Environmental Registry

The [*Environmental Registry*](#) (commonly called the “Registry”) is an on-line database used by Ontario ministries and agencies to post public notices of any government proposal or decision that may impact the province’s environment. These notices may contain information about proposed new laws, regulations, policies and programs or about proposals to change or eliminate existing ones. Provision is made for public comment and for notification of future announcements related to any environmental matter of interest.

The Registry is an important part of ensuring that the public can participate in decisions being made about environmental issues. It is the only one of its kind in Canada and was created in 1993 under Ontario’s [*Environmental Bill of Rights*](#) (EBR). The [*Environmental Commissioner of Ontario*](#) is responsible for monitoring that the government ministries and agencies fulfill their obligations under the EBR including the Registry.