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'Framing the Future of FOW' September Board Retreat and Planning Meeting

Several FOW Board members and associates participated in a Board retreat earlier this month in Thunder Bay, Ontario.

One main purpose of this retreat was to learn more about Indigenous/First Nation's culture and their story in Canadian history, experiencing and recognizing the importance of our role in truth and reconciliation.

We are so grateful to Shy-Anne and Marilyn for sharing their knowledge about Indigenous history in Canada by leading us through the 'Kairos Blanket' experience. This experience took us through the sobering details and impacts of this history which continues today, with evolving efforts to address the wrongs of the past, as exemplified by the 2015 report of [Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission](#).

Shy-Anne also provided guidance on establishing a Land Acknowledgement for FOW, and the part we play in truth and reconciliation. She shared the differences of perspectives in land acknowledgements; whereas an Indigenous Land Acknowledgement may be a personal reflection that includes such things as a recognition of and gratitude for the bounty of the Earth that sustains all life, a non-Indigenous statement should pose a sincere commitment to implementing one or more of the [94 Calls to Action](#) in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission report.

Developing a Land Acknowledgement will be a continuing focus for the Board, combining our broadened understanding of Canada's treaties and their impacts with further exploration of how to meaningfully implement relevant Calls to Action. It is our sincere hope that through this process, our organization will be better equipped to develop relationships based on trust and understanding.

Another purpose of the retreat was to analyze our vision, mission and strategic direction for our non-profit organization and come away with a renewed focus guiding us into the next few years and beyond. Thanks to Margaret for her expertise in facilitating our strategic planning as we reflected upon our past and present work as an organization and collaboratively worked on our vision, mission and plans for the future.

The full FOW Board will be reviewing the Strategic Plan and completing the approval process over the next few months. Once finalized, the updated strategic plan/vision/mission of FOW will be published. Stay tuned!

Of course, it was also a chance for us to meet each other in person (a difficult thing to do with members spread throughout the continent) and enjoy each other's company! We were able to meet with Wabakimi Parks staff as well as new members, which resulted in some promising talks of connecting with youth in and around Armstrong, ON. All in all, it was a successful and enjoyable Board Retreat!

We offer a big thanks to Maurice, Brian and Vern, who worked hard to put this retreat together. It was worth the effort!



Wabakimi Boreal Caribou Citizen Monitoring Project Update

In late August, FOW volunteers wrapped up the inaugural summer of the Wabakimi Boreal Caribou Citizen Monitoring Project. The project is off to an excellent start: twelve dedicated community scientists participated in three canoe trips, surveying three lakes for caribou evidence. Volunteers encountered the challenges of a Wabakimi canoe trip—battling bugs, variable weather, and tough terrain—while also enjoying breathtaking vistas, solitude, and the camaraderie of both new and old friends.



We're excited to report that each trip found recent signs of boreal caribou, and some participants even spotted the animals themselves. These observations indicate that caribou continue to use this habitat where they have been historically documented, providing valuable information for policymakers and conservationists to guide future conservation efforts. Stay tuned to our

upcoming newsletters for more details on the Year One observations, survey results, and opportunities to get involved in the project.

If you paddled in Wabakimi this summer and observed caribou or signs of them, please contribute to our data by reporting your findings on iNaturalist by adding them to the “Wabakimi Boreal Caribou Citizen Monitoring Project”.

For assistance reporting your observations, email fowcaribouproject@gmail.com.



Caribou pellets found by the team. They look like chocolate "Glosset" raisins!



Caribou hair found in a bedding site. Their hair is hollow to aid in buoyancy and heat retention.



Expanding Protected Areas in Ontario

Last month, the Ministry of Environment, Conservation and Parks (MECP)

announcing proposed sites to be regulated under the Provincial Parks and Conservation Reserves Act (2006). Expanding protected areas in the province is a vital step in safeguarding Ontario's habitats and biodiversity to meet international targets for protecting our lands and waters: at least [25 percent protected by 2025 and at least 30 percent by 2030](#).

[The proposal](#) outlined areas in five geographic regions across the province, including proposed Provincial Park Additions and Conservation Reserve Additions. Many of the sites posted are areas that were previously identified for protection under Ontario's Living Legacy plan from 1999.

Our Conservation Committee took this opportunity, amidst a tight turnaround for the comment period, to provide four suggested ideal candidate areas adjacent to Wabakimi Provincial Park. We are thankful to have strong support among other stakeholders, as well as organizations such as Ontario Nature, in protecting more lands and waters in the Wabakimi area.

The “Friends of Wabakimi” strongly supports the expansion of conservation reserves and other protected areas within the Wabakimi Area. The existing protected habitat is fragmented and is not big enough to support a viable, free ranging caribou population.

The caribou outside of the park are greatly diminished and rest at high risk from roads and logging in prime caribou habitats.

It is necessary to provide buffers to expand existing protected areas. “Bridges” created by the Ontario Government to connect existing protected areas would build big blocks of uninterrupted caribou habitat. Creating big blocks of caribou habitat will also protect and maintain a host of other boreal species that share caribou habitat. Our goal is to connect the dots to make bigger blocks of uninterrupted habitat and necessary range.

The Wabakimi Area is **one** of the few places where it is possible to create a block of habitat that is big enough to support **threatened** caribou. This wilderness complex will provide opportunities for research and provide a host of recreational activities. The Wabakimi Area should be a model for caribou conservation in Ontario.

Finally, the “Friends of Wabakimi” feel that wilderness is an important value to be preserved by the Ontario Government. Providing permanent protection for the area’s nomination(s) will help to **enhance the important values of the Wabakimi Wilderness**. This wilderness also creates exceptional recreation and tourism values adjacent to Wabakimi Provincial Park. This helps to maintain existing and potential eco-tourism business opportunities and contributes to the **to the Armstrong, Savant Lake, six adjacent First Nations, regional and provincial economies**.

There are four areas adjacent to or near Wabakimi Provincial Park that are ideal candidates for protection for recreational and ecological purposes:

Misehkwow River Watershed

This river valley serves as a migration bridge for wildlife such as caribou and wolverines. It is an essential buffer between two provincial parks and serves as a canoe route connecting Rockcliff Lake in Wabakimi Provincial Park to the Albany River Waterway Park. This wild river flows over Iron Falls, several Class I and Class II rapids, and offers numerous opportunities to see moose and experience the wilderness. It is one of the few areas with speckled trout.

Caribou - Campbell - Hollingsworth Triangle

This area is bounded by the park on the west and lies north of Caribou Lake and south of Campbell and Hollingsworth Lake including Campbell Creek, which is an important walleye spawning area. Campbell Lake is a valuable and remote lake trout lake. Both the north half of Caribou Lake (hence the name!) and Hollingsworth Lake have been well documented by the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry as critical caribou calving area, historically and presently. They also lie in the special protected area Crown Land Use Policy Atlas (CLUPA) 2616, where wildlife, lake trout, and tourism values are greater than timber values.

D'Alton Block

This area also lies within CLUPA 2616, and has an unusually high concentration of interconnected small lakes and rivers. It has been documented as historical caribou habitat and migration corridors. There are several valuable remote tourism outposts scattered across the "block". This tangle of lakes has the potential to be enhanced for recreational canoeing and creates opportunities for canoe outfitting for the Whitesands community.

Doe - Fawn - Tamarack Lake Complex

This area features shallow soils and critically important as it is currently used year-round as caribou habitat. This small but important area deserves status as a Conservation Reserve to protect this caribou habitat. Eliminating or limiting road access (temporary winter roads only?) and designating the area west of Doe and Fawn Lakes as a Conservation Reserve will accomplish both goals.



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Wabakimi Provincial Park 2024 Canoe Ranger Profiles

Wabakimi Provincial Park hired two first-time canoe rangers this summer, both students at Lakehead University in Thunder Bay, Ontario. Canoe rangers' primary duties are the maintenance and inventory of canoe portage routes and campsites throughout the park, but rangers are also given the opportunity to participate in

other projects during the season such as assisting with ecological data collection and engaging with park stakeholders. This year's team covered over 500 km of canoe routes in the park over 13 trips (and we're not done yet!).

Meet this Year's New Rangers:



Wyatt MacEwen is a fourth-year forestry student born and raised in the small coastal hamlet of Rosspoint, situated on the north shore of Lake Superior. With a lifelong experience of the outdoors such as one can only receive when growing up in a remote community surrounded by nature, Wyatt seamlessly transitioned into his canoe ranger duties. You could say he

was born for this.

After a lifetime of kayaking around the archipelagoes of northern Lake Superior, Wyatt was eager to explore Wabakimi's waterways by canoe. He was undisputedly the most successful angler of the team this season and showed a great deal of love and enthusiasm for the park. When he completes his studies, Wyatt hopes to pursue a career as a pilot. Maybe one day in the not-too-distant future he will be the one piloting your charter flights to the park!

Graham Matheson, originally from North Vancouver, British Columbia, will be commencing a Master of Science program at Lakehead University in Fall 2024. His research will be assessing lake sturgeon (*Acipenser fulvescens*) in Whitewater Lake, with the field season scheduled for summer 2025. Through his summer employment with Wabakimi Provincial Park, Graham was able to establish relationships with community partners at Whitewater Lake, do preliminary information gathering and site reconnaissance, and develop a personal connection with the park itself prior to commencing research.



The research, itself a partnership between Ontario Parks and Lakehead University, will contribute not only to the conservation of lake sturgeon at the federal and provincial levels, but will contribute to the stewardship goals of the Whitewater Lake community, to whom lake sturgeon are considered sacred as well as ecologically important. Being a canoe ranger for Wabakimi has been a highlight of Graham's career (best job ever!) and he is counting himself lucky that the opportunity to work in Wabakimi fell into his lap. He will be eagerly awaiting the summer 2025 field season.

Wabakimi Provincial Park wants to extend our gratitude to these two superstar canoe rangers for their hard work this season. We wish them all the best in their future endeavours and look forward to working with them again soon!



FOW 2024 Photo/Video Contest Reminder!

We have been greatly enjoying all of the beautiful and impressive photos from your adventures over the summer. Now that the peak paddling season is over, we'd like to remind you to submit your favourites to our [2024 Photo and Video Contest!](#)

The theme of the contest is “Explore Wabakimi”. The photos & videos should highlight the wildlife, camp life, challenges and/or natural beauty encountered when paddling in Wabakimi Provincial Park or the surrounding Crown lands.

The deadline for submissions is November 1, 2024.

We can't wait to see your photos and videos!

Enjoy some of our submissions from last year's contest below.



Submit Your Trip Reports!



This is a friendly reminder that we have a large collection of trip reports on our [website forum](#), and we'd love to have more!

FOW Members can sign in to the interactive member website and submit trip reports there. Non-members can email their reports to info@wabakimi.org, or better yet, consider joining us!

These trip reports help inform Wabakimi adventurers who are planning future trips. Help out our current and future Wabakimi-lovers by submitting your Wabakimi area trip reports! Thanks to everyone who has submitted in the past, we greatly appreciate it.

As always, we'd like to give a big

[Thank you to all our Business/Sponsor Members!](#)





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