

A Critique of the *Study on the Social and Economic Benefits Associated with the Nine Ontario Living Legacy Signature Sites*

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When I received the materials related to the study, *Social and Economic Benefits Associated with the Nine Ontario Signature Sites*, I was overwhelmed by the amount of information provided by the consultants. After reading through this information, I was impressed with many aspects of the study. In particular, the efforts made by the consultants to collect new information about some users of signature sites were very well done. These efforts to obtain reliable information about the signature sites should make the reader feel less wary about the conclusions reached by the consultants.

As with any research project, however, one may quibble with decisions made because of limited data or with assumptions employed to facilitate the analyses. Limited data on recreational use at the various signature sites led the authors to use a variety of approaches to estimate use at each site. These differing approaches for the various sites makes one believe that the reliability of recreational use information is much higher at some signature sites than at other sites. This reliability concern for recreational use also impacts the summary estimates of economic values for each of the signature sites. Therefore, readers are forewarned that the aggregated economic values presented for each signature site may differ from other sites because of real differences and/or differences attributable to the varying approaches used to estimate recreational use.

The consultants also proceeded to employ a series of assumptions that enabled them to conduct the economic valuation and benefit transfer analyses that were a centre piece of the study. Two major assumptions employed by the consultants included: (i) a constant relationship between per day willingness to pay and the duration of the trip (e.g., the willingness to pay for an additional day of canoeing was assumed to be the same for a one day or 100 day canoe trip); and, (ii) no relationship between increased per day costs of recreation and participation rates within the activities (i.e., it was assumed that if a person was willing to spend \$20 per day more for canoeing, their total number of canoe-

ing days would not be affected by this increased cost for canoeing). Hindsight suggests that the consultants could have relaxed these assumptions to employ a more behaviourally realistic modeling approach.

One final concern with the study relates to its mandate. The information from this study was intended to provide baseline data from which future comparisons could evaluate the benefits of the signature site designation for these areas. However, absent from the study are baseline data on areas outside of the signature sites (i.e., control data). Without this control data, it is not possible to evaluate whether future changes to the value of signature sites are due to its unique designation or changes to the demand for public land recreation. Future efforts, therefore, should fill this void by collecting such baseline information on sites that are not designated as signature sites.

In conclusion, I would encourage people to read and make use of the wealth of information provided by the consultants. The consultants have produced good quality data sets that other individuals could employ to research many aspects related to outdoor recreation and tourism. Given all the limitations imposed by the data availability and the original scope for the project, the consultants did a good job with the task at hand.