

MANAGEMENT PLANNING FOR KOMOKA, A NEAR-URBAN PROVINCIAL PARK

Tim Marchand
Ontario Parks

Abstract

Komoka Provincial Park is located along the scenic shores of the Thames River straddling the municipal boundaries of the Township of Middlesex-Centre and the City of London. In 1979, an interim management statement for Komoka Provincial Park was prepared to guide the management of the park until a management plan is completed (OMNR, 1979). Dramatic landscape change resulting from 20 years of urban expansion and the consequent increase in park usage prompted Ontario Parks to initiate a management planning process in June of 2001. The plan will define the park's goal and objectives and establish long-term direction for the protection, development, management and use of its resources. To support the management planning process, an updated life science inventory of the park was conducted in 2001/02 and a park user survey in partnership with the Geography Department, University of Western Ontario was completed in 2001. To assist Ontario Parks in the development of the park management plan, planning consultants have been retained and a 12 member Advisory Committee has been formed. Consisting of representatives from local First Nations, municipalities, academia, naturalists and interest groups, the committee will advise and make recommendations to Ontario Parks throughout the planning process. Public participation is also encouraged throughout the management planning process.

Park Management Plans

A park management plan describes what will happen inside a park. It clearly states the goals and objectives of the park and its role in the larger provincial parks system. During the preparation of the plan, other approaches to resource stewardship, development and operations may be considered and a preferred alternative identified.

Management plans are prepared by an Ontario Parks planning team with input from the public. They are based on information collected from many sources including biologists, foresters, geologists, archeologists, historians, other resource scientists and managers, and the public. When issues are complex, the team may be assisted by a steering committee made up of Ministry of Natural Resources staff, with the assistance of other individuals, groups and agencies. In very complex cases, public advisory committees may be established to help resolve issues.

There may be up to seven stages in the production of a park management plan, and the process may vary from park to park, depending on the significance of park values and the

complexity of issues raised. Some stages may be combined in the case of a simple straightforward plan. For all plans, public participation is encouraged from the start and continues throughout the process (OMNR, 1994).

Komoka Provincial Park

Komoka Provincial Park is located along the scenic shores of the Thames River straddling the municipal boundaries of the Township of Middlesex-Centre and the City of London. The flora of this unique area consists of Carolinian forest, western prairie and northern boreal elements, which provide an important wildlife migration corridor. In the park, a wide variety of locally and regionally unique plants. For example, purple milkweed (*Asclepias purpurascens*) and wildlife such as the blue-winged warbler (*Vermivora pinus*) can be found. In the summer, this picturesque area offers local residents and tourists opportunities to walk along the extensive trail network that is maintained by the Thames River Valley Trail Association. In the winter, cross-country skiing is a popular activity within the park. Komoka makes a significant contribution to Ontario's system of provincial parks.

Management Planning Process

An *Interim Management Statement* was prepared for Komoka Provincial Park in 1979 (OMNR, 1979). *The Provincial Parks Act* and the Ontario Parks' policy require that a management plan be prepared for the park (OMNR, 1978; OMNR, 1992 and OMNR, 1994). In addition, the landscape surrounding the park has undergone significant change since the development of the interim management statement, particularly as a result of urban expansion. With the associated increase in use, it has become particularly necessary to develop a management plan for the park to define its goal, objectives and long-term direction for the protection, development, management and use of its resources. The plan will address key management issues including classification, permitted activities, trails, and access.

The primary role of the planning process will be to identify the contributions that Komoka makes to the achievement of the four Ontario Provincial Parks system objectives of protection, heritage appreciation, recreation, and tourism. Additionally, it seeks to identify and establish management policies aimed at maintaining or enhancing those contributions. Appropriate reports, supporting documents, unpublished data and other relevant information will be made available for public review in the development of this plan.

In February 2001, prior to formally initiating the park management planning process for Komoka, Ontario Parks: 1) hired planning consultants to prepare the Background Information, Issues and Options report, Preliminary Park Management Plan and Recommended Park Management Plan; and, 2) selected 12 members to sit as the Advisory Committee for the park management planning process.

The Advisory Committee is comprised of representatives from:

- Byron Community Network;
- Chippewa of the Thames First Nation;
- Corporation of the City of London;
- London Canoe Club;
- London Off-Road Cycling Club;
- McIlwraith Field Naturalists;
- Middlesex Stewardship Committee;
- Thames Valley Trail Association;
- Township of Middlesex Centre;
- Upper Thames River Conservation Authority; and,
- Geography Department, University of Western Ontario (UWO).

In June 2001, Stage One of the park management planning process was formally initiated with: the approval of the terms of reference for the Komoka Provincial Park management planning process; and, the distribution of the Initial Invitation to Participate and the approved terms of reference to internal and external stakeholders with a 45-day comment period.

Supporting Activities

In June 2001, Ontario Parks partnered with the Geography Department, UWO, to deliver a jointly designed park user survey. The results of the survey will support the park management planning process. Two undergraduate students at the university are completing theses related to the survey, one on respondent willingness to pay for conservation and environmental values (Howard, 2002), and the other on multiple use of existing trails and potential conflicts that arise (Corriveau, 2002). The latter will be used to help draft a trail stewardship plan for Komoka.

In July 2001, Ontario Parks contracted a life science inventory update to support the park management planning process. The goals of the life science update are to:

- update and build upon the inventory and assessment information provided in: *Reconnaissance Life Science Inventory of the Komoka Park Reserve and Komoka Park Reserve Area of Natural and Scientific Interest*. (Klinkenburg, 1985);
- provide valuable background information in support of a vegetation stewardship plan and to document ecological change since 1985; and,
- make recommendations on key management issues such as: park classification, zoning, permitted activities, land securement, proposed park boundary, natural values protection, management and restoration prescriptions, research and monitoring needs, trails and access.

Next Steps

Stage Two – Background Information, Issues and Options

- anticipated to commence Summer 2003

Stage Three – Preliminary Park Management Plan

- anticipated to commence Fall 2003

Stage Four – Recommended Park Management Plan

- anticipated to commence Winter 2003/04

Future Implementation Planning Needs

- Trail Stewardship Plan
- Vegetation Stewardship Plan

References

- Corriveau, Erin L. 2002. *Conflicts on Multi-Use Trails in Komoka Provincial Park*. 4th year honours thesis. Department of Geography, University of Western Ontario: London, ON.
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