
Komoka Provincial Park: A Case Study in Protected Areas Planning in an Urbanized Landscape

Tim Marchand

Assistant Park Planner, Ontario Parks, Southwest Zone
London, Ontario N6E 1L3
(519) 873-4618 Fax: (519) 873-4645
tim.marchand@mnr.gov.on.ca

Abstract

With increasing urban development in southern Ontario, the demand for outdoor recreational opportunities, as provided by parks and protected areas, is increasing. A paradox exists, however, in that many of these sites are key in providing critical habitat for species at risk. Therefore, a fine balance must be struck between providing appropriate recreational opportunities while protecting species and their habitats.

Keywords: urban protected areas, park planning, park management, outdoor recreation

Introduction

Komoka Provincial Park is situated along the Thames River, a Canadian Heritage River, along the municipal boundary between the City of London and the Township of Middlesex Centre, Middlesex County. The concept of a park was first put forth in the mid-1960s by Osmond Langtvet, then a geography professor at the University of Western Ontario. In 1973, the former Ontario Department of Lands and Forests, now the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources, agreed to the concept and began land acquisition with the purpose of creating a near-urban provincial park. Due to the cost of securing lands in southern Ontario, the originally proposed acquisition boundary was greatly reduced. A 198 hectare parcel of land was regulated as Komoka Provincial Park in 1989. An additional area of approximately 106 hectares has been acquired for future addition to the park.

Komoka Provincial Park protects provincially significant life and earth science areas of natural and scientific interest, including species at risk and their habitats, and important cultural heritage features. Since the late 1970s,

use of the site has increased resulting in the proliferation of trails and uses, some of which (e.g., the use of off-road and all-terrain vehicles) are incompatible with the protection of resources that the park has been established to protect.

In 2001, Ontario Parks initiated a management planning process for the park with the hiring of planning consultants and the establishment of an advisory committee. In support of the planning process, an updated survey and evaluation of life science resources was completed in 2003. The management plan will identify the contributions that Komoka makes to the achievement of the four Ontario Provincial Parks system objectives of protection, heritage appreciation, recreation and tourism, and it will identify and establish management policies aimed at maintaining or enhancing those contributions.

With area population expected to grow by 23% by 2021, park policies must balance the protection of provincially significant natural heritage features while providing park visitors with an appropriate level of sustainable outdoor recreational opportunities.

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 by 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 they 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.

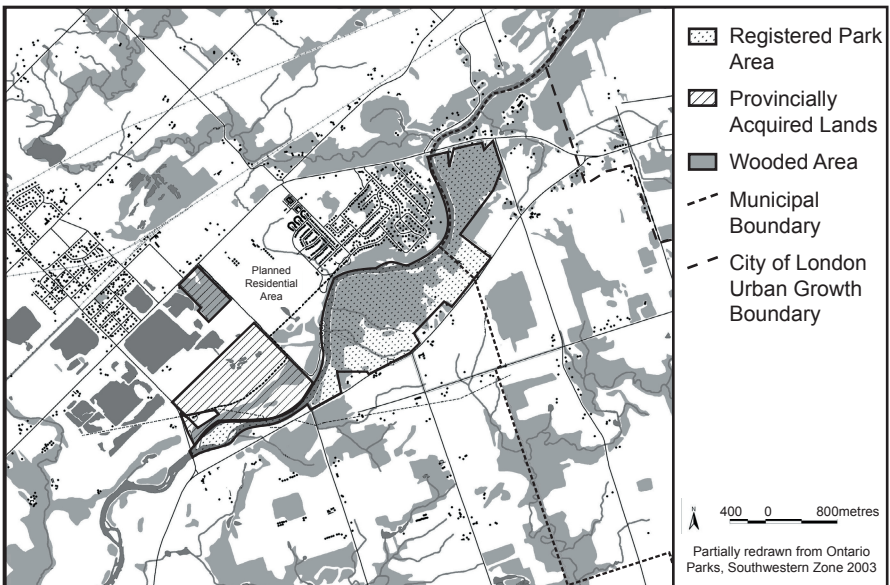
Komoka Provincial Park

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 (Figure 1). 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 – such as purple milkweed (*Asclepias purpurascens*) – and wildlife – such as 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 cooperatively maintained with 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. The *Provincial Parks Act* and the Ontario Parks policy require that a management plan be prepared for the park. In addition, the landscape surrounding the park has undergone significant change since the development of the Interim Management Statement, particularly as a result

Figure 1. Study area and land uses around Komoka Provincial Park.



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 twelve members to sit as the Advisory Committee for the park management planning process.

The Advisory Committee is comprised of representatives from:

- Chippewas 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. An Initial Invitation to Participate and the approved terms of reference were distributed to those on the project mailing list that includes individuals, groups, local, regional, and

provincial stakeholders, government organizations, and local First Nations. In addition to direct mailings, paid advertisements were placed in local and regional newspapers, notices were posted on-site at the park, and a policy proposal notice was posted on the Environmental Bill of Rights (EBR) Environmental Registry. This stage of the planning process included a 45-day comment period to allow interested parties to review and comment on the terms of reference.

Stage Two of the planning process was initiated in December 2003 with the release of the *Komoka Background Information, Issues and Options* report. Copies of the report were distributed to those on the project mailing list, paid advertisements were placed in local and regional newspapers, notices were posted on-site at the park and the policy proposal notice was updated on the EBR Environmental Registry. During the 45-day comment period, an open house was also scheduled to provide an opportunity for the public to review and comment on the background information, issues and options that had been identified thus far.

It is anticipated that Stage Three of the management planning process will be initiated in winter 2005 with the release of the approved *Komoka Preliminary Park Management Plan*. The preliminary park management plan will contain all of the proposed policies and direction statements for the long-term management of the park. The document will represent Ontario Park's preferred policy for Komoka Provincial Park. As with previous stages, notices will be distributed to the project mailing list and posted on-site at the park, paid advertisements will be placed in local and regional newspapers, and the policy proposal notice will be updated on the EBR Environmental Registry. An open house will likely be scheduled to allow interested parties to review and comment on the preliminary park management plan.

Release of the approved *Komoka Park Management Plan* will initiate the final stage of the management planning process for the park. It is anticipated that Stage Four will commence in spring 2006. The park management plan will contain Ontario Parks' policies and directional statements for the management of the park. In addition, it will outline an implementation strategy for the plan's elements and summarize the public consultation that occurred. In addition to mailed and on-site notices and paid advertisements, a policy decision notice will be posted on the EBR Environmental Registry. The public will be provided with a final 45-day opportunity to determine if their concerns had been adequately considered and addressed, and to initiate an appeal of the plan contents where appropriate.

Following its release, the approved *Komoka Park Management Plan* may be reviewed or amended to address changing issues or conditions. A review may involve a reassessment of all or part of the plan, including classification, zoning, goal, objectives and all resource management, operations, and development policies, while an amendment may be considered to address specific issues or needs.

Supporting Activities

In June 2001, Ontario Parks partnered with the Department of Geography, University of Western Ontario (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 of Western Ontario completed theses related to the survey, one on respondent willingness to pay for conservation and environmental values, and the other on multiple uses of existing trails and related conflicts that arise. The latter will be used to help draft a trail stewardship plan for Komoka. In addition to these two most recent research projects, additional studies by the Department of Geography, UWO have been undertaken since 1978.

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 were to:

- update and build upon the inventory and assessment information provided by the reconnaissance life science inventory completed in 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.

Future Implementation Planning Needs

Park management plans set policy direction for a specific park or protected area. Subsidiary implementation plans are operational in nature and provide comprehensive direction for a particular management project or activity that cannot be adequately provided in the approved park management plan.

Due to urban expansion and an associated increase in park use, the key management issues of trails and vegetation management will be addressed

in subsequent implementation plans. Work is now underway on a trail management plan for the park. Public review and comment on the draft *Komoka Trail Management Plan* may be initiated with Stage Three of the management planning process and the release the *Komoka Preliminary Park Management Plan*.

References

- Ambrose, J., G. Waldron, L. Rodger, and D. Martin. 2002. *An Updated Survey and Evaluation of the Life Science Resources of Komoka Provincial Park and Selected Adjacent Lands*. Prepared for Ontario Parks, Ministry of Natural Resources: London, ON.
- Bowie, G.J. 1985. *Land Use Conflict in London's Rural-Urban Fringe. A Case Study of Kilworth-Komoka, Ontario (1964-1984)*. 4th year honours thesis. Department of Geography, University of Western Ontario. London, ON.
- Campbell, L.M. and A. Kesteloot. 2002. *Komoka Provincial Park Use Survey: Summary of Results*. Department of Geography, University of Western Ontario: London, ON.
- Corriveau, E.L. 2002. *Conflicts on Multi-Use Trails in Komoka Provincial Park*. 4th year honours thesis. Department of Geography, University of Western Ontario: London, ON.
- Hawthorne, K.M. 1978. *Near Urban Recreation: A Study of the Proposed Kilworth-Komoka Provincial Park, Middlesex County, Ontario*. 4th year honours thesis. Department of Geography, University of Western Ontario: London, ON.
- Howard, G. 2002. *Environmental Values and Willingness to Pay in Komoka Provincial Park*. 4th year honours thesis. Department of Geography, University of Western Ontario: London, ON.
- Klinkenberg, R. 1985. *A Reconnaissance Life Science Inventory of the Komoka Park Reserve and the Komoka Park ANSI*. Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources, Southwestern Region: London, ON.
- Langtvet, O. 1964. *A Proposal for the Establishment of a Wilderness Park Straddling the Thames River between Kilworth and Komoka Bridges, Delaware and Lobo Townships, Middlesex County, Ontario*. London, ON.
- Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources. 1978. *Ontario Provincial Parks: Planning and Management Policies*. Outdoor Recreation: Toronto.
- Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources. 1979. *Kilworth/Komoka Public Lands (Park Reserve) Interim Management Plan*. Prepared by Aylmer District Planning Committee: Aylmer, ON.
- Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources. 1992. *Ontario Provincial Parks: Planning and Management Policies – 1992 Update*. Provincial Parks and Natural Heritage Policy Branch.
- Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources. 1994. *Ontario Provincial Park Management Planning Manual*. Provincial Parks and Recreational Areas Branch.
- Seddon, I. and A. Usher. 2002. *Komoka Background Information, Issues and Op-*

tions. Prepared for Ontario Parks, Ministry of Natural Resources: London, ON.

Smithson, D.M. 1991. *An Assessment of Trail Damage by Horse and Human Trampling in Komoka Provincial Park, Ontario*. 4th year honours thesis. Department of Geography, University of Western Ontario: London, ON.