

Recreation Resource Assessment In Ontario's Provincial Parks and Conservation Reserves

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Abstract

The intent of Ontario's Living Legacy Land Use Strategy (July 1999) is to strengthen the forest and mining communities and enhance tourism and recreation in northern Ontario. Recommended in the Land Use Strategy are 61 new provincial parks and additions to 45 provincial parks. A total of 271 conservation reserves and one addition to an existing reserve are also recommended. Information regarding existing recreational features and recreational activities is essential to properly plan and manage Ontario's system of protected areas. A new inventory process was needed to identify important biophysical features that support a variety of recreational activities. This paper presents the methodology used to build the recreational inventory during year one of implementing Ontario's Living Legacy.

Introduction

The intent of the Ontario's Living Legacy Land Use Strategy (OMNR, 1999) is to provide strategic direction for the management of 39 million hectares of Crown land and water. Recommendations in the Land Use Strategy are intended to improve the social and economic health of communities in the Planning Area. Recommended in the Land Use Strategy are 61 new provincial parks and additions to 45 provincial parks in the Planning Area. A total of 271 conservation reserves and one addition to an existing reserve are also recommended in the same area. The planning process focused on the identification of areas that contributed to the representation of the province's diverse ecosystems and outstanding natural features. Frameworks for the conservation of biological features and geological features were used to guide the selection process as well as a set of park class targets and an attempt to minimize impacts on other land uses. Recreation and cultural values were not formally integrated into the selection process. However, numerous areas with recreation values were identified as a result of public input.

The provision of recreation opportunities is an integral part of the provincial parks and conservation reserve system. The provincial parks and conservation reserves identified under the Land Use Strategy vary in size and shape and receive many forms of general crown land use. Recreational use ranges from out-of-country residents pursuing backcountry canoe tripping to local residents hunting and fishing. The level of access to the protected areas varies from multiple road access to fly-in only. There is a need to understand the mix of biophysical features and recreational uses at each protected area. There are additional needs: the need to evaluate the sensitivity of the biophysical features to recreational use, the need to

account for the variety of human influences and land uses and the need to provide information for planning processes (Interim Management Statements, Statements of Conservation Interest). The identification of recreational features and uses is a necessary and fundamental step in the management of Ontario's natural heritage.

Search for a Methodology

Ontario Parks has a well-developed inventory program for earth and life science features. There was a need to develop an inventory program for recreation as part of the Protected Areas Planning and Management Project Plan for the 2000/01 fiscal year funding was secured for recreation inventories. Given the limited time available to develop a new inventory program for the 2000/01-field season, it was decided to try to find an established method. An established method would provide for faster implementation, lower costs and build on a body of work.

A literature review of the World Wide Web was undertaken using various search engines. Key words and phrases were used to locate hyper links and files. It was found that much work had been done in the Forestry sector that attempts to understand and manage for resource values such as recreation. After careful study it was decided to adopt a methodology developed by the Government of British Columbia, Ministry of Forests, Range Recreation and Forest Practices Branch, Research Section (BC Ministry of Forests, 1995).

Guidelines for Recreation Resource Assessment - Version 1 (OMNR, 2000) have been prepared by Planning and Research Section of Ontario Parks to help build recreational information for the protected areas identified in the Land Use Strategy. The central concept is to provide a standard framework for collecting information and assessing biophysical features and recreational uses. Guidelines will help ensure that the information is collected in a uniform manner and that the gaps in information are minimized. The guidelines are for the use of Ontario Parks/MNR staff as well as consultants hired to work on the recreational inventory of protected areas in the OLL Planning Area.

Goals of the Recreation Resource Assessment

Goals and objectives for the recreation assessment have been established and provided in the guidelines. The goals of each recreation resource assessment follow:

- To determine the existing recreational uses and use levels.
- To determine how each protected area contributes to the supply of recreational features and settings locally and provincially.
- To consider the future demand for recreational opportunities in protected areas.

Objectives of the Recreation Resource Assessment

Each recreational inventory must identify the unique mix of recreational features, settings and activities. All recreation resource assessments are guided by the four objectives noted below:

- Identify landforms and features, which are or may be used for recreation.
- Identify the range of settings that the protected area is able to provide.
- Identify all known existing recreational activities.
- Identify the various means by which the protected area can be accessed.

Recreation Resource Assessment - Stepwise Procedures

The Guidelines for Recreation Resource Assessment include a process with two phases and conducted according to a procedure with eight steps. The first phase involves the collection of background information and the recreation inventory (steps 1 through 6). The second phase involves the recreation assessment (steps 7 and 8). The phases and steps are noted in Table 1.

Table 1. Recreation Resource Assessment - Stepwise Procedures

Phase 1

Step 1 - Project Organisation

Step 2 - Background Information

Step 3 - Building the Map Base

Step 4 - The Site Visit

Step 5 - Information Transfer and Management

Step 6 - The Inventory Report

Phase 2

Step 7 - Recreation Analysis Tools

Step 8 - Recreation Assessment Report

The Recreation Inventory Checklist

At the core of the recreation assessment is the recreation inventory checklist. The majority of the work is directed at completion of the checklist. The checklist (Figure 1) is a convenient format to summarize the various data to be collected for each protected area. The checklist is composed of three main sections. The first and topmost section is to record the name of the area, the NTS number, the UTM number, Ontario Base Map numbers, Latitude, Longitude, Area (ha), ownership, MNR Region, MNR District, Park Zone, County, and Township.


The second or middle section of the checklist is to record the top eight biophysical or recreation features and the top eight recreation activities. The researcher is provided with a standardized code list of features and activities from which to select.

The third or bottom section is to record their evaluations of the various recreation factors. The recreation factors include: most scarce feature, feature scarcity, most


RECREATION INVENTORY CHECKLIST

NAME					
MAP NAME	NTS Number	UTM reference			
OEM Number	LATITUDE	LONGITUDE	AREA (ha)	OWNERSHIP	
MNR REGION	MNR DISTRICT	PARK ZONE	COUNTY	TOWNSHIP	
RECREATION FEATURES		RECREATION ACTIVITIES:			
1		1			
2		2			
3		3			
4		4			
5		5			
6		6			
7		7			
8		8			
RECREATION FACTORS	FEATURES	Rating			
Feature Scarcity		Very High	High	Moderate	Low N/A
Most Scarce Feature	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8				N/A
Feature Scarcity		Very High	High	Moderate	Low N/A
Most Unique Feature	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8				N/A
Activity Attraction Capability		Very High	High	Moderate	Low N/A
Scenic Attractiveness		Very High	High	Moderate	Low N/A
Geographic Significance		Very High	High	Moderate	Low N/A
Feature Significance:		Very High	High	Moderate	Low N/A
Most Sensitive Feature To Recreation Use	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8				N/A
Feature Sensitivity To Recreation Use:		Very High	High	Moderate	Low N/A
Most Sensitive Feature To Resource Development	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8				N/A
Feature Sensitivity To Resource Development:		Very High	High	Moderate	Low N/A
Cultural/Historic and Archaeological Features:		C	A	B	
Comments					
DATE COMPILED		COMPILER			

Source: Recreation Resource Inventory Checklist and Procedures, OPP/FORP, Div. of Recreation, Ministry of Forests, Reproduction and Forest Practices Branch, March 1986.



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unique feature, activity attraction capability, scenic attractiveness, geographic significance, feature significance, most sensitive feature to recreation use, feature sensitivity to recreation use, most sensitive feature to resource development, feature sensitivity to resource development, cultural/historic and archaeological features and comments.

Most Scarce Feature

A list of eight recreation features is used to identify the scarcest feature associated with the protected area.

Feature Scarcity

Feature scarcity is rated on a scale from very high to low, where not applicable may also be selected.

Most Unique Feature

The most unique feature is selected from the list of features associated with the protected area.

Activity Attraction Capability

The site's activity attraction capability is rated on a scale of very high to low, where not applicable may also be selected.

Scenic Attractiveness

The scenic attractiveness of the site is rated on a scale of very high to low, where not applicable may also be selected.

Geographic Significance

The geographic significance of the protected area is rated using the following criteria: very high = international/national significance, high = provincial significance, moderate = regional significance, low = local or community significance.

Feature Significance

Considering the composite of the previous six factors, feature significance is rated on a scale of very high to low, where not applicable may also be selected.

Most Sensitive Feature to Recreation Use

The feature most sensitive to recreation use is selected from the list of eight features.

Feature Sensitivity to Recreation Use

The feature most sensitive to recreation use is rated on its sensitivity by using a scale of very high to low, where not applicable may also be selected.

Most Sensitive Feature to Resource Development

The feature most sensitive to resource development use is selected from the list of eight features.

Feature Sensitivity to Resource Development

The feature most sensitive to resource development use is rated on its sensitivity by using a scale of very high to low, where not applicable may also be selected.

Cultural/Historic and Archaeological Features

The site is assessed for the presence of cultural features (select C), archaeological features (select A) or both cultural and archaeological features (select B).

Comments

Comments are recorded on any of the data collected.

Date/Compiler

The date of completion and the name of the researcher/compiler is documented.

Limitations of the Methodology

The recreation resource assessment is more subjective than the Ontario Park earth and life science inventories. How we “see” the landscape and what we value is a cognitive process. The researcher is asked be aware of their biases and try to consider the range of activities requested and pursued by the public. Researchers are encouraged to share their findings and discuss them with other staff who have experience with the protected area to help confirm the selections and ratings.

Ontario’s Living Legacy - Year 1 (2000/01) Inventory

Work targets were assigned to park zones, MNR regions and districts. A total of 70 recreation resource assessments are planned for the first year of the parks and protected areas inventory. A number of field trips and working groups have been organised to help test and develop the guidelines.

Summary

The introduction of a new inventory process in the MNR has been a team effort. Many staff have been involved in the review and application of the guidelines. Regular communications regarding the new recreation resource assessment process will continue to be the key to successful implementation.

The new information collected regarding recreation features, activities and the various recreation factors will make a significant contribution to the planning and management of Ontario’s natural heritage.

References

- British Columbia Ministry of Forests. 1995. *Recreation Resource Inventory, Standards and Procedures, Draft Report*. Range Recreation & Forest Practices Branch, Recreation Section. Victoria, B.C.
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