

FOW engages with Armstrong Forest Planning

The Armstrong Forest is currently revising the next ten-year Forest Management Plan (FMP). —Recently FOW President Vern Fish was accepted as our representative to the Armstrong Forest Local Citizen Committee (LCC). Board member and Thunder Bay resident Shawn Bell was accepted as our Alternate. They replace Phil Cotton who was appointed shortly before he passed.

Volume 5 Canoe Routes. There are many canoe routes in the Armstrong Forest which [The Wabakimi Project](#) improved and documented in [FOW Maps Volume 5](#) as well as several major points of entry into Wabakimi Provincial Park. Logging and road development in this Crown land forest will impact the area's habitat and canoe routes.



Vern attended his first meeting on May 27th. This was the LCC's first online meeting, a change which greatly helps our involvement. Vern reports:

“New Logging road. The dominant issue was the location of a road to haul logs out of the northwest corner of the Armstrong Forest.

(See the Dalton Road Extension map. The logging company refers to the road as the Dalton Road Extension but the locals refer to it as the Big Lake Road.)

Alternative #1 would push the existing Big Lake/ Dalton Road north from Armstrong passed Big Lake, Dalton Lake and up to Linklater Lake. At this point the road will swing to the west around the northeast corner of Caribou Lake. From this point the road could go west somewhere south of Campbell Lake and then turn north to gain access to AB-3 (an area bordering Wabakimi Provincial Park).

Alternative #2 (Hollingsworth Road) would push a new road west from the existing McKinley Road and south Hollingsworth Lake. This road would then turn north to AB-3. (However, the February meeting minutes noted that staff had recommended that the McKinley Road be closed north of the Whitesand River crossing. This would include the removal of all man-made structures such as coverts.) Based upon the discussion at the meeting, I do not believe this alternative is still on the table.

The Crown Forest Sustainability Act (1994) states that Ontario's Crown forests will be managed for sustainability while supplying social, economic, environmental needs for present and future generations. Local Citizen Committees involve the public in forest management planning (FMP) for each forest plan.
(Big River photo by Ken Babinchak)

Alternative #3 is an option that came out of the meeting discussion. This would push a road north from the NE corner of Caribou Lake on east side of Hollingsworth Lake and then turn west to reach AB-3. This route would protect a Brook Trout spawning area on Fletcher Creek which is south of Hollingsworth Lake. I am assuming that this route would follow the Dalton Road Extension north pass Big Lake up to northeast corner of Caribou Lake.

To cover the costs of upgrading the existing Dalton Road Extension to handle the logging traffic, MNRF staff recommended that the Dalton Road Extension be given the status of a *primary road*. The primary status opens up significant funding sources but implies that this road will have a more “permanent” status. There were concerns voiced about the longevity of primary roads. Once they are built, “they never go away”. It was also noted a road up into AB-3 will make the Caribou Lake region “less wild”. This could have negative impacts on tourism. All of these road options could impact the Raymond River Canoe Route.”

It was also noted that the Trail Lake Road which travels west from HWY 527 south of Armstrong would also receive upgrades and realignment. This will provide logging access to AB-1 and improve vehicle access to Tamarack Lake and the Boiling Sand River in southeast corner of Wabakimi Provincial Park. It is very likely that this road will stay on the landscape for a long time.”

Logging Roads, the Good and the Bad.

Closing the McKinley Road north of the Whitesands River is a good thing for habitat restoration. However, this particular closure will prevent vehicle access to the Big River canoe route coming out of Lower Pawshowconk Lake. On the other hand, upgrading the Trail Lake Road will improve canoe access to the southwest corner of Wabakimi Provincial Park. The Dalton Road Extension could improve canoe access to both the Raymond River and the Big River Routes. However, this access will reduce the wilderness feel of this area.

In our previous response to the [MNRF Desired Benefits Survey](#), we said, “*Our priority is protecting identified canoe routes and the forest's wildlife, habitat and ecological resources. We do not want to see any more roads than absolutely necessary encroach on the greater Wabakimi wilderness area. However when a road is created and maintained for long-term usage, it should be available to the public...to give paddlers affordable access to existing canoe routes.*”

As noted in park biologist [Shannon Walshe's recent article](#), “*Today, (woodland caribou) numbers are dropping dramatically. At least half of the caribou's range has been lost due to activities that disturb and fragment their forest habitat, such as road building.*” This area is also included in [Ontario's Woodland Caribou Conservation Plan](#). [Key forest planning documents](#) have a goal of harvesting so as to mimic natural processes as way of protecting habitat integrity.

The FOW now has two board members serving on the Armstrong LCC to represent the recreational community and fulfill our mission “*to advocate for the protection and preservation of the diverse natural, cultural and historical resources of the Wabakimi Area*”. We need more involved members. You can join our Conservation Committee discussion, with your [membership Online Profile](#) or email us at friendsofwabakimi@gmail.com