

ONTARIO CROWN LAND CANOE ROUTES

Executive Summary

Traditional and historical canoe routes that lie on the Crown lands of central and northern Ontario are loosely regulated by a confusion of terms used to describe and evaluate them and by disparate prescriptions provided for their protection in separate forest management units and land use planning areas. This important component of the province's cultural and historical heritage is prone to the impacts of resource extraction activities and subject to the competing interests of other stakeholders.

This paper will examine the prescriptions currently in place for the protection of Crown land canoe routes and propose development of a uniform, province-wide set of protective measures to guarantee their continued enjoyment by future generations of both residents and visitors.

Since much of the province's Crown land is impacted by the forest industry, the logical means to achieve this target would be through the forest management planning process which already has in place forest management *guides*--sets of standards, guidelines and best management practices designed to protect an identified cultural, historical, natural or recreational value. Creation of a new *guide* contradicts current trends to minimize the number of forest management guides with which planners must cope. Instead, adapting one or more existing *guides* to include protection of Crown land canoe routes and their land-based components would be the preferred strategy.

Preparation for development of a set of standards, guidelines and best management practices for the protection and conservation of Crown land canoe routes and their related land-based values has already begun with a survey of the prescriptions for their protection that are currently in place in forest management plans. As new forest management plans are developed and approved, the survey is updated to reflect any change of direction that impacts Crown land canoe routes.

A few well-organized, volunteer groups exist whose members actively participate in forest management planning exercises and who work tirelessly to rehabilitate and maintain Crown land canoe routes in selected areas of the province. However, no single group is dedicated to the protection and preservation of *all* Crown land canoe routes. Such an organization is urgently needed to represent the paddling community at large and to spearhead development of a set of protective measures to be applied uniformly to *all* Crown land canoe routes.

Development of these protective measures will require the collaboration of the organization representing recreational canoeists with government agencies and other stakeholders including First Nations, resource extraction and tourism interests and non-government environmental organizations. These groups have widely different interests and often conflicting opinions as to how the province's Crown land and water resources should be managed. Partnering with them will be a challenge requiring patience and tact.

Considerable time, effort and expense will be needed to develop these protective measures. While some costs can be avoided through the efforts of volunteers, sources of funding will have to be secured to offset other inevitable expenses. Formation of a registered, non-profit organization will greatly increase potential to raise revenues.