

# **Ontario Outdoor Cards and the KHSS**

## **A Proposal for Managing Canoe Routes and Campsites Within the KHSS**

Proposed by some Property Owners Of the Kawartha Highlands (POOKHs)

Below, please find suggestions as to how some problems associated with canoe routes and campsites in the Kawartha Highlands Signature Site (KHSS) might be solved, fairly quickly and at low cost. The intent is to provide a low-cost workable solution making use of readily available tools (existing legislation, enforcement procedures and administrative resources that are in place), without in any way compromising the values of the KHSS. The solution proposed should require very little in the way of set up costs and / or time.

### **I. Problems to be Solved:**

For most of the KHSS the density of camp-sites and canoe routes is insufficient to economically justify usual park management models. However, the use of these routes and sites has reached a threshold where some controls must be introduced. The controls described below are intended to address this intermediate situation.

At the Cavendish meeting of the KHSS Local Stakeholders' Committee (LSC) held on September 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2000, nine presentations and recorded comments were made. Most comments, including those of Reeve Tom Flynn, focused on the problems cited below. Since that time similar comments have been made in other parts of the KHSS.

Many, if not most, of the problems that have recently arisen in the KHSS are attributable to overnight-camping issues such as:

- inappropriate disposal of waste,
- inadequate privies,
- inadequate fire-pits and firewood supplies,
- overuse of sites,
- access roads that are inadequate, and
- uncontrolled parking.

These problems are not necessarily, or even usually, the fault of transient visitors. Many of them arrive with little prior knowledge of the area responding to somewhat misleading advertising. Lakes that have been affected include: Beaver, Cold, Wolf, Crab, Big Cedar and Coon.

That we know of, no proposals have been made as to how these problems can be solved quickly and at low cost. Hopefully the suggestions below will be useful in this regard.

It is hoped that these proposals, if implemented, would cause the least possible reduction of FREE USE POLICY privileges for all parties concerned. Some reduction is implicit in the suggestions. Please note that all of the suggestions can be implemented under the provisions of the Public Lands Act and the Free Use Policy, and that no redesignation of General Use Crown Land is necessary or desirable, especially of Crown Land adjacent to private property.

## **II. Firstly, post all acceptable campsites and all areas not suitable for camping, as soon as possible.**

Utilize Section (28) of the Public Lands Act, and Section 3.4.4 a) of the Free Use Policy to clearly post all acceptable campsites, and areas that are not suitable for camping.

**NB:** Obviously, any campsites that are going to be used for somewhere between 100 and 150 days during a season, mid-May to Thanksgiving, or later, require suitable sanitation facilities, at least adequate privies.

Most campsites also require a safe fire-pit and a readily available supply of firewood. If firewood is not readily available (i.e. easily scrounged or supplied) some campers will likely cut down trees, which is undesirable.

If an area does not have a suitable privy, a safe fire-pit and a readily available supply of firewood, it is unsuitable for overnight camping and should be so identified. We suggest, since we are talking about an area with the impressive label "Ontario Signature Site", that picnic tables should also be provided.

## **III. The Ontario Outdoors Card:**

The Ontario Outdoors Card, along with affixed tags, is used to protect, or control, the consumption of, various fish and wildlife Natural Resources. For example, in various areas limited numbers of tags are issued for, say, bull moose to be taken so that harvests will be sustainable. The number of tags issued at various times and in various areas can be adjusted to reflect current data regarding the conditions and inventories of the resource being harvested. Why not use these cards to control and preserve our camping resources?

We propose that the Ontario Outdoors Card with, say, the KHSS Camping Tag affixed be used:

- to control numbers of persons accessing the KHSS for overnight camping purposes,
- to manage access and parking for transient visitors,
- to facilitate proper garbage disposal by transient visitors (overnight campers) to the area, and
- to capture data required to plan the future management of the KHSS.

## **Ontario Outdoors Cards are affordable and readily available:**

Once a person has an Outdoors Card the MNR has made it easy to renew them: by automated telephone service, over the internet, at 60 Service Ontario Kiosk locations, by mail or at MNR Offices. At \$6.00 for three years, they are affordable. Persons wishing to go fishing or hunting are already required to have these cards with tags attached to them. Why not overnight campers in areas where camp-sites are in limited supply?

Once a person has an Outdoors card the MNR has also made it quite convenient to acquire the various tags, or licences, that are required to be attached to the Outdoors Card for specific purposes. The Minden and Bancroft District Offices have advised us that there are twenty-five and fifty-seven private businesses in their Districts, respectively, where persons can obtain tags for Outdoors Cards.

**NB:** In short, the administrative apparatus for dispensing these cards and tags is already in place. Only relatively small set up costs should be required to add another tag.

#### **IV. Purposes for the KHSS Camping Tag and Canoe Route Management:**

##### **1) Proper Waste Disposal:**

The KHSS Camping Tag could be recognized as a pass to local landfill sites. Presently, only tax-paying residents receive passes to our landfill sites. As a result, even devoted “no-trace campers” have no convenient way to properly dispose of refuse.

Suppose that a family of four “no-trace campers” from London Ontario spends a week camping in the KHSS, say on Bottle Lake, and that they leave on a Thursday to spend the weekend at a hotel in Peterborough, before returning home to London on the following Monday. What are their options to dispose of their waste?

- They cannot take it to the Cavendish landfill site because they do not have a pass.
- They could try to dispose of it at some local business between Cavendish and Peterborough, which is unfair.
- They could take it to the hotel in Peterborough.
- They could save it in their van for a hot weekend in July or August and take it back to London on the Monday.
- Or, they could dispose of it somewhere along the road between Cavendish and Peterborough.

Which option is most likely to be exercised?

Of course, an appropriate portion of the KHSS Camping Tag fee should be paid to the municipalities to compensate them for additional landfill site costs. If it becomes necessary to increase the number of hours for which landfill site attendants are required, then this cost should be included in the cost of the tag.

Appropriate maps showing the locations of camp-sites, landfill sites, parking, and other educational literature could be distributed with the KHSS Camp Tags.

##### **2) Control the number of persons occupying a site:**

Obviously sites that may be used continuously for between 100 and 150 days per season require some sanitary facilities, at least properly designed privies. These facilities, and other aspects of a campsite, present limitations that must be recognized. These limitations should be recognized on the KHSS Camping Tag by specifying the maximum number of persons that may occupy each particular site at one time.

The number of KHSS Camping Tags to be issued for any time period cannot exceed the number of sites identified as outlined in Section II above.

##### **3) Specify check-in and check-out times for each site:**

Some sites are suitable for occupation by the same group for more than one day at a time. Most of the sites on Bottle and Sucker Lakes would fall into this category. They are not, usually, part of a “point-to-point” route; although some of them could be.

Other sites, because they are on a “point-to-point canoe-route”, might not be suitable for occupation by the same group for more than a day. Each group would have to move on to make way for the group following them. In either case, campers would have to observe check-in and checkout dates and times, and these would be specified on the KHSS Tag.

Flexibility regarding the direction in which campers traverse routes could be provided on, say, the Long Lake to Cold Lake route. Number the sites, then reserve odd-numbered sites for eastbound traffic and even-numbered sites for westbound traffic.

#### **4) Parking could also be controlled:**

As well as specifying how many persons might occupy a site, it would also be desirable to specify the maximum number of cars that could be used by a particular party on the routes; and where (on Crown Land), and for how long, those cars could be parked. Certain parking areas are logically associated with certain campsites and canoe routes, but there is room for choice, including privately owned parking facilities.

**NB:** It is obvious that parking areas require privies, especially if they are near private properties; and they will require proper maintenance, probably daily.

Some parking spaces are required for property owners who do not have roads to their properties. They should receive complimentary parking passes for themselves and their guests.

#### **5) Capture Usage and Planning Data:**

Proper design of the data captured on Tag Applications would be useful for a variety of management purposes.

#### **6) Day-use activities exempt:**

**NB:** There is no reason why day-use activities, such as hiking or fishing, should require KHSS Camping Tags. If they are exempted, then the negative impacts with regard to diminishing the Free Use Privileges of local cottagers and other day-use visitors will be minimized.

#### **7) Enforcement:**

There are about 130 campsites in regular use distributed throughout the KHSS as shown on the attached map. It is suggested that they be patrolled, as required, by Conservation Officers who would be performing other duties in the area such as checking creel contents.

A Conservation Officer leaving Minden could easily patrol the sites in Cavendish in a day, and return home that day, with the help of an assistant, a square stern canoe and a small motor. A CO leaving Bancroft in the morning and returning home the same day could, probably, patrol the sites in the Anstruther Recreation Reserve and on Wolf and Crab Lakes, or those on Long and Loucks Lakes.

Patrolling the sites between Loucks Lake and Cold Lake would require more time.

#### **8) Scheduling:**

It is likely that software currently being used to confirm reservations in Provincial Parks could easily be modified to solve this relatively small scheduling problem. Once again, set up costs should be minimal.

#### **9) Maintenance of Routes, Sites and Parking Areas:**

Privies, fire-pits and wood supplies will require regular attention by MNR Staff.

Because of the traveling time that will be required if maintenance crews live off site, we suggest that it might be practical to have four or five two-person, properly equipped crews reside on the canoe routes for the season. Please consider the attached map. It seems that one crew would be required for the KHPP area, a second for the Anstruther Recreation Reserve Area, and two or three crews for the Burleigh-Harvey Recreation Reserve Area.

Patrolling the routes and sites, and carrying out routine maintenance would be a fabulous job for a number of students. If students from a university co-op program were hired, then the shoulder seasons could also be covered. The presence of these crews on the routes would also tend to discourage abusive activities.

## **10) Modified Management Areas:**

Whenever campsites or parking areas are proposed in close proximity to private property, then the provisions of the Bancroft and Minden District Land Use Guidelines to provide for Modified Management Areas should be utilized to mitigate potential conflicts between visitors to the area and nearby property owners.

These property owners should also be provided with contact numbers for MNR Staff who will be responsible for ensuring that reasonable behavior codes are observed at all campsites and parking areas, on a 24 x 7 basis.

## **V. Summary:**

By taking advantage of existing tools (Outdoors Cards, the system for distributing them, scheduling programs, the PLA and the Free Use Policy provisions for signage) which are working well to protect other scarce natural resources, the costs in time and money to effect the necessary controls is minimized.

The solution proposed addresses the real causes of most current problems in the KHSS with minimal impact on the FREE USE POLICY benefits of persons not contributing to the problem, for example day-users, most of whom would be local residents. These persons have traditionally been very protective of the KHSS area.

This solution is not perfect; however, it offers an improvement over the current situation. Our goal is BETTER, not necessarily perfect. It is also a WIN-WIN solution.

**WINNERS: The MNR and the Provincial Government.** The novel and highly visible action involving Ontario Outdoor Cards proposed will be seen as a very definite step towards protecting the environment and the KHSS in particular.

**WINNERS: The Municipalities.** Road crews will spend less time picking up litter and the municipalities will be compensated for the impact on landfill sites. Otherwise, the litter picked up by road crews and volunteer residents winds up in the landfill sites with no compensation.

**WINNERS: Local residents** who will benefit from less rubbish to pick up and controlled use of parking areas.

**WINNERS: Transient visitors** win since they will, hopefully, find campsites meeting acceptable standards and predictable parking accommodation when they arrive.

## **The Downside:**

There is a downside. We are faced with the fact that the availability of suitable campsites is limited, and therefore unlimited and uncontrolled consumption of this resource cannot continue. Imposing fees and controls on this consumption impacts the provisions of the Free Use Policy, and this is truly unfortunate. But there is no alternative.

## **VI. Addendum:**

According to Meteck, only the existing Kawartha Highlands Provincial Park (KHPP) has the soil capacity required to accommodate drive-in campsites in the usual sense of the term. If this development occurs, then the system described above should likely be replaced by the usual park management model for the KHPP Area. However, the system proposed above could still work for the relatively dispersed campsites throughout the remainder (non-KHPP) parts of the KHSS in the Anstruther and Burleigh-Harvey Recreation Reserves.

In order that visitors to the area not be misled by the term "park"; which implies to most persons - running water, showers and other amenities - it is suggested that non-KHPP areas should not be referred to as "parks". The long-existing "recreation reserve" terminology is preferable, and less likely to be misunderstood by visiting campers.