

The Algonquin Eco Watcher



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This radio-collared black bear was legally shot outside Algonquin Park in the fall of 1996.

ALGONQUIN BLACK BEAR STUDY

The Algonquin Black Bear Study, which was funded by AEW in 1998, has established that over half of the dominant radio collared male bears that leave Algonquin Park after the breeding season, in search of food such as berries, fail to return to the Park prior to the opening of the fall hunting season and are shot by hunters. The loss of so many dominant males will negatively affect the social structure of this insular black bear population and could eventually lead to the degradation of the gene pool.”

UPDATE: The Algonquin Black Bear Study gathered considerable new data during the 1998 field season. As in past years, field data will be summarized and submitted to Algonquin Park staff prior to the commencement of the 1999 field season. This study is scheduled to conclude in the year 2002, by which time 10 years of data will have been collected for analysis and summary. It is our hope that this study, in addition to teaching us more about the seasonal feeding habits and movement patterns of Algonquin male black bears, will shed new light on the perplexing question of why large adult male black bears (rarely) attack humans.

SOURCE WATERS

There are at least 20 headwater areas outside the perimeter of Algonquin Park, which drain into the seven major river systems that flow through and out of the Park. Since these headwater areas are not subject to the same restrictive development criteria as Park waters, it is important not only to establish benchmark physical and chemical characteristics in these waters, but also to ensure that degradation does not occur in these areas over time. Such degradation would negatively affect downstream waters in Algonquin Park.



The tiny headwater lake in the centre of this photo is typical of the hundreds of vulnerable spring-fed source waters that provide the flow for 7 major rivers which originate on the Algonquin Dome.

UPDATE: 1) As a result of the long-term implications of the Lands for Life initiative, Algonquin Eco Watch (AEW) made two submissions to the Great Lakes Roundtable recommending the protection of headwaters in general, but in particular for those areas surrounding Algonquin Park. While the concept of headwater protection appears to have been accepted by the Roundtable, the designation “Stewardship Reserves” by the Ontario government falls short of the goal in that it appears to allow for exploration, staking and mining activity within these reserves. Further correspondence on this issue has ensued. As of January 1999, the Ontario Government had not made public the final decisions relating to this complex exercise. AEW will be closely following developments in this regard.

2) AEW has now completed a detailed survey of the Tyne Creek Watershed, one of the more than 20 headwater areas mentioned above.

3) AEW, the Federation of Ontario Naturalists, the Wildlands League and the Sierra Legal Defence Fund filed an Application for Investigation under the Environmental Bill of Rights. Of major concern is the effect that acidification from a graphite mine on the shore of Graphite Lake near Kearney, Ontario, is having on the headwaters of the North and South branches of the Magnetawan River and may have upon the headwaters of the Tim River (which flows through Algonquin Park), if the proposed mine expansion occurs. In December 1998, AEW met with the mine owner in an attempt to establish a working rapport, which will hopefully result in the long-term rehabilitation of the site. Plans are presently underway to gather representatives of the participating parties together at a meeting in early 1999, so that all aspects of the problem can be discussed. Serious difficulties remain.

4) At the request of a member of the public, AEW investigated the development of an aggregate (garnet) quarry in a headwater area outside the north boundary of Algonquin Park in Papineau Township. While we would prefer to see a complete hydrological survey of the area conducted prior to the commencement of blasting, for the time being we have contacted the local municipal governments as well as the Ontario Ministries of Natural Resources and Environment, respectively to express our concerns.

GROUND POLLUTANTS

In 1996, after discontinuing the use of their track through Algonquin Park, the CNR hired a contractor to remove rails and ties and generally clean up the right-of-way prior to decommissioning. AEW has been following this activity closely



The removal of the C.N.R. line through Algonquin Park is presenting some clean-up problems.

and has identified several issues, which we have brought to the attention of the Park Superintendent. Specifically, the cap material topping the rail bed is comprised of a 10-15cm layer of slag from mines in the Sudbury Basin. Analysis of this material indicates greatly elevated levels of heavy metals; some of which are highly toxic and/or carcinogenic when compared to the local substrate. AEW feels that this material should be removed from Algonquin Park prior to the completion of decommissioning.

In addition, we estimate that there may be as many as 200 culverts passing beneath the railbed within Algonquin Park, many of which are “perched”, or raised at the outflow so that fish cannot access the upper reaches of the creeks that flow through them. Since many of these creeks are known brook trout nursery creeks, to leave these culverts in place will continue to obstruct the reproductive success of such species as brook trout.

UPDATE: AEW feels that a complete environmental study should be conducted prior to the completion of the decommissioning process. It should include confirmation that 1) all sites of petroleum product pollution such as greasers and mechanical servicing facilities have been thoroughly rehabilitated, 2) all known spill sites have been properly assessed and rehabilitated where necessary, 3) the land adjacent to the rail bed right-of-way has been thoroughly checked, on foot, for the presence of old ties (containing creosote), many of which were discarded off the right-of-way during normal maintenance, 4) all potential spawning beds in creeks and lakes adjacent to the right-of-way be assessed for the presence of slag material, which should be subsequently removed. AEW feels that all culverts should be removed with subsequent appropriate streambed rehabilitation.

THE ALGONQUIN MOOSE HERD



If there is an icon synonymous with Algonquin, surely it must be the moose; whether it be a prime bull with his magnificent antlers, or a cow protecting her young calf. Since the early 1990's, the Ontario government has agreed to the harvesting of up to 100 moose by native groups annually from the north-eastern 40% of Algonquin Park, as part of on-going land claims. From a biological standpoint this hunt has been carefully controlled to ensure that an overharvest of this self-sustaining moose population does not occur. Native hunters have consistently shown their desire to conduct a responsible hunt through the process of self-regulation. They feel

that this hunt represents a valuable step forward, both morally and tangibly, in their on-going quest to receive recognition of their traditional way of life. Algonquin Eco Watch is concerned regarding the implications, both ethical and biological, of this on-going hunt, which in effect has created a new Wildlife Management Unit in an area where no legal hunt had been conducted for 100 years. Of greater concern is the fact that the Government of Ontario appears to have recognized these hunting rights as an interim measure during land claim negotiations, but no longer is actively negotiating in good faith with native groups.

UPDATE: AEW has discussed this topic with Algonquin Park staff, as well as Sean Conway, MPP, and is approaching various native representatives in an effort to promote a better climate of communication. We will endeavour to continue these discussions in the hope that the negotiating process may be continued with renewed vigour, ultimately resulting in satisfaction to all parties, while minimizing changes to the Algonquin Ecosystem.

Wherein lies the future? Where else but in the minds of today's young people. If the importance of irreplaceable ecosystems can be planted in the young minds of to-day, then there is hope for tomorrow.

UPDATE: As an ongoing attempt to affiliate with educators and to carry our message into the Ontario school system, AEW set up a booth and made a presentation at the 1998 Conference of the Society for Environmental Education, held at the Leslie



M. Frost Centre near Dorset, Ont. In the fall of 1998, AEW sent letters of introduction, with accompanying literature, to the Renfrew County Board of Education and the Trillium Lakelands District School Board, offering to address the members of the respective boards. To date there has been no response to these letters. In December, 1998, AEW made a presentation to the Outdoor Education class at F.J. McElligot High School in Mattawa, Ont. Schools in the near vicinity of the

Algonquin Ecosystem are felt to be especially important in any educational program, since many of the students can relate to the subject based on personal experience. AEW will attempt to continue and expand an education program aimed primarily at high school aged students, with secondary emphasis at the public school level.

ECOTOURISM

The burgeoning nature-tourism or ecotourism industry has created never-before-encountered challenges within the Algonquin Ecosystem. It is known that the increase of Park visitation can have significant impact on the local natural environment, from soil damage, to structural damage to vegetation, to stresses on wildlife that alter natural behaviour patterns.

UPDATE: AEW commissioned a paper entitled "Recreation and Algonquin Park" to assess the issues outlined above. This paper will form the basis of an AEW position paper to be submitted for consideration at the upcoming Algonquin Park Master Plan review.

BIODIVERSITY

A major purpose of Algonquin Park should be to retain the natural biodiversity that was present in this area long before people started to dominate the Park. This requires careful study and maintenance of many kinds of forest stands and wildlife species.

UPDATE: 1) As a result of consultation between AEW, the Algonquin Park Superintendent, and the Algonquin Forestry Authority, a silvicultural shortcoming has been rectified. Prior to this agreement, total silvicultural management - i.e. the removal of all yellow-marked trees, 10 centimetre D.B.H. (diameter breast height) and greater was not being implemented in Algonquin Park. Failure to remove these trees marked for removal lessened the ability of that forest stand to achieve maximum growth potential during the upcoming rotation period. As a result of this agreement, total stand improvement will now be fully implemented in Algonquin Park by the AFA by March 31, 2002.



Horse skidding in vulnerable riparian areas would reduce logging damage considerably.

2) In preparation for the implementation of the Algonquin Park Forest Management Plan for the years 2000-2020, AEW made a presentation to the joint Local Citizens Committee/Planning Committee on November 25, 1998.

AEW drew attention to new research, which indicates that successful reproduction of brook trout may depend on ground water seepage and adjacent small inflowing surface water creeks for successful spawning and early stage development, and cautioned that logging practices must reflect awareness of these areas.

In spite of many advances in the field of mechanized logging, damage mainly as a result of poor skidding practices, remains a major concern. AEW will be making further presentations on the practicality of horse logging in Algonquin Park in specific circumstances.

The above topics all imply the need for a greater auditing presence - i.e. a more concerted effort to identify potential problems and deal with them before remedial action becomes necessary. Consultation with a certified hydrologist relating particularly to the proximity of logging roads to lakes, creeks and marshes is recommended. AEW also recommends that a program be implemented whereby members of the public could receive permission to visit logging operations in company with a staff member of either the AFA or MNR. Perhaps by limiting this courtesy only to members of chartered organizations, numbers could be kept to a minimum, while at the same time allowing access to groups with a demonstrated interest in the well-being of the Algonquin ecosystem.

SPECIES MAINTENANCE



The above photos show the Galeairy Lake Dam before (left) and after (right) repairs were carried out that will ensure stable water levels for lake trout spawning. A good-news story!

ISSUE: Species Maintenance

UPDATE: In the fall of 1997, AEW observed major leakage of water between the stoplogs and through structural cracks in the wingwalls in the Galeairy Lake dam. Galeairy Lake, a major lake trout lake on the Madawaska River system, straddles the Algonquin Park boundary. It is essential that water levels do not drop during lake trout incubation and early fry stages (Oct-May). As it is not possible to guarantee water level stability however, if leakage is occurring through and around the control structure, AEW wrote a letter to the Bancroft District Manager of the Ministry of Natural Resources, requesting that consideration be given to repairing the dam as soon as possible.

Extensive repair work was carried out to the dam in the fall of 1998, and as a result of this work, there is no longer any leakage, and water level stability has been achieved.

A Message From the Board of Directors

The Algonquin Eco Watch Board of Directors is comprised of seven individuals from diverse backgrounds. We are a retired financial administrator, a dean of forestry, a homemaker, a registered nurse, an environmental lawyer, a communication specialist and a retired biologist - a group of people who share a concern for the well-being of the Algonquin Ecosystem.

Algonquin Eco Watch is committed to finding solutions through cooperative effort, rather than confrontation. We believe that the chances of success are greater using this approach, since it is positive in nature.

We sincerely hope that after having read this update, you will contact us with your ideas as to how we may best work toward our goal. Your concerns can be our concerns. Solutions are often surprisingly simple, and can be made doubly so, if ideas are shared.

Watch for further updates as Algonquin Eco Watch continues to work toward the long-term protection of the Algonquin Ecosystem.

You can learn more about Algonquin Eco Watch by checking our website (www.algonquin-eco-watch.com), or requesting literature from our toll free number 1-888-894-TREE. A donation (membership) form is included below for your convenience.

Goal Statement: To assess, protect and sustain the Algonquin Ecosystem for the future.

Note: Algonquin Eco Watch now has a 10x10ft. sectional booth, which can be used for displaying our message at appropriate outdoors and sports shows. In 1998, we attended the Outdoor Adventure Show in Toronto, and distributed considerable literature to visitors. In 1999, we will be setting up our booth during the Canoe Expo at the Metro East Trade Centre in Pickering, Ont.

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DONATION FORM

Anyone donating \$15.00 or more will receive a 1 year membership plus a tax deductible receipt. The Algonquin Eco Watch Group is a registered Canadian charity.
Donations can be mailed to:

ALGONQUIN ECO WATCH, RR#1, Spring Bay, Ontario, P0P 2B0
Please make cheques payable to "Algonquin Eco Watch"

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