The Algonquin Eco Watcher

ALGONQUIN ECO WATCH

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Volume 2 ◆ Number 1 ◆ Spring-Summer 2000

BATHING IN THE LAKE — THE CHOICE IS YOURS

The pure water of Canisbay Creek, upstream from Highway 60, Algonquin Park

The controversy rages on: is it acceptable to bathe and wash our hair in the lake? The inclusion in soaps and shampoos of chemical compounds such as phosphates, which fertilize and accelerate ageing of lakes, has largely been abandoned in recent years. To assume, however, that the addition of bath products no longer poses a threat to Algonquin lakes is probably wishful thinking.

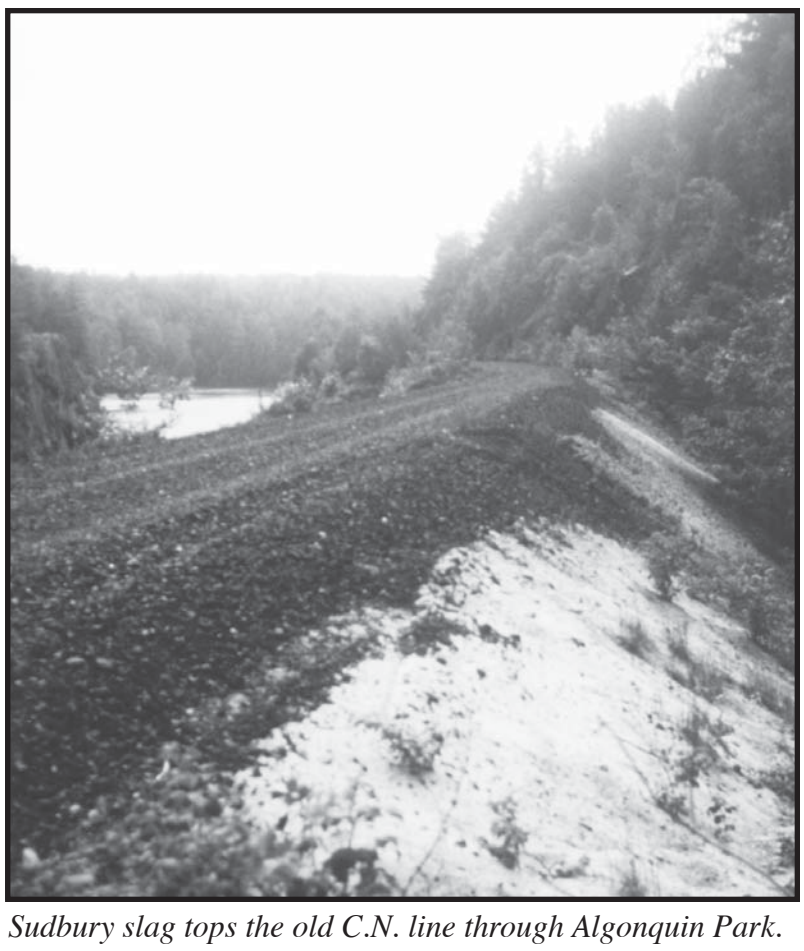
Pure water is comprised of molecules consisting of 2 hydrogen atoms bound to 1 atom of oxygen. Every time something is added to water, it loses some of its purity and instead becomes a dilute solution of those additives. Following is the chemical formula of a popular brand of shampoo: Water. Sodium laureth sulphate. Sodium lauryl sulphate. Cocamidopropyl betaine. Aloe barbadensis extract. Chamomile (Anthemis nobilis) extract. Passionflower (Passiflora incarnata) extract. Cocamide MEA. Dihydroxypropyl PEG-5 linoleaminum chloride. Fragrance. Citric acid. Propylene glycol. Sodium chloride. DMDM hydantoin. Iodopropynyl butylcarbamate. FD&C Yellow No.5. D&C Orange No.4. Ext. D&C Violet No.2. Considering the large numbers of people annually utilizing Algonquin, is it desirable to introduce potentially large amounts of foreign substances into the waters of a natural environment ecosystem? The answer becomes a matter of conscience. It is well to remember that even those natural elements left behind from biodegradable products are additives which were not previously present in the water. The use of a bucket to wash ourselves away from the shore ensures that the majority of chemical compounds will be bound up in the soil and not reach the lake water.

Consider the lowly sponge! A natural “Loofah” sponge can be purchased in any drugstore for about the price of a cake of soap and can be re-used indefinitely. It is lighter than a cake of soap and can be squeezed into any corner of a packsack. Brisk rubbing with the sponge, followed by a dip in the lake, will remove dead skin, most of the “offensive” odour, and leave the body feeling tingly and clean – without adding manufactured chemical compounds to the lake.

The addition of scents to soaps and shampoos has implications other than just chemical degradation of pure water. It is generally accepted that perfumes attract insects such as mosquitoes and black flies. Many scents and perfumes contain chemical compounds known as pheromones, which act as sexual attractants. The release of these aromatic compounds in a natural environment may affect the normal behaviour patterns of local wildlife in unpredictable ways. While not much is known about the introduction of such compounds to a wild landscape, why tamper with Nature?

Finally, we like to think that the water droplet depicted in the Algonquin Eco Watch logo is comprised ONLY of oxygen and hydrogen.

REMEMBER - THE CHOICE IS YOURS.



Sudbury slag tops the old C.N. line through Algonquin Park.

SLAG AND HEAVY METALS

A uniform layer of slag, 10-15cm deep, from mines in the Sudbury Basin, caps the former Canadian National Railway (CNR) right-of-way along its entire length through Algonquin Park. Particle size ranges from dust to approximately 10cm in diameter. Tests conducted for Algonquin Eco Watch at Laurentian University in Sudbury indicated that concentrations of nickel, cadmium, lead, cobalt and chromium in the slag all exceed acceptable levels for ingestion by animals. Nickel, cadmium, cobalt and chromium are all known carcinogens, i.e. they cause cancer - while lead is known to be a dangerous toxin.

Of particular concern is the fact that birds ingest small “ rock” particles to aid in gizzard function as part of the digestive process. Constant rubbing together of these rock particles in the gizzard, however, wears them down, after which the components are assimilated into the bird’s tissues. A recently published paper entitled “Grit Ingestion as a Source of Metal Exposure in the Spruce Grouse, (Dendragopus canadensis)”, by L.I. Bendell-Young and J.F. Bendell (1999), stated that “ … ingestion of grit results in exposure to toxic trace elements such as Cd (cadmium) which in turn is accumulating in the liver”.

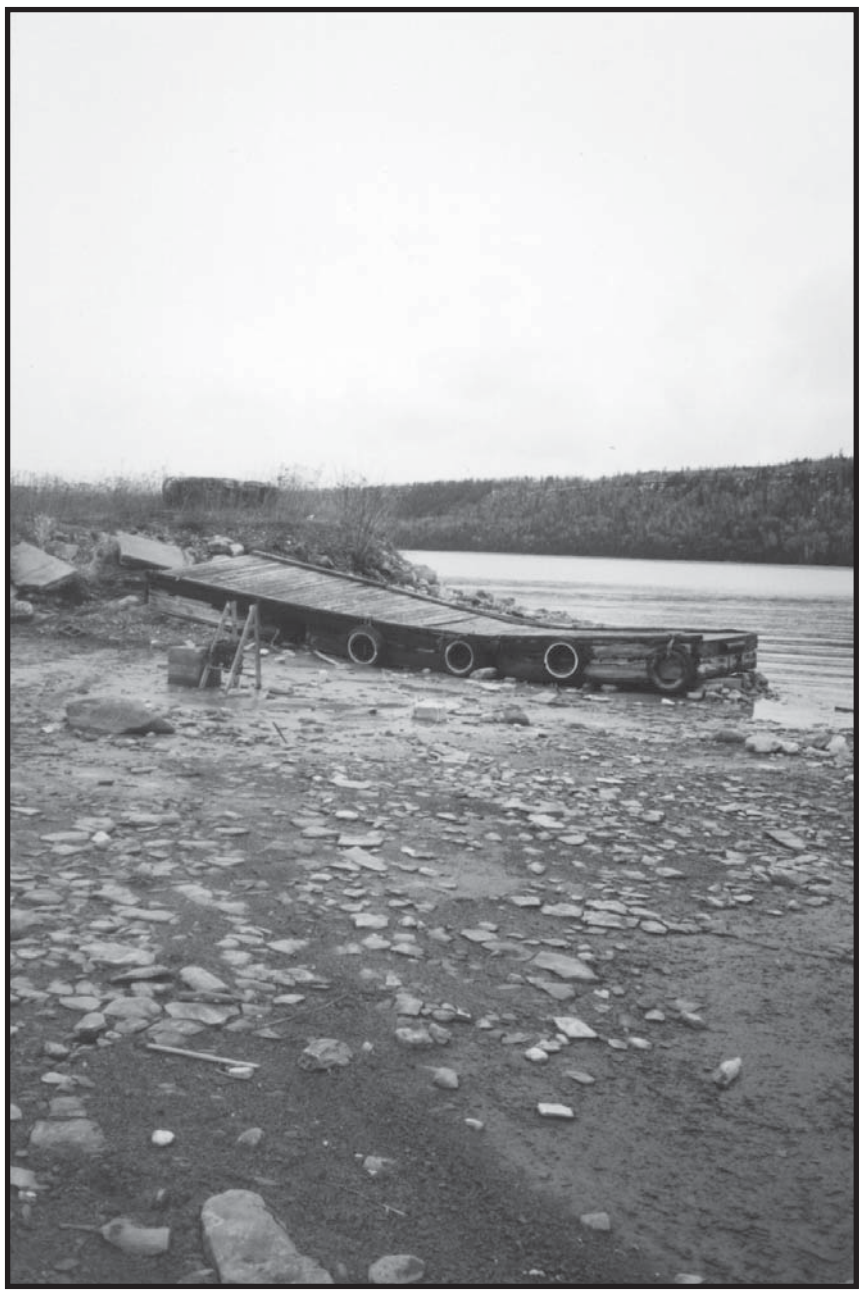
Additional concern exists for Algonquin fish life in waters adjacent to the right-of-way as leaching of slag into these waters is likely.

Since Algonquin Park is classed as a “Natural Environment” park, Algonquin Eco Watch wonders whether or not this “ outside” material should be allowed to stay after the decommissioning of the CNR line. We invite comments from our members.

WATER AND THE NEW MILLENNIUM

As of October 12th,1999, 6 billion people were alive in the world; an addition of one billion in only 12 years. World population is growing at 78 million a year, a little less than the total population of Germany. It has doubled since 1960. These facts are contained in a document released in September 1999, by the UNFPA, the United Nations Population Fund, 220 East 42nd St., New York. N.Y. 100017, U.S.A. (www.unfpa.org) . The document further states "One fourth of the world's people are likely to live in countries facing chronic or recurring shortages of fresh water by the year 2050".

The Algonquin Ecosystem, a unique and perpetual source of pure water, receives much of its atmospheric precipitation as a result of condensation from the cooling of warm moist westerly winds rising over the Algonquin Dome, after having crossed the warm waters of Lake Huron and Georgian Bay. This "perpetual engine" is fueled bythe surface waters of Lake Huron/Georgian Bay and, therefore, is a direct result of the open water surface of these 2 water bodies. In the past several years, the level of Lake Huron has dropped approximately 4 feet (1.3m), decreasing the surface area by a measurable, though small, percentage. Further drops are predicted for this year. This decreased surface area will be reflected proportionately by a decrease in precipitation over the Algonquin Dome. This phenomenon may be due solely to natural causes such as several consecutive dry summers. However, Algonquin Eco Watch has contacted the Great Lakes Institute in Burlington, Ontario in an effort to ascertain whether or not such additional factors as the withdrawal of large amounts of water from the system by the city of Chicago, with subsequent discharge into the Mississippi River, may also be contributing to the problem. While the connection between the upcoming world water shortage, the Algonquin Ecosystem and the Lake Huron/Georgian Bay water levels may seem somewhat tenuous, it nevertheless exists and serves to point up the fact that no ecosystem should be considered to function in isolation.



This dock at Gore Bay, Manitoulin Island, is no longer usable, owing to the low water level in Lake Huron.

VISIT TO 5 LOGGING OPERATIONS (THIRD PARTY PARTICIPATION)

Algonquin Eco Watch has been extremely fortunate in obtaining the contract services of Mr. Jack Mihell, professional forester, to assist with on-going field visits to Algonquin logging operations. During the winter of 1999- 2000, we were able to visit 5 operations, of our own choosing, in the Tim Lake, McManus Lake-Lake Traverse blowdown, Hogan Lake, Grizzly Lake and Louisa Lake areas.

Algonquin Eco Watch has no alliance with the Algonquin Forestry Authority (AFA), or any logging companies. Indeed, we attempted unsuccessfully to have horse logging re- introduced to Algonquin during the recent Forest Management Plan Review. We do feel, however, that the most feasible way to maintain diversity in the Algonquin Ecosystem is through properly controlled logging and silvicultural procedures. For this reason we will continue to conduct up to 6 field inspections annually and maintain an open dialogue with Ontario Parks staff, the AFA, and the logging industry.

Following is an excerpt from a letter of March 7, 2000, to the Superintendent of Algonquin Park: "While we observed some points which may prompt future discussion, most were of a minor nature and were mentioned in our notes. We are comfortable that all parties involved with Forest Management in Algonquin Park are acting in good faith to assure that Forest Management Guidelines are complied with". Copies of field notes made during inspections are available to members of Algonquin Eco Watch upon request.

This portable metal bridge, spanning a brook trout nursery creek, was fabricated for the Algonquin Forestry Authority, and can be removed for use elsewhere, with no resulting damage to the creek bed.

FISHERIES TRENDS

On January 13th, 2000, as a result of a request from one of our members, Algonquin Eco Watch spent several hours discussing fishing trends in Algonquin Park with staff members of the Algonquin Fisheries Assessment Unit (AFAU). White Partridge and Smoke Lakes are two of the Algonquin lakes which receive fairly intense angling pressure; the former as a result of horse cart access via outfitters and the latter resulting from its proximity to highway 60. Both lakes have been subjected to long term monitoring by the AFAU. Following is a summary of our discussion.

White Partridge Lake:

- While there are no clear cut trends in angler effort or success, a definite change in the proportions of lake and brook trout has been noted; specifically, the proportion of brook trout has drastically declined, while the proportion of lake trout has increased.
- It is felt that this may indicate a decline in brook trout stocks.
- More monitoring is to be done in 2000, after which it might be possible to better explain proportional population changes.

Smoke Lake:

- A slot limit (lake trout must be less than 40cm(15.7in) or greater than 55cm(21.7in) in length for anglers to possess) has now been in effect long enough to be able to say that the fishery has recovered as a result of slot limit implementation.
- AFAU staff are very favourably impressed with the slot limit as a management tool to protect lake trout as they pass through their maximum spawn producing years.

General:

- There is unanimous agreement among AFAU staff that "the quickest way to destroy a trout fishery is to open it for winter fishing".
- This has been well documented in the fisheries literature.
- Algonquin Eco Watch will continue to maintain a dialogue with the Algonquins of Ontario, as represented by the Algonquin Nation Negotiations Interim Directorate (ANNID), in this regard. A fishing agreement, similar to the hunting agreement presently in effect, would be very desirable to all parties.

THE ALGONQUIN NATION OF ONTARIO

On October 26th,1999, Algonquin Eco Watch met with members of the Algonquin Nation Negotiations Interim Directorate (ANNID), representing the Algonquin Nation in Ontario in land claim negotiations, at Mattawa. On January 13th, 2000, we met with members of the Algonquins of Pikwakanagan at Golden Lake. The purpose of these meetings was to discuss issues of mutual concern, such as winter fishing for brook and lake trout, removal and subsequent use of the CNR line, and the graphite mine near Kearney.

Algonquin Eco Watch made slide presentations at both these meetings to illustrate the fragile nature of brook trout fisheries and their vulnerability to winter fishing pressure. The concept of "Catch and Consume", whereby fish caught in Algonquin Park would have to be consumed in the Park, was discussed and will be actively pursued. We will endeavour to continue this type of interaction with the Algonquins.

Regarding fisheries matters, Algonquin Eco Watch will contact the Algonquin Fish and Wildlife Commission and after explaining our concerns, enter into discussions with them on that topic.

Algonquin Eco Watch remains committed to assisting an Algonquin post secondary student who is pursuing higher education in the field of resource management, and will proceed in that regard once candidate names are received.

BEARS AND HEAVY METALS

Large male Algonquin black bear.

As part of the on-going Algonquin Black Bear Study, Algonquin Eco Watch submitted bear kidney and liver tissue, collected from bears hunted outside Algonquin Park, to Laurentian University for heavy metal analysis. Since it is known that excessive accumulation of certain heavy metals can lead to aberrant behaviour in humans, it was reasoned that bears may be similarly affected, offering an additional possible explanation of why bears (very rarely) attack humans. The presence of land fill (dump) sites adjacent to Algonquin Park, many of which are visited by Algonquin bears, increases the possibility of these animals, and particularly dominant adult males, coming in contact with sources of heavy metals such as paints, batteries and petroleum products.

Results of the analysis indicate elevated cadmium levels in kidney tissue of all bears tested. Moreover, it appears that the presence of cadmium is cumulative and increases with age.

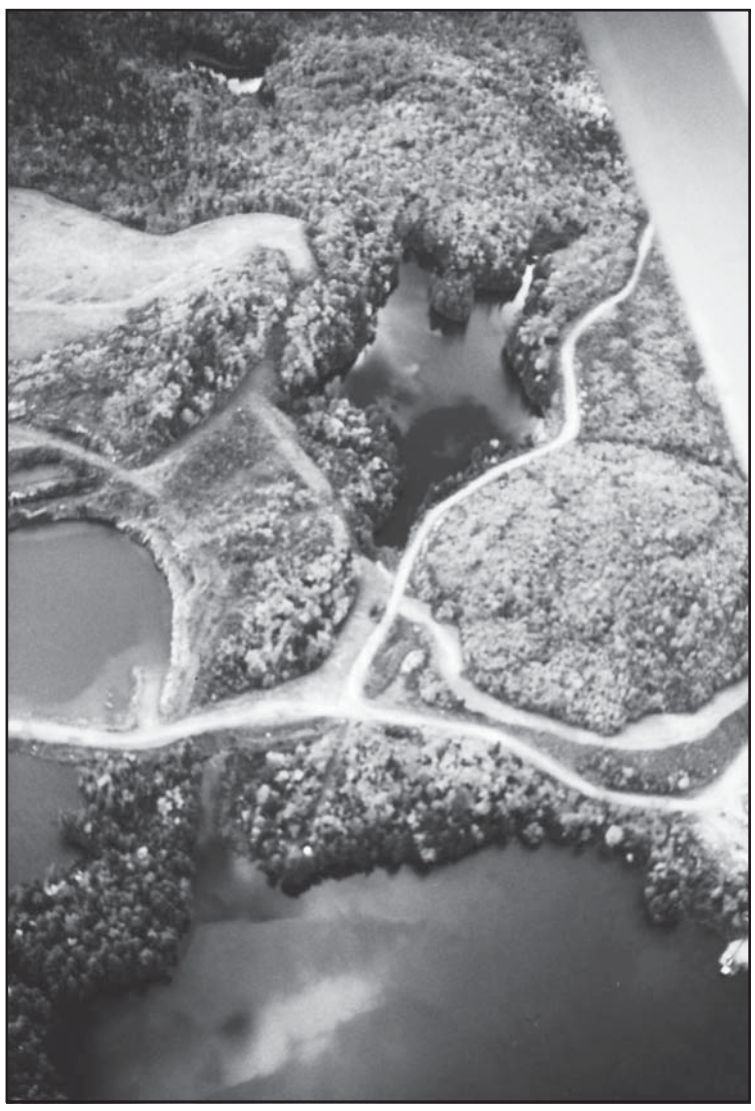
We are uncertain as to the implications of these findings, but not too many years ago, the Province of Ontario advised against the eating of moose and deer kidneys because of – you guessed it – elevated cadmium levels.

Individuals interested in learning more about the Algonquin Black Bear Study may do so by visiting our website (www.algonquin-eco-watch.com).

GRAPHITE MINE

As a result of a joint request from Algonquin Eco Watch, the Wildlands League, the Federation of Ontario Naturalists and two citizens, the Ontario Ministry of the Environment issued a Control Order on August 6th, 1999, against the owners of the graphite mine at Graphite Lake, immediately outside the western boundary of Algonquin Park. The final order calls for the removal of acid generating rock from several locations within the work site, but failed to include the rehabilitation of Minnow Creek, a condition which was present in the draft order that was distributed to the concerned parties at a meeting on March 23rd, 1999. The original Minnow Creek bed was filled in (see adjacent photo) to facilitate the movement of ore trucks.

Algonquin Eco Watch will continue to actively pursue this matter.



Minnow Creek, which previously flowed from Minnow Lake (upper) to Graphite Lake (lower), was filled with rock to facilitate the transportation of ore.

OUR MEMBERS SUGGEST

Following are some "capsule" statements that we have received from our members since the last printing of the "Algonquin Eco Watcher", regarding issues and suggestions which they feel warrant follow-up. We will endeavour to investigate and report on these topics as time and funding permit. The articles entitled "Bathing in the Lake – The Choice is Yours" and "Fisheries Trends" (this issue) resulted from such suggestions. If you care to add to this list, we welcome your ideas.

- "Encourage the use of smaller, 4 cycle outboards as they are quieter and cleaner".
- "Offer greater protection to Algonquin wolves". (A recent workshop at Dorset, Ontario, addressed this ongoing concern).
- "Concerned about logging". (See article this issue)
- "Request more information regarding the proposed access road into Algonquin Park from the Haliburton area". (AEW contacted committee – n o further developments; see Vol.1, No.2).
- "Not anti-hunting, but there should be no hu nting in Provincial Parks". (AEW agrees).
- "The Provincial Government has turned forestry control over to the lumber companies". (Increasing self regulation by the logging industry is the main reason why Algonquin Eco Watch will conduct up to 6 field inspections in Algonquin Park annually. See article this issue).
- "Hunting in Algonquin Park has a negative effect on fall visitation".
- "How about monitoring septic systems at lodges and youth camps, as well as landfills in or near the Park?"
- "Soaps and shampoos for those who bathe in the lake, at the cottage, or, on a canoe trip". (See article this issue).

If you agree with the ideas and opinions expressed in the Algonquin Eco Watcher, please pass this copy on to a friend. (Back issues available on request.)

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