

ALGONQUIN ECOSYSTEM WATER STUDY

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Introduction

Algonquin Eco Watch (AEW) actively participated in the Ontario Government initiative known as “Lands for Life”, in an effort to obtain special status for all headwaters sourcing outside Algonquin Park, but draining into it. While the resulting document, known as “Ontario’s Living Legacy” did include a category of “Enhanced Management Areas” (EMA’s) known as “Algonquin Park Headwaters”, only 8 of the estimated 47 headwater areas were identified in that document. AEW subsequently decided to seek funding assistance through partnerships, which would facilitate the conducting of a study establishing water quality and quantity in all Algonquin Ecosystem drainages sourcing outside Algonquin Park. It was felt necessary to obtain this first-time data to facilitate negotiations with the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources, ensuring that all such drainages could ultimately be included in the “Algonquin Park Headwaters” EMA category.

A secondary but no less important purpose of this study was to establish baseline information against which future testing can be compared, in order to measure water quality and quantity trend data within the Algonquin Ecosystem.

Originally it was felt that this study could be accomplished in one field season, since only those waters sourcing outside Algonquin Park, but flowing into it would be tested for quality and flow. Subsequent to that however, the decision was made to test certain “interior” waters as well; specifically, those adjacent to the Highway 60 corridor (since many of these are subject to extraordinary pressure due to development), plus specific lakes and creeks adjacent to and crossing the abandoned CNR mainline through Algonquin Park (as there is evidence indicating pollution and changes in flow patterns in some of those waters).

It became obvious early in the first field season (2001) that it would be logistically impossible to sample all the intended waters in one year, owing to numbers and accessibility problems. Normally headwater lakes and streams are the most difficult to reach by vehicle as they are closest to the height-of-land in their respective watersheds and least likely to have road access. In actual fact, a significant number of headwater lakes could only be accessed by helicopter. To reach these on foot would have proven impractical, owing to field season time constraints.

The decision was then made to attempt to obtain sufficient funding assistance so that this program could extend over 3 field seasons. Because of this it was felt advisable to include the re-testing of a small number of lakes each year to ensure a comparative link

among years. The lakes chosen for this were Smoke, Cache, Jake and Found, all situated adjacent to Highway 60 in Algonquin Park.

The extended duration of this program would not have been possible had it not been for the long-term commitment of the W. Garfield Weston Foundation and the McLean Foundation, the former providing funding for the complete field portion of the study and the latter providing vehicle rental funding. Partnerships with the Lake Partners Program and Ontario Parks assisted greatly with regard to sample testing and logistical support respectively. All technologist and technician field staff was hired from Sir Sanford Fleming College, Lindsay Campus, which also provided items of logistical support.