



ALGONQUIN ECO WATCH GROUP

ECO-TOURISM

Ecotourism has recently come to be regarded as the panacea that enables us to aggressively seek tourism dollars with no obvious damage to ecosystems, since wild populations are not being harvested and there is no apparent associated development. There is rising awareness among animal behaviourists that increasing activity of humans and their pets may cause changes in the normal behaviour patterns of resident wildlife species. While this branch of biology is as yet imperfectly understood, there is increasing evidence that the rush for "ecotourism" dollars in parts of Africa and Asia has forced some species to retreat from areas of prime habitat to less suitable territory: a phenomenon ultimately resulting in reduced reproductive success and lower population levels. While we feel that hiking trails promote ecological awareness, consider the fact that between 1990 and 1994 there were 5 new hiking trails opened in Algonquin Park; an average of 1 per year. If such trends were to become established, what would Algonquin be like 100 years from now?

The cumulative damage caused by slow development can in fact be more harmful than sudden change, because it tends to slip by unnoticed and consequently unchallenged. Changes that occur slowly, while unnoticeable to most people can be devastating to the ecosystem.

The Algonquin Eco Watch Group is committed to monitoring proposed change and development within Algonquin Park to ensure not only that development of any kind does not go beyond the terms and conditions of the Algonquin Park Master Plan, but that the people of Ontario are clearly aware of proposed changes and have a voice in their implementation. Further, the Algonquin Eco Watch Group will commit funds to study the potential negative effects of ecotourism as well as introducing and pursuing the concept of a "100 Year Plan" for Algonquin Park. These topics plus many others are discussed in detail in the Algonquin Eco Watch position paper, entitled "Environmental Pressures to be Considered in the Management of the Algonquin Ecosystem".



This juvenile Algonquin wolf should normally actively avoid contact with humans. Abnormal behaviour such as this, often encouraged by humans, can lead to the ultimate need to destroy such individuals, which may become more aggressive through time.

As a result of 5 human deaths from black bear attacks in Algonquin Park a study was launched in 1991 to establish what may lead to these fatal interactions.

Such possible causes as increased human activity in the Park, territorial breeding behaviours of large male bears, possible brain damage resulting from physical violence or the ingestion of heavy metals, as well as seasonal feeding habits and movement patterns are all being investigated.



To date results are inconclusive, but it has been established that up to 50% of adult males radio-collared within Algonquin Park are being killed by hunters outside the Park, suggesting that this important southern Ontario gene pool requires greater protection into the future. As a result of government cutbacks, Ministry of Natural Resources funding is no longer available to assist with this program. The Algonquin Eco Watch Group will commit funds in an effort to complete this study which has significant implications concerning wildlife/human interactions.