

Stewardship Planning for Ontario Parks Legacy 2000 Sites in South Eastern Ontario

Susan Grigg, Corina Brdar and Jim Peets
Ontario Parks, South Eastern Zone

Abstract

Through the Ontario Parks Legacy 2000 Program, an innovative partnership between Ontario Parks and The Nature Conservancy of Canada from 1996 to 2000, significant natural areas in Ontario were secured to protect biodiversity to celebrate the Millennium. These areas are intended to be regulated and managed as Nature Reserve class provincial parks (Provincial Nature Reserves). This poster presentation highlights the planning and management direction of the South Eastern Zone, Ontario Parks for four of these Legacy 2000 sites, Alfred Bog, Burnt Lands, Dupont and Menzel-Centennial. Interim Management Statements prepared for these sites by staff in the South Eastern Zone, working in co-operation with Nature Conservancy of Canada staff, identify management guidelines necessary to protect heritage values, including restrictions on access and recreation. A component of interim planning is the identification of research that is necessary to guide any further land securement and conservation management activities.

The Ontario Parks Legacy 2000 Program

The Legacy 2000 Program was a 4 year Partnership between Ontario Parks and The Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC) from 1996 to 2000. Under this program, significant natural areas in Ontario were secured to protect biodiversity and to celebrate the Millennium. Areas secured are to be regulated under the *Provincial Parks Act* as Nature Reserve class parks. Sites remaining under ownership of NCC are managed under legal agreement between Ontario Parks and NCC.

Nature Reserve Class Parks

Nature Reserve class parks *represent and protect Ontario's geological, ecological and species diversity* (MNR, 1992). The earth and life science values of these parks necessitate scientifically based management policies. Management can either allow for natural succession or perpetuate a particular evolutionary stage. These sites are managed toward achievement of protection and heritage appreciation objectives.

Stewardship Planning and Management Challenges

As an initial stage in planning and management, an Interim Management Statement (IMS) is prepared for each site. An IMS is a short term, internal document that guides custodial management until a management plan is prepared. An IMS identifies values to be protected, measures to protect these values, restrictions on

use, and gaps in knowledge. Common protection concerns at each site include control of access, limiting amount and types of use and ensuring uses are compatible with natural values and features, and gaps in life science and earth science resource knowledge. Each site has unique characteristics that affect the custodial management of the lands. Following is a summary of planning and research challenges facing four Legacy 2000 sites within the Ontario Parks, South Eastern Zone.

Alfred Bog

Alfred Bog is a Provincially Significant Wetland and Area of Natural and Scientific Interest (ANSI). It is the largest remaining bog community in Southern Ontario, and is considered a nationally significant ecological area. The protected area is approximately one half the area of the evaluated wetland. Peat extraction on lands adjacent to the Legacy 2000 site is negatively affecting the hydrology of the bog. Consultation and cooperation between many stakeholders concerned with protection of the bog is integral to protection of the property (Crown, NCC, South Nation Conservation, Municipalities, local interest groups).

Crucial research and information needs related to Alfred Bog stem from pressure from adjacent land uses. The hydrology of the bog and the effects of adjacent land uses on this hydrology must be more clearly understood before restoration plans can be created. Also key to the values and functions of the bog is research and trials of appropriate restoration methods.

Burnt Lands

Burnt Lands is a globally imperiled alvar vegetation community recognized as a life science ANSI. This Legacy 2000 site was recommended as a nature reserve class provincial park through the Ontario's Living Legacy Land Use Strategy (1999), along with adjacent areas of Crown land. Private land stewardship must be promoted since the protected area is only one quarter of the ANSI as a whole. Nature Reserve class parks do not permit sport hunting, so the issue of deer management must be discussed through management planning, to ensure the loss of values due to over-browsing is prevented. There is a need for restoration of alvar communities in disturbed areas. The recommended park is made up of three discrete blocks of land, increasing access control and enforcement difficulties. Encouraging private land stewardship and a public appreciation of the heritage values of the alvar will be key to the protection of the site.

Due to the exceptional quality of the alvar environment at this site there continues to be significant research interest from within MNR and from university, conservation and scientific groups. Key research and information needs include the effects of deer on alvar vegetation. Deer exclosures and control plots were installed in 1997 and continue to be monitored to determine the long term effects of deer browse on vegetation. Studies related to alvar ecology and succession have occurred since a fire in 1999, and the associated fire control work, affected a large section of the Crown land portion of this alvar.

Dupont

This site is located along the St. Lawrence River, and was acquired by the NCC from DuPont Canada in 1997 and 1998. Significant features of this site include Hoasic Creek, one of the few remaining natural creeks in eastern Ontario, a provincially significant coastal wetland complex, and a heronry. The remainder of the site consists of upland and lowland forest communities. Due to a history of industrial development and pasturing prior to acquisition by NCC, there is a need for rehabilitation and/or restoration of severely disturbed areas within the site. Also affecting the site is its proximity to urban communities and the associated transportation infrastructure.

Research and information needs include the effects of the controlled St. Lawrence River levels on the coastal wetland. Restoration plans may be required for severely disturbed areas. An assessment of cultural resources must be completed. Life science needs include inventory of breeding birds, and a fish species and spawning study.

Menzel-Centennial

Characterized as open and treed fen, this site is recognized as a provincially significant wetland, and is within the Westplain Mud Lake Fen ANSI. An undisturbed lake, known as Mud Lake, located near the centre of the property is surrounded by treed, shrub and open fens, and coniferous and mixed swamp forests. Remnants of a small quarry, gravel pit and farm buildings and foundations are located on the property. Planning and management challenges facing the site are encroachment by adjacent land use (pasturing) and sensitivity of vegetation to trampling by recreational users (requirement for boardwalks).

Research and information needs include the cultural history of the property, including the history of remaining structures and land uses. Geology and geomorphology of the site are not fully understood.

Research and Information Strategy

Research needs for the Legacy 2000 parks have been identified in the IMS for each site, as well as within the Research and Information Strategy for the South Eastern Zone (Ontario Parks, 2001). The goal of this strategy is to ensure the formation of a coordinated body of knowledge to provide for informed planning and management decisions. Research needs are ranked, and strategies for meeting research needs, promoting research opportunities, and establishing long term direction for research and information related to parks within the zone are identified.

References

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