

Consultant's Response to the Presentations and Discussion at the Workshop

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The PRFO Monitoring Workshop on May 10, 2001 provided the consultant team with an opportunity to present the draft monitoring framework, and to obtain feedback on the project as well as other insights on monitoring in Parks. We perceived the workshop as an opportunity for peer review and open discussion on the approach and directions suggested in our report. We were pleased with the overall response and support we received from the participants which lead to some refinements to the draft report.

For future workshops of this kind, we feel that the format could be refined. We were not convinced that the use of a panel achieved its objective of stimulating constructive criticism of our work. This may have been due to the monitoring reports being so voluminous that it was not possible, or reasonable that the panel members obtain a full understanding of the study. We also felt that the subject matter of the panel members' presentations was peripheral to the main issues that MNR faces for monitoring, and that the time may have been better spent if more direction had been provided to the panel in the form of questions or specific areas to critique. It was also unfortunate that the timing of presentations was so tight that the last speaker, Mr. Cliff Drysdale, who had one of the most important messages (actual hands on experience with long term park monitoring), had insufficient time to deliver his full presentation and that a number of participants had left by that point. The most valuable aspect of the workshop for us was the open discussion/question and answer portion with the workshop participants.

The main message that we took from the workshop participants was that the approach we were proposing was on track. We did not receive any major criticisms of our work that required us to go back and re-examine the monitoring framework that we had developed. In particular, the participants reaffirmed that the extensive consultations that were undertaken, and the frank presentation of the findings from those consultations, was a worthy approach which added credibility to the study. A number of constructive comments were made that allowed us to build on what we had presented, and refine the final product. These mainly centred around appropriate next steps. In addition, it was suggested that some graphics be used to better illustrate some points, especially with respect to explaining the concept of adaptive management.

One issue that was raised by several participants was the need to involve First Nations in the further development of the framework. Although there was a recommendation in the draft report to include First Nations in the monitoring pro-

cess, the arguments presented at the workshop convinced us to place a higher priority on it and this is reflected in the final report.

There was also substantial discussion on the nature of the goal associated with the monitoring program. Some participants felt that the goal should be for the monitoring program itself, while others felt that a broader goal was needed to articulate the mandate of Ontario Parks, and that monitoring was just a tool that should be used to achieve the goal. The draft report provided a working goal and objectives but recognized that it was an area that needed more work. Refining the goal statement was a high priority recommendation in the final report.

Many participants recognized the significant challenge of implementing an extensive monitoring program throughout the provincial parks system, yet no one suggested that it should not proceed. Several participants expressed the need for adaptive management and that without monitoring it was impossible to understand the current trends in park ecosystems, or the effects of management prescriptions. Monitoring was thus deemed as an essential component of adaptive management in Ontario's Parks. This perspective was articulated in the draft and final reports. Having confirmation of the importance of monitoring as an integral part of park management was an important outcome of the workshop.