

A Summary of Recent Research Activities within the Southwestern Zone, Ontario Parks

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Abstract

The Southwestern Zone, Ontario Parks, is an administrative area containing 40 Provincial Parks. The Planning and Research Section in Peterborough co-ordinates and implements corporate research priorities, and liaises with the scientific and education sectors. A database was created in 1996 to track projects or contracts that are approved for research within the parks.

Since 1996 there have been 82 research projects within the Southwestern Zone, 21 in 2000 and ten already approved in 2001. Research is being conducted from as far south as Fish Point Provincial Nature Reserve on Pelee Island and as far north as Cabot Head Provincial Nature Reserve on Bruce Peninsula. The projects range from a general survey and inventory of insect populations to establishing a statistical significance between the distance travelled by visitors and the number of nights spent in a park.

This poster presentation summarises the location and content of research projects conducted during 2000 and 2001, some of them being long-term, multi-park or regional research projects. The focus of the panel is on the diversity of research occurring in Ontario Parks, Southwestern Zone.

Introduction

An integral part of the management planning process for Ontario Parks is social and scientific research that has been occurring in Provincial Parks for decades. The Planning and Research Section of Ontario Parks provides leadership and support by conducting research in the parks as well as encouraging others to do the same. Many of the 40 Provincial Parks in the Southwestern Zone are involved directly in or help support research within them.

Research Initiatives

The Ontario Parks, Ministry of Natural Resources develops partnerships and agreements with qualified researchers at colleges, universities and other research institutions and organisations. They encourage volunteerism and make use of community-based initiatives to further park objectives (OMNR, 1997). Research in Ontario Parks is an important aspect in ensuring park sustainability. Investigations are encouraged through a variety of means to help provide a better understanding of park environments and contribute to appropriate management practices and actions.

Valuable social and environmental data are gathered while conducting research in Provincial Parks. The information is used to assist the park management process, as each park is unique in its own environment and requires a different approach when it comes to individual management.

Application Process

Applying to conduct research in a Provincial Parks can be done two ways: through an online application (www.ontarioparks.com/form.html) or by contacting one of the Ontario Parks offices throughout the province for an application form. There is approximately a two-month wait for the application approval process. This allows Ontario Parks, Ministry of Natural Resources the opportunity to review and assess the application.

The applicant's study period is a maximum of 12 months however, an extension may be applied for as needed. Upon completion of the study, the researcher(s) are required to provide the Parks Superintendent/Zone Manager with a copy of all reports, publications, theses, etc. produced as a result of the research. This information must be submitted within two years of the research project completion (OMNR, 1996).

Research Classification

Many different academic disciplines apply to conduct research within the parks (Figure 1). In 2000-2001, there were 15 different disciplines represented among people conducting research in 19 of the 40 Ontario Provincial Parks (Figure 2).

Specific Research Projects

Of the 30 research projects conducted in the selected Ontario Parks during 2000 and 2001, two have been selected to outline how broad the range of investigation within the parks can be. These studies are "*Taxonomy and Distribution of Ontario Insects*" and "*Similarities in Camper Behaviour in Pinery Provincial Park*".

The "*Taxonomy and Distribution of Ontario Insects*" to be conducted in 2001 will be carried out within five of 40 Southwestern Zone Provincial Parks: Black Creek, Inverhuron, Ojibway Prairie, Pinery and Wheatley. The research will produce a general survey and inventory of insect distribution within the stated parks. It is a no impact study that will utilise net and hand collecting of the insects (OMNR, 2001).

The "*Similarities in Camper Behaviour*" survey, using Pinery Provincial Park as the study area, was conducted in the year 2000. Pinery Provincial Park is the most visited park in the Southwestern Zone with over 480,000 visitors in the year 2000 (OMNR, 2001), making it an excellent choice for this survey. This research project was based on the CAMIS (Campground Information System) accommodation software that Ontario Parks uses as its reservation system. This study was organised as a database survey to gather statistical information such as the significance be-

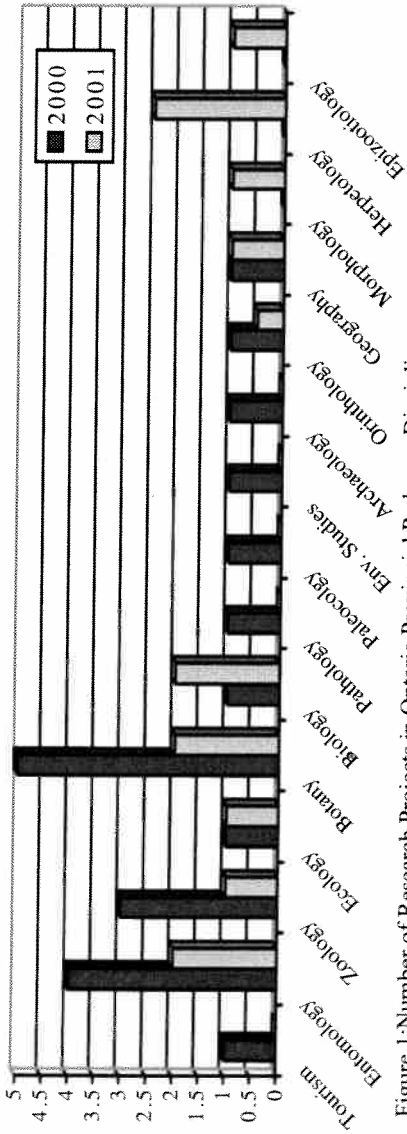


Figure 1: Number of Research Projects in Ontario Provincial Parks per Discipline

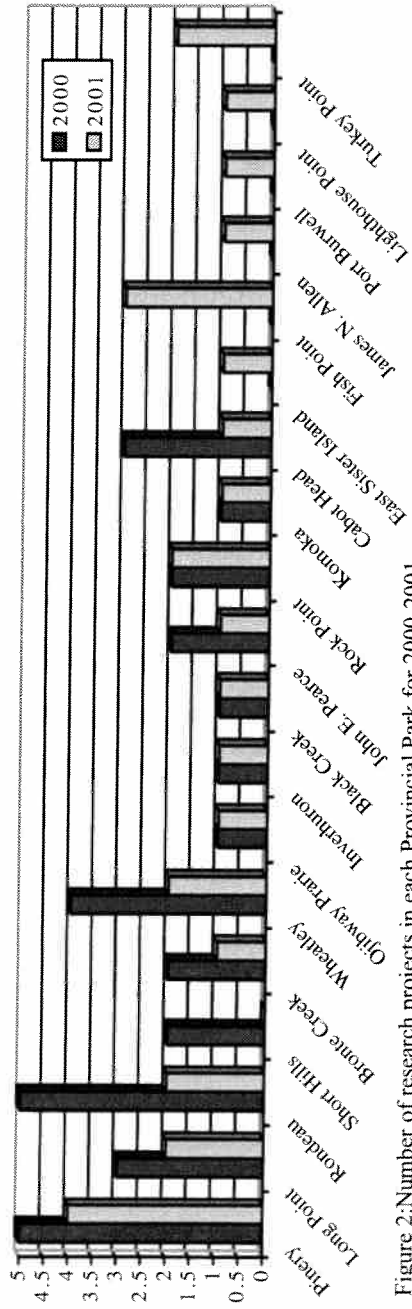


Figure 2: Number of research projects in each Provincial Park for 2000-2001

tween distance travelled by users and camper nights, number of users, type of sites used, length of stays, method of payments and types of camping equipment used. Non-peak times of year are also included in the survey to represent all of the demographics contained within the database, which serves the marketing initiatives of Pinery Provincial Park. There was no impact on the park's environment as all the work was carried out using electronic media (OMNR, 2001).

Conclusion

For the 40 Provincial Parks in the Southwestern Zone it is imperative that research initiatives are undertaken in order to understand and properly assess the social and environmental impacts that humans have on these natural areas. Research is an essential tool to aid wise management decisions and processes that will not only benefit an individual park and other parks within the Ontario provincial parks system, but also parks and their respective systems outside of the province.

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