

LAND USE/ACCESS/TRAILS ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING REPORT
OCTOBER 24, 2023

PRESENT: Mike Evers, Chair Stephen Huntley Natalie Mechalko Rick Moore Stu Paterson
Roy Polsky

ABSENT: Josef Brecka David Chenier Roy DeCorte Bob Emery Ben Kissner
Fazal Muhamed Adam Mumby Grier Ragot

STAFF: Matt Robbins, Liaison Mark Ryckman

GUEST: Cole Wear

1. Introductions/welcome to guest speaker Cole Wear, R.P.F.
 - Cole is a forest management superintendent with Dryden Fibre Canada
 - An angler and hunter.

2. Presentation on Trout Lake Forestry Project / caribou and road access - Cole
 - Caribou
 - Ungulate, native to northwest and northern Ontario.
 - Range from Timmins through Dryden up to the Hudson Bay lowlands.
 - Currently listed as threatened, chiefly due to habitat disturbance (fire, habitat loss, roads, etc.).
 - In Ontario, caribou are managed at landscape scale.
 - Northern half of Ontario is known as a “zone of continuous caribou distribution,” which is divided into 12 areas, often referred to as “ranges.”
 - Direction within these policies require that disturbance be managed through three main strategies:
 - Harvest Disturbance Aggregation (i.e., The Dynamic Caribou Habitat Schedule - Disturbing larger tracts of land like fire).
 - Management of forest composition and hardwood competition.
 - Road and Access Management.
 - Decommissioning
 - Generally, operational roads are scheduled to be decommissioned once their function is served within a caribou zone.
 - Can be active (machines on site) or passive (allowing nature to do the work).
 - Most roads are passively decommissioned.
 - Balancing public access/social benefits with the potential impacts of roads is a challenge.
 - Recreational users want roads and trails.
 - Can serve a purpose for businesses.
 - Caribou are sensitive to roads.
 1. Predators use roads to access areas quickly, which allows them to reach more sensitive areas (calving, for example).
 - Decommissioning process varies
 - MNRF may be involved right away to determine what should be done where but, depending on the project, they may not be involved until later, for evaluation.
 - Trout Lake
 - Trout Lake Forest is a 1,030,840-hectare forest near Lac Seul.
 - Decommissioning process is ongoing for some areas, while creation of new roads is also ongoing.
 - Worked with a local baitfish harvester to ensure that an ATV can still access certain areas being decommissioned.

- Public Involvement
 - Best way to become involved is to share your concerns through the Annual Work Schedule.

You can also contribute through:

- FMP Development.
- By contacting your local SFL Holder.
- By contacting the local MNRF District office.

- Discussion

Cole clarified that, in the North, they try to imitate fire (which historically would burn massive swaths of land at a time) through “mass clearcuts.” This approach can take 10 to 20 years at best, while fire does it in 10 to 20 days.

Who designates caribou?
Both the federal and provincial governments.

How accurate are population surveys?
Previously they used aerial surveys, now they use fecal samples using transects, which allows for more details and is more accurate (are they related, are they pregnant, what’s their diet, etc.).

What about predator prey balance?
There is a knowledge gap regarding alternative predators (like bears).

How is this effecting moose populations?
There is a knowledge gap. Moose can deal with roads better than caribou and prefer hardwood browse, which tends to develop around roads. They are not trying to eliminate hardwoods, but they are trying to manage them. Indigenous communities are often very concerned about the policy’s potential implications for moose.

What about mitigation measures?
Managing disturbance, managing access, managing predator prey dynamic, large-scale “harvest clumping,” are all considered mitigation measures. FSC does have additional mitigation measures but is not always captured by policy. Some forestry plans go above and beyond to include these but are not under a legal obligation.

How is their quota achievement?
Generally, 60% achievement; 15-20% of lands end up being captured under protections (nesting, water quality reserves, etc.), some lands are less suitable than anticipated, etc.

What impact would a loss of pulp mill-demand have on caribou management?
There are other uses for the trees, but it would be significant. If they lost their licence, management would go to the MNRF.

3. New Project Evaluation Policy - Matt

- Revised version of 2020 Environmental Impact Assessment Policy which aids in implementing the Provincial Parks and Conservation Reserves Act (PPCRA).
- Guides how the PPCRA principles are implemented, where and when evaluations are required, etc.
- Less thorough than its predecessor, removing requirements for project evaluation for many activities, like expanding campgrounds and constructing buildings between 400 and 500 square feet.
- Significant increase in ministerial powers.
- Decision made: The PEP was put through with limited changes. The only change with relevance to our comments was with respect to “Dredge below high-water mark to maintain navigation or remove contaminated sediments.” They added “resulting in no changes to upstream or downstream water management or if project is identified in the management plan.”

Mike pointed out that this seems to align with the general direction of our current government.

4. Boreal Forest Medieval Villages - Matt
 - Commune-style communities have been appearing across Northern Ontario, framed as “an alternative form of affordable property ownership for those looking to live off-grid.”
 - Kirkland Lake, Long Lake, Swan Lake.
 - Officially, these are unorganized townships.
 - Causing concerns around environmental damage/pollution and strain on municipal resources.
 - Dave Chenier may have a guest speaker lined up to speak on this topic at our next meeting.
 - Head of the Federation of Northern Ontario Municipalities

5. Canadian Wetland Roundtable - Matt
 - Multi-stakeholder partnership of industry, conservation organizations and Environment and Climate Change Canada formed to conserve and improve the management of Canada’s wetlands by advocating for government, industry and public actions/regulation.
 - Co-chaired by Ducks Unlimited Canada and the Canadian Sphagnum Peat Moss Association.
 - Developing a National Wetland Policy Framework, and asked OFAH to contribute through an interview.
 - Questions revolved around what policies are in place, efficiency and effectiveness of our jurisdictional approaches, and possible areas of improvement.
 - Have invited an OFAH representative (Matt) to attend a wetland policy workshop this November to discuss findings, develop recommendations, etc.

6. Prince Edward Point and Monarch Point - Matt
 - OFAH staff have heard concerns around perceived threats to access, particularly to waterfowl opportunities.
 - South Shore Joint Initiative is a local NGO aiming to permanently protect the south shore of PEC, and some of their wording alludes to restricting certain undesirable activities.
 - Members are concerned that some individuals are pushing to eliminate hunting from Monarch Point Conservation Reserve.
 - A committee may be formed for managing Monarch Point and OFAH will look to have representation.
 - Spoke with ECCC about the Prince Edward Point National Wildlife Area. There are no plans to limit access to water. In fact, looking at adjusting regulations to officially allow transport of firearms through park.

Matt will make a point to speak with Kerry Coleman about this issue.

7. Pretty River Valley Provincial Park - Matt
 - OFAH staff have heard concerns about the new prohibition on roadside parking within Pretty River Provincial Park, in the Township of Blue Mountain. Anglers use the park to fish for salmon and trout, while hunting is permitted for small game, upland game birds and deer.
 - Concerns around the new parking location, an old snowmobile parking space, are around safety, accessibility, and river access.
 - Spoke with park staff, and they assured Matt that:
 - The closure was safety related.
 - The new location is being improved.
 - There are other access areas and a stretch of river nearby.
 - They will keep us involved and informed, with potential for a committee in the future.

8. Submissions
 - Lanark County Pit letter
 - Bigwind Provincial Park ERO
 - Provincial Planning Statement ERO
 - Bradford Bypass ERO
 - Amendments to the Building More Mines Act, 2023, ERO
 - Protecting Black Ash and its habitat under the Endangered Species Act, 2007, ERO
 - Floating accommodations letter
 - Project Evaluation Policy (referenced above)

9. Roundtable Updates + Open Discussion

- Mike Evers highlighted the need for committee engagement on submissions.
- Stephen Huntley mentioned that the ALUS tour was great, always valuable.
- Stu Paterson highlighted the aquaculture facility issue in the Georgian Bay area.
- Mike Evers would also like to work to make these committee meetings more accessible to members who work or go to the school, as well as being conscious of those in different time zones.

Respectfully submitted,

Mike Evers
Chair