

ONTARIO FEDERATION OF ANGLERS & HUNTERS



Ontario Conservation Centre

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Mr. James Britton
Mapping and Geomatic Services Section
Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry
300 Water Street
Peterborough, Ontario
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Dear Mr. Britton:

The Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters (OFAH) is Ontario's largest, non-profit, fish and wildlife conservation-based organization, representing 100,000 members, subscribers and supporters, and 725 member clubs. We would like to bring to the attention of the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry (MNR) a number of issues and opportunities we have identified related to various online interactive mapping systems, namely the Crown Land Use Policy Atlas (CLUPA). The CLUPA can be an effective tool for members of the outdoor community to locate Crown land and determine where they can hunt, fish, and/or camp without having to contact government staff. However, the CLUPA has some serious shortcomings, particularly related to Crown land in Southern Ontario and its ability to provide users with accessible, up-to-date information. The MNR has an opportunity to provide an invaluable service that will benefit all Ontarians who enjoy spending time outside. In order to deliver on this potential, we suggest the following changes to ensure all information featured is complete, up to date, and available in a format that is accessible to members of the public.

Information for Crown Land Parcels in Southern Ontario is Incomplete/Non-existent

Many hunters in Southern Ontario do not have access to private land and many accessible outdoor areas (e.g. Conservation Areas, municipal parks, etc.) do not permit hunting. Therefore, many hunters in Southern Ontario seek out Crown land opportunities. The CLUPA does not provide adequate information regarding Crown land in Southern Ontario, making it very difficult to find these opportunities even when they are present. The issue is twofold: firstly, there is no easy way to locate Crown land in Southern Ontario; and secondly, if you do identify a specific parcel as Crown land there is no straightforward way to determine the permitted land uses. This effectively prevents anglers and hunters from easily locating Crown land in Southern Ontario without contacting MNR staff.

Crown land in Southern Ontario often appears in the CLUPA as non-selectable parcels which have no associated land use information (for example, if fishing or hunting are permitted). This proves frustrating in situations where there are known parcels of Crown land, but no clear way of determining permitted land uses. For example, there are two parcels of Crown land in Prince Edward County - Point Petre Provincial Wildlife Area and Ostrander Point Crown Land Block - that do not appear in the CLUPA. These parcels are shown on the Prince Edward County GIS map as Crown land, but it does not list permitted uses. This is a similar situation for the majority, if not all, of Crown land in Southern Ontario. It prevents potential users from knowing what activities are permitted and forces them to contact MNR staff, wasting time and resources.

The OFAH would like to see all Crown land in Ontario appear on the CLUPA with its associated land use information accessible to the public. If no current land use policy reports are available for the Crown land parcels in Southern Ontario, then they should be developed and added to the CLUPA. In the meantime, the management documents governing those parcels (such as District Land Use Guidelines) should be added to provide direction on what is and is not permitted. Providing this information would create better opportunities for hunters, anglers, and other recreationists in Southern Ontario.

Confusion caused by Multiple Policy Reports for the Same Area

One major benefit of the CLUPA is the ability to find out whether or not hunting is permitted in an area. Normally, this is easily done by opening the policy reports for the area in question. However, certain areas are subject to additional policy reports, which are linked at the top of the main policy report. The additional policy reports are for sections of land within the main parcel of Crown land, but are not differentiated on the map itself in any way. Often, these sections of land do not allow the same activities that the main policy report allows; such as prohibiting hunting where the main policy report allows it. The issue with this is that these differences are not visible on the map and, therefore, it is very difficult to determine where the prohibited areas start and finish. These differences should not be hidden in additional policy reports, but instead displayed on the map so that users can clearly see where activities are and are not permitted.

Using CLUPA to Provide Accurate Up-To-Date Information to Outdoor Recreationists

Land access in Ontario is not a static situation; access and resource management decisions can greatly impact end users such as anglers and hunters. Since the CLUPA is used by many to plan camping, fishing, and hunting trips that often require significant travel and time investments, it can be exceptionally frustrating when individuals arrive to an area only to find that the forest access points that appear on the CLUPA are closed to motorized travel. The OFAH recommends the MNRF keep the CLUPA updated with closures and associated details to allow for outdoor recreationists to plan their trips. This information is available through Forest Management Plans (FMP) and was previously published online. However, it was extremely difficult information to sort through for the general public and is now no longer available online.

A spatial layer for roads with information regarding closures and decommissioning plans could easily be integrated into the CLUPA with information extracted from the FMPs. This would not only solve the issue of disgruntled users finding roads they intended to use closed, but could also be used to alert the public to roads that are scheduled to be decommissioned in the near future. The OFAH hears from many of our members that they wish to be forewarned of upcoming decommissioning activities. If decommissioning dates appeared in the CLUPA once they are scheduled in the FMP, then users would have the ability to make alternate plans. In conjunction with this, the MNRF should develop internal processes to ensure that all necessary information from planning processes, such as FMPs, is integrated into the CLUPA. Positioning the CLUPA as the definitive source for information on Crown land access in Ontario would benefit recreationists, natural resource industries, and the MNRF.

Integrated Interactive Ontario Maps

There are several web-based mapping applications that display information from Land Information Ontario (LIO) for public use. These maps include the CLUPA, 'Make a topographic map,' 'Make a natural heritage area map,' 'Find a conservation reserve,' and Fish ON-Line. Between the various mapping applications, there is unnecessary duplication and separation of information that would benefit from being found in one location. For example, when looking for information regarding conservation reserves, the information is spread across three separate applications. The map for finding a conservation reserve currently doesn't show the location of conservation reserves, but does provide the Statement of Environmental Interest for some of the conservation reserves. The natural heritage area maps show the locations of conservation reserves, but provides no additional information, and the CLUPA shows them and provides their policy reports. All of these could easily be incorporated into the CLUPA by adding the Statement of Environmental Interests to the same location as the policy report is currently located. As these maps are all based on GIS layers from LIO they could be integrated into a single user-friendly map.

In addition to the multiple land information maps, the MNRF also manages Fish ON-Line which provides waterbody-specific information such as fish species present and stocking records. The MNRF should consider integrating an improved CLUPA with Fish ON-Line to provide the most comprehensive interactive mapping application possible. This suggestion is contingent on the government's ability to ensure there is no loss of usability or functionality from the original maps. The integrated map would take the preexisting layers and include them in one location, allowing users to effectively plan any type of outdoor activity. This would clear up many access issues and reduce the chance of inadvertent trespassing. The benefit to having all aspects of Ontario's current mapping applications together would be immense; the new map would show access points, boat launches, Crown land boundaries, fish species information, license issuer locations, conservation reserves, and everything else that outdoor recreationists need.

Mobile Device Compatibility

Another shortcoming of the MNRF's mapping applications is the incompatibility with mobile devices, especially smart phones. Fish ON-Line is fairly functional on mobile devices, but the CLUPA is essentially nonfunctional. The OFAH envisions the integrated mapping application suggested above as a website with the ability to run on mobile devices (or as a downloadable app). The mobile friendly version should have similar, if not the same, functionality as the web version. An essential element would be the ability to download maps for use offline for areas with poor cellular service and being able to use the location feature to pinpoint your current location.

Conclusions

While the OFAH believes that the CLUPA is a fantastic resource for anglers, hunters, and outdoor recreationists as a whole, we also believe that it can be dramatically improved. The suggestions made above would increase the functionality of the CLUPA and allow users to gain meaningful land use and fisheries information. This would have wide reaching benefits, including more people knowing the permitted uses of Crown land parcels, clear topographic information and parcel boundaries, and lessening the requests to MNRF staff. Providing clarity and certainty on angling and hunting locations will also help to retain new anglers and hunters who may have otherwise quit, because they couldn't locate opportunities. Integrating the mapping applications together will also benefit the MNRF by consolidating lands and fisheries information in one location. This will reduce the administrative burden of having to maintain and operate multiple sites.

Thank you for your consideration. The OFAH looks forward to working with the MNRF to help develop this fulsome mapping application for the outdoors community.

Yours in Conservation,



Mark Ryckman
Manager of Policy

MR/jb

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