



Laura Bjorgan
Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks - Land and Water Division
Ontario Parks - Protected Areas Section
300 Water St, 6th Floor South
Peterborough, ON
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Canada

Submitted via Environmental Registry of Ontario

3 May 2023

Re: Developing a Management Plan for Bigwind Lake Provincial Park (ERO File 019-7814)

Dear Ms. Bjorgan:

The Wilderness Canoe Association (*the WCA*) appreciates the opportunity to respond to the consultation by the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks on the proposal to develop a management plan for Bigwind Lake Provincial Park (BLPP). This most recent consultation focuses on a preliminary management plan for the proposed operating park. This comment letter builds on comments submitted by the WCA as part of the initial consultation on plans for BLPP, dated 29 August 2023.

The WCA is a non-profit organization with a membership interested in outdoor pursuits, and particularly in wilderness travel by canoe. WCA members have a shared interest in conservation of wilderness areas, and in protection of and access to canoe routes in Ontario and elsewhere.

The WCA supports ongoing investment in Ontario's provincial parks, expanding opportunities for Ontario residents and visitors to access wilderness areas in a sustainable way. BLPP's transition to operating status is a welcome initiative, but –in the WCA's view– the proposed approach should be adjusted to minimize the ecological impact of the project.

The WCA has the following specific concerns based on a review of the *Bigwind Lake Provincial Park Preliminary Management Plan* and related material:

- Infrastructure planned for the A1 access zone and the D2 development zone will be in very close proximity to the "high connectivity" zone south of Crosson Lake, to the lake itself, and to wetlands adjacent to the Old Wagon Road in that area. Ideally, park infrastructure would be minimized or concentrated in less sensitive sections of the park area.
- The proposed scale of camping capacity, based on 300 campsites, will impose a very significant strain on adjacent habitats, particular with the related upgrades to the Old Wagon Road (paved for



two-way, four-season use) and associated parking facilities. A significant parking facility in area D2 is a particular concern, and seems to be at odds with the stated "park-once" approach; visitors who use campsite vehicle parking would generally not require a central parking facility, unless using vehicles to access other park amenities.

- Currently, the draft management plan contemplates approximately 25 back-country camping sites in the park, and 250 drive-in sites. The WCA would support a greater relative emphasis on back-country sites with associated parking concentrated in selected lower-impact areas. This approach would be most consistent with preservation of the largely unspoiled environments within the current and proposed park boundaries.

The WCA believes that BLPP has particular potential to support educational activities, both focused on ecology, and on back-country camping safety and skills. We would welcome an emphasis on support for group educational activities in the configuration of park infrastructure.

The WCA encourages the Ministry to continue its efforts to expand Provincial Parks and other protected areas across Ontario, and in particular endorses net additions to protected areas in Ontario.

Please contact us if you have any follow-up questions arising from this response to your consultation on the draft park management plan.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "G Ataman".

Gary Ataman, Chair
The Wilderness Canoe Association

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Tom Connell".

Tom Connell
WCA Conservation Committee