

## BLUEBERRY LAKE, TEMAGAMI, CANDIDATE PROTECTED AREA

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Prepared for the Wilderness Committee



### SUMMARY

Temagami was historically dominated by old-growth white and pine forest, and forests 250 to 400 years old were not considered exceptional during the heyday of logging from the 1940s to the 1980s. Today only 6.5% of the Temagami Forest is old-growth pine, and only a fraction of this is forest over 250 years old.

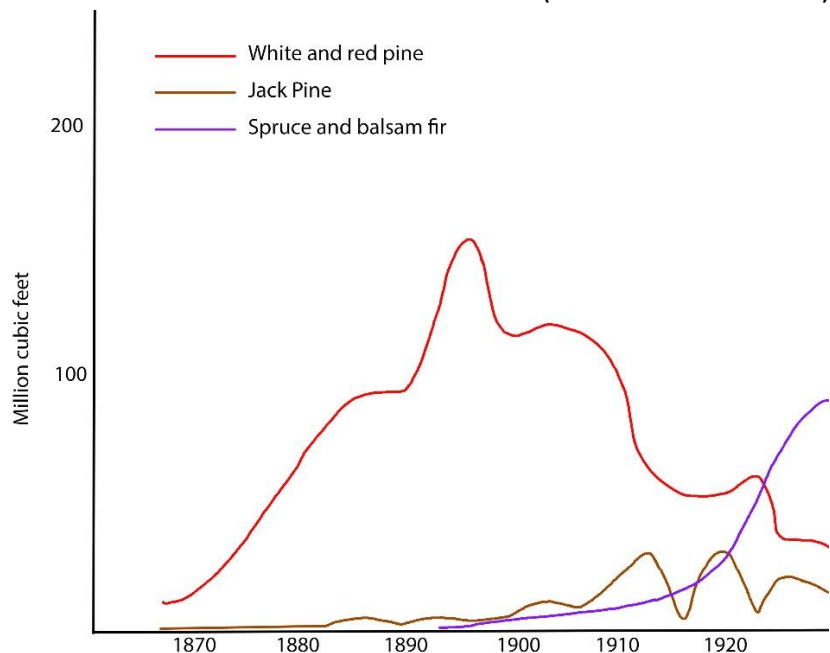
Blueberry Lake preserves a rare remnant of old forest with white and red pine trees reaching at least 280 years-old, and a very rare stand of old-growth yellow birch. It also is part of a popular canoe loop, and trails that access the old-growth forest are frequently used and well-maintained.

We propose a 1540 ha park that protects the ecological and recreational values of the Blueberry Lake area. Boundaries were drawn to include tracts of old-growth and unlogged forest, and to follow natural landscape features where possible. Over one third of the park is old-growth forest according to Forest Resource Inventory maps, and the park protects six campsites, eight portages, five recreational trails, and two scenic lookouts.

## HISTORY OF THE TEMAGAMI FOREST

White and red pine accounted for most of the timber harvested from Ontario through the nineteenth and early twentieth century (Figure 1), first in the form of square timbers exported to Britain then as sawlogs mostly exported to the U.S.A., which led to a general reduction in abundance of these species in parts of Ontario (Burgar, 1983; Head, 1975; Thompson et al., 2008).

FIGURE 1 ONTARIO CROWN LAND WOOD HARVEST 1867-1930 (ADAPTED FROM BURGAR 1983)



While square timber would have been harvested from some parts of Temagami before 1900, the forest was otherwise largely left intact. In 1901 a forest reserve was created protecting 1,400,000 acres (566,560 ha), considered “the largest body of pine timber in Ontario still in the hands of the Crown” and according to the *Globe* “one of the finest timber districts of the Province, having an abundance of white and red pine in virgin forest.” (Hodgins & Benidickson, 2013).

According to 2013 Forest Resource Inventory data, only 8.6% of forest in the Temagami Management Unit is over 140 years old: 5.3% is old-growth white pine, 1.2% red pine, 0.9% cedar, with other species making up the remainder.

There are 34456 hectares of old-growth white and red pine remaining in Temagami, of which 9853 ha (28.6%) are formally protected in parks and conservation reserves (Fig. 2). Over 5000 ha of old-growth white and red pine are found in the Lake Temagami Skyline Preserve or on Islands in Lake Temagami and are unlikely to be logged but lack designation as a park or conservation reserve.

It’s hard to reconcile the current state of the Temagami Forest, which is now only 6.5% old-growth pine, with historical accounts. When we conducted surveys around Rabbit Lake in forests that had been logged between the 1940s and 1980s, we regularly found white and red pine stumps between 60 and 100 cm in diameter, indicating how common old-growth pine forest once was in Temagami.

The remnant old-growth pine in White Bear Forest has trees confirmed to be up to 400 years old, and commonly over 200. According to Sloan Watters, who worked with Gillies Bros. Lumber from 1946 until his retirement, the White Bear Forest was typical of forests around Rabbit and Cassels Lakes when Gillies Bros. began logging there in the 1940s (Henry & Quinby, 2022).

FIGURE 2 OLD-GROWTH WHITE AND RED PINE IN THE TEMAGAMI FOREST

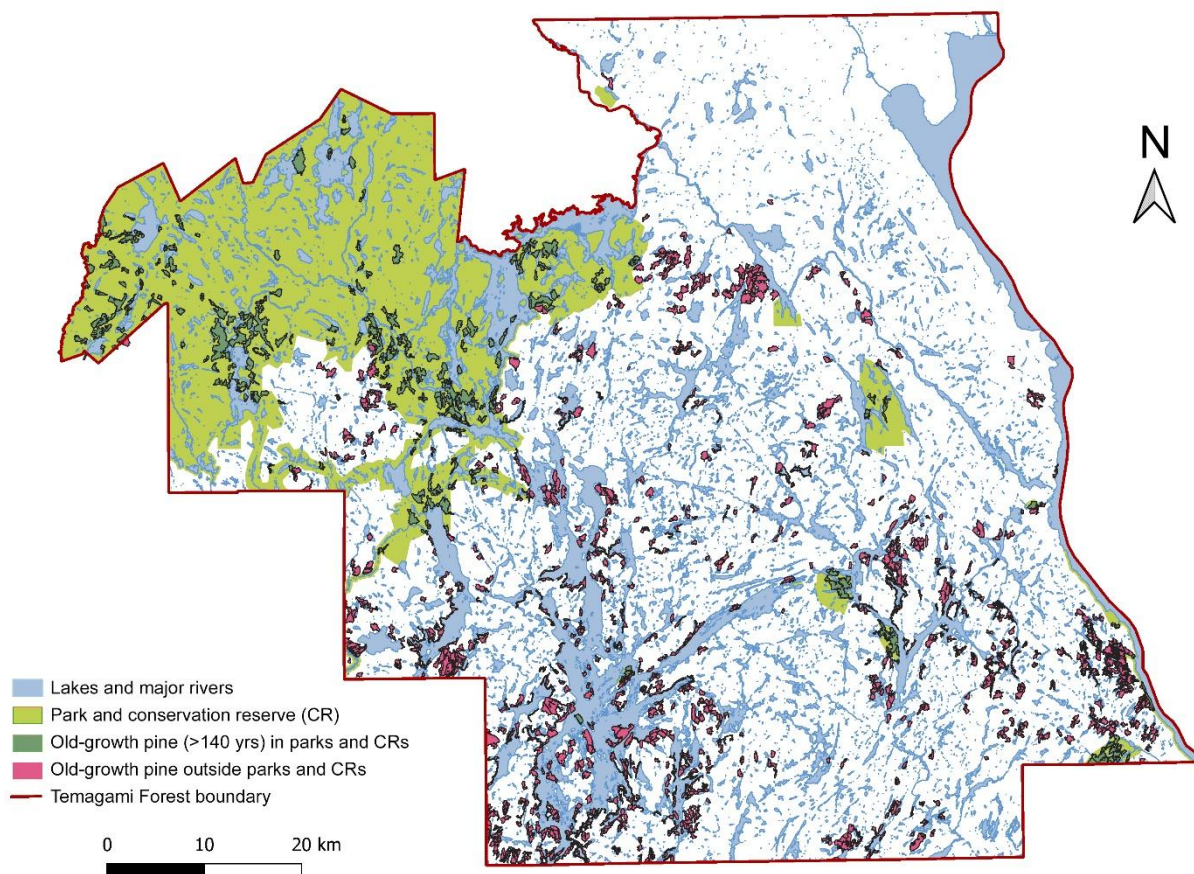


TABLE 1 PROTECTED AREAS IN THE TEMAGAMI FOREST

| Name   | Type                 | Ha    | % Temagami Forest |
|--|----------------------|-------|-------------------|
| Lady Evelyn-Smoothwater Provincial Park (Wilderness) | Provincial Park      | 72400 | 11.4              |
| Obabika River Provincial Park (Waterway)             | Provincial Park      | 20520 | 3.2               |
| North Yorston Conservation Reserve                   | Conservation Reserve | 13323 | 2.1               |
| Jim Edwards Lake Conservation Reserve                | Conservation Reserve | 8656  | 1.4               |
| Sturgeon River Provincial Park (Waterway)            | Provincial Park      | 7985  | 1.3               |
| Sugar Lake Conservation Reserve                      | Conservation Reserve | 6143  | 1.0               |
| Solace Provincial Park (Waterway)                    | Provincial Park      | 5943  | 0.9               |
| East Lady Evelyn Lake Conservation Reserve           | Conservation Reserve | 5612  | 0.9               |
| Pinetorch Lake Conservation Reserve                  | Conservation Reserve | 3623  | 0.6               |
| Cliff Lake Conservation Reserve                      | Conservation Reserve | 2947  | 0.5               |
| Bob Lake Conservation Reserve                        | Conservation Reserve | 2657  | 0.4               |
| Ottertail Creek Conservation Reserve                 | Conservation Reserve | 1650  | 0.3               |
| Smith Lake Conservation Reserve                      | Conservation Reserve | 1649  | 0.3               |
| White Bear Forest Conservation Reserve               | Conservation Reserve | 1242  | 0.2               |
| Big Spring Lake Bedrock Conservation Reserve         | Conservation Reserve | 973   | 0.2               |
| South Timiskaming Shoreline Conservation Reserve     | Conservation Reserve | 703   | 0.1               |

## ONTARIO OLD-GROWTH FOREST PROTECTED AREAS #2, BLUEBERRY LAKE

|  |                      |          |      |
|--|----------------------|----------|------|
| Rabbit Lake West Conservation Reserve            | Conservation Reserve | 491.4    | 0.1  |
| W.J.B. Greenwood Provincial Park (Recreational)  | Provincial Park      | 465      | 0.1  |
| Henwood Township Forest and Wetland Con. Reserve | Conservation Reserve | 322      | 0.1  |
| Indian Bay South Conservation Reserve            | Conservation Reserve | 241.3    | 0.04 |
| Temagami Island North Conservation Reserve       | Conservation Reserve | 125.6    | 0.02 |
| Matabitchuan River Conservation Reserve          | Conservation Reserve | 87.2     | 0.01 |
| Finlayson Point Provincial Park (Recreational)   | Provincial Park      | 47       | 0.01 |
| Narrows Island Conservation Reserve              | Conservation Reserve | 41.1     | 0.01 |
| All  |                      | 157846.6 | 24.9 |

\* Total area of Temagami Forest is 634127 ha

### THE BLUEBERRY LAKE PROPOSED PARK

This park proposal amalgamates field work, map data, and recreational use of the area to design a park with high ecological and recreational value. Boundaries were drawn to include tracts of old-growth and unlogged forest, to follow natural features, and (on the west shore of Blueberry Lake) to follow the height of land to create a scenic reserve and maintain ecological integrity.

### LOGGING RECORDS

Several sources of logging records are available. The most detailed for modern logging is depletions listed in the Forest Resource Inventory (FRI) stand data. Logging records before 1990 were collected from the North Bay MNR office by Tom Lee at Ancient Forest Exploration & Research. These provide records back to the 1940s but are unreliable for the first two decades. Information from the 1940s is spotty, but anecdotally much of the shoreline of Cassels Lake and parts of the west shore of Blueberry Lake were likely logged. Only 76 ha (5%) of the proposed 1507 ha park has records of logging, and field reconnaissance indicates it is even lower. An estimated 150 ha (10%) of the west side of the park could have been logged in the 1940s, likely the selective removal of large pines. According to our best knowledge the proposed park is 85-90% pristine forest and includes old and impressive stands of white and red pine.

**TABLE 2 OLD-GROWTH FOREST AND LOGGED AREA IN THE PROPOSED BLUEBERRY LAKE PARK**

|                                   | ha     | %    |
|-----------------------------------|--------|------|
| Blueberry Lake Provincial Park    | 1540   | 100  |
| Historic logging                  | 75-225 | 5-15 |
| Old-growth white and red pine     | 552    | 36   |
| Old-growth yellow birch and cedar | 21     | 1    |

### OLD-GROWTH FOREST

573 ha (37%) of the park is over 140 years old on the most recent FRI maps. 552 ha is white and red pine dominated, the remaining 21 ha is yellow birch dominated, which also very significant. Only 105 ha of yellow birch working group over 140 years old occurs in the Temagami Forest, 20% of which is in the Blueberry Lake proposed park. When older FRI data is considered the old forest in the park could be as high as 790 ha, or 51% of the park. A winter road was used by lumbermen to access Blueberry Lake in the mid-1900s, and old pine was likely removed from the west shore, however the steep slopes adjacent to Dalton Lake and on

the northeast shore of Blueberry Lake made logging impractical. Tree cores have shown that trees are commonly 200-280 years old near Dalton Lake, and over 150 years old on the northeast shore of Blueberry Lake. The yellow birch forest at the east end of the lake has characteristics suggesting trees also reach 280 years-old or more, but ages have not been verified by tree core. The old-growth forest around Sunrise Lake is the remnant of extensive tracts of old-growth pine that were logged in the 1960s (east of the lake) and the 1980s (west of the lake); the old growth was left as a shoreline reserve around the Lake.

## RECREATION VALUE

In 1998 several hiking trails were built to access the old-growth forest in an almost entirely volunteer effort, and a Guide to the Blueberry Lake Ecology Trails was created (Henry, 1999). The Temagami Local Citizens Committee coordinated a field trip to hike the trails in 1999, at which time GPS tracks were recorded and the trails were recognized for planning purposes. Attendees included Bob Olajos, Francis Boyes (Smoothwater), Jim Sanderson (MNR), and Claude Goulard (Goulard Lumber), and others. Since then more portages have been reopened to make Blueberry Lake part of several possible canoe loops.

The Blueberry Lake area and the Blueberry-Sunrise loop are now popular canoeing destinations, and the trails see frequent use. Temagami Outfitting states that “it is busy canoe route. We have people going there ALL THE TIME. That alone should warrant its designation.” (Fenkell, 2025), and Smoothwater Outfitters reports that “Blueberry has been consistently popular with our clients. They love the lake and the trails.” (Boyes, 2025)

Given the proximity to town, the beauty of Blueberry and Sunrise Lakes, and the high-quality old growth found there, this is an exceptional canoeing destination that deserves recognition and formal protection. Ontario Old-Growth Conservation Volunteers and Friends of Temagami regularly maintain portages, campsites and the old-growth trails.

FIGURE 3 BLUEBERRY LAKE PROPOSED PARK IN RELATION TO HISTORIC LOGGING AND OLD-GROWTH FOREST

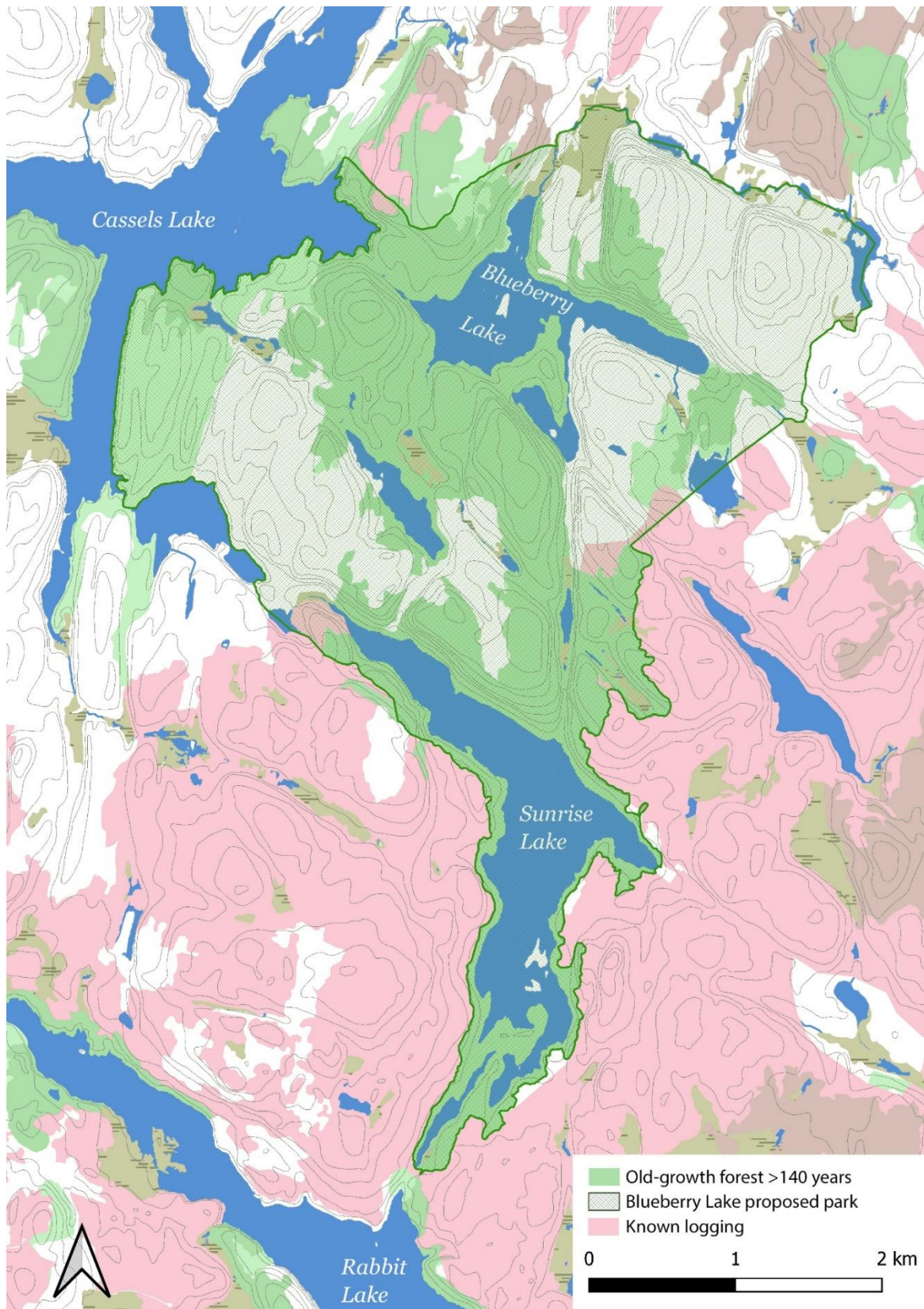
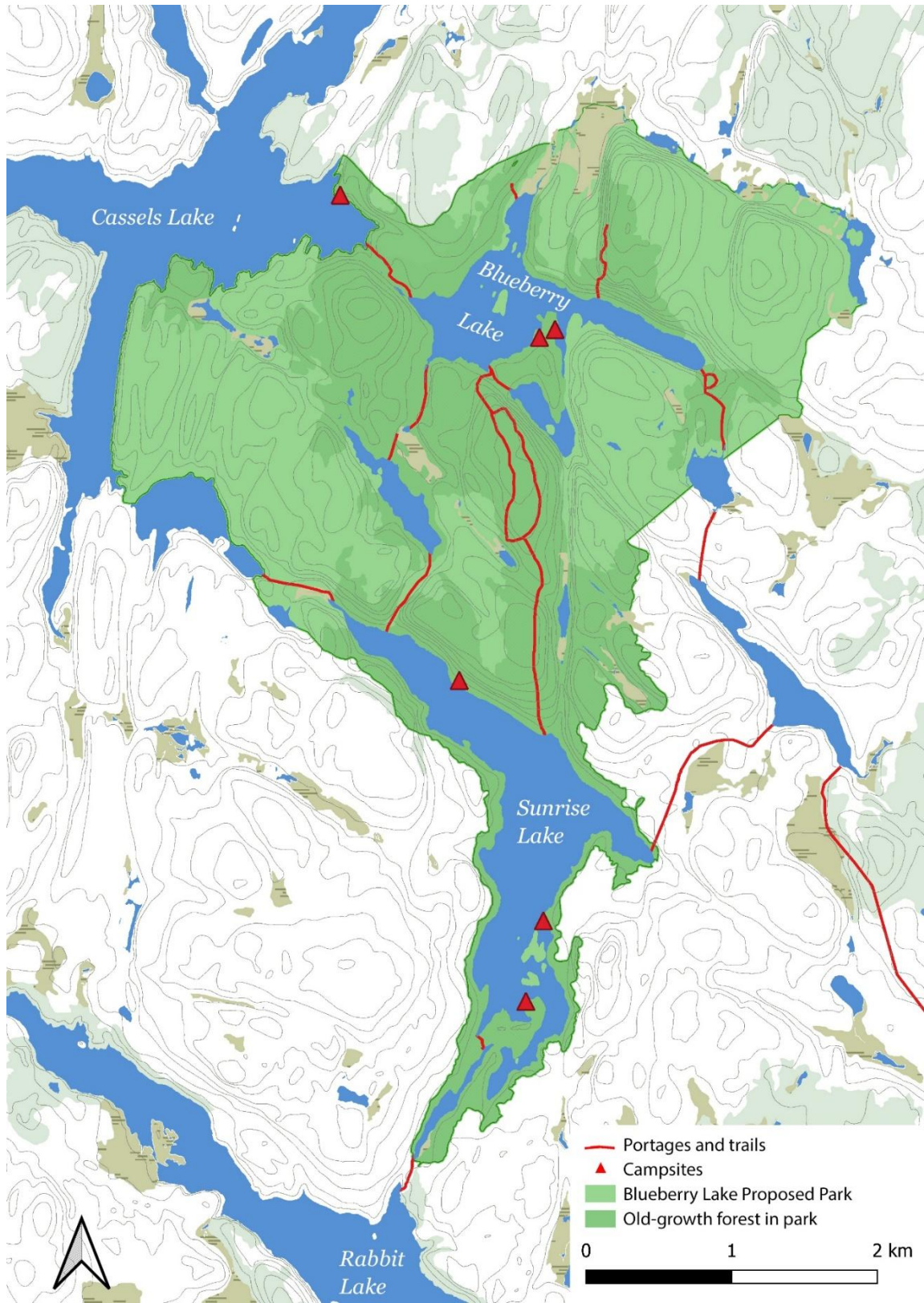


FIGURE 4 BLUEBERRY LAKE PROPOSED PARK RECREATIONAL VALUES



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