

Logging to continue

Algonquin plan is conservationist's nightmare

By MICK BIRNAL

Logging will be allowed to continue, and a only very small percentage of Algonquin Park's area will be classified as 'primitive,' according to the Ontario Government's much delayed master plan for Algonquin Provincial Park.

The one hundred page report was released October 22 by Natural Resources minister, Leo Bernier.

Algonquin Park, 160 miles from Toronto, presently covers 2,910 square miles. Under the new master plan, another 25,000 acres of government owned land will be added.

It's estimated that during the 1974 season, 760,000 people visited the park.

LOGGING

Presently, twenty-seven companies have rights to log throughout Algonquin Park. Nearly 3,000 local men make their livelihood working for the firms. The question of whether or not the logging should be allowed to continue is a very sensitive and emotional one.

The government, in allowing logging to continue, will also permit 75 per cent of Algonquin's forests to be cut. Each year, 20,000 acres of land may be cleared, or roughly one per cent of the park's total area.

The government claims it is reducing the logging by 50 per cent. But Patrick Hardy, the executive director of the Algonquin Wildlands League, an organization devoted to ridding the park of logging and all commercial resorts, says "these figures are misleading." While it is true that only one per cent of the park may be cut annually (down from the previous two per cent total) the government will allow more million cubic feet of wood to be taken from the reduced area. In the master plan there is no mention whatsoever that the logging will one day be phased out.

The trees presently being cut take between seventy-five and one hundred years to grow back. Already, only one or two of Algonquin's magnificent pine stands still remain, and the birch trees which are being cut now are falling at an alarming rate. At least 1,000 miles of logging roads have leveled their way through Algonquin.

Bernier, as minister in charge of both mines and lands and forests, is in an interesting position. "One of his jobs is to exploit the land," said the Toronto Sun in a 1972 editorial, "the other is to save it; it is a direct conflict." Two years later, when evaluating the master plan, Liberal leader Robert Nixon said, all it will do is "put in a lot more picnic tables, pick up trash, and continue logging."

TIMBER

But the most interesting comment of all comes from Stephen Lewis, the leader of the New Democratic Party. Using figures from Bernier's ministry, Lewis claims enough timber exists in the area surrounding Algonquin to accommodate nearly all the logging companies. Bernier has refused to comment.

It seems the government's action in allowing the logging to carry on is sadly lacking and missing the point of maintaining a wilderness area. Certainly, there are 3,000 jobs involved, but no one is suggesting that the logging end tomorrow. Phase it out over a reasonable period of time, say ten years for example. As for relocating the men, Ontario generates over 200,000 new jobs each year. Of course, moving one's family or learning a new skill is no easy matter, but if Lewis's claims are true, then the companies will only have to move outside the park, and

do their logging there.

How can one fail to see that logging is just not compatible with preserving a natural environment area? Evidently, Bernier has. And although Henry David Thoreau once said, "we can never have enough of nature", the Ontario government's interpretation of this must be to provide just enough.

PRIMITIVE ZONE

Roughly nine per cent of Algonquin Park will be protected from logging and all other harmful activities. This 'primitive' zone is in the south-west corner of the Park.

Hardy was very disappointed with such a small area being protected. The Algonquin Wildlands League, he said, wanted to see the entire western section of the park protected, at the very least. To illustrate the diminutive size of the 'primitive' area, Hardy estimated that it would cost a canoeist only one day's work to paddle straight through it, or three days to circle it.

It might also be noted, that this primitive area, "free from all outside influences," includes the Canoe Lake portage store which dumps its sewage into the lake, and Highway 60, which crossed the park's southern portion.

FOREST AUTHORITY

An Algonquin Park Forest Authority was also established by the master plan. Its purpose is to monitor logging activities inside Algonquin. Bernier's original choice for chairman of the committee was former Ontario premier John Robarts, who sits on the board of directors for one of the logging firms presently operating inside the park.

Bowing to mounting pressure, the minister wisely changed his mind and made George Priddle, a geography professor at Waterloo University, the chairman instead.

A second 'rubber stamp' committee was set up in the master plan to advise the minister on Algonquin, and all other provincial parks. This 18-member council has an interesting history to it or perhaps, more appropriately, lack of one. At least two of the members were phoned the day before the master plan was released and asked to join then, without seeing any of the council's goals or objectives in print.

OTHER PROPOSALS

There are many other proposals in the one hundred page report. Among the more important ones are these:

- interior canoe routes will be improved, and new ones in the exterior will be developed.
- perimeter parks around Algonquin will be established.
- motor boats will be banned on all but 27 lakes. One of these is Opeongo, the largest lake in the park, and the other 26 have cottages on them.
- the four existing lodges inside Algonquin will be allowed to operate until 1995. No new lodges will be built.
- camping on heavily used lakes will be limited to one night.
- tin cans will be banned, except for areas with garbage disposal systems in effect.
- no other highways will be built inside the Park.
- no additional hydro lines or pipelines will be built.
- no cottage leases will be renewed.

The Toronto Star's editorial section rose to the occasion on October 24, by declaring that the master plan "isn't worth the 100 pages it was printed on." Although there are some very good points in the report, the bad points decisively outweigh their effect.

No one will ever accuse Bernier's ministry of running out of ideas for Algonquin Park. Although cleaning up Algonquin is both time consuming and expensive (to the tune of \$200,000, last year), some money managed to find its way to smoothing a 900 yard portage with dozens of 100 pound bags of woodchips. This was to make the walking easier.

Similarly, not allowing logging during the peak tourist months of July and August is an admirable idea, but to look at the situation realistically, are we supposed to think that logging never goes on, since we can't see or hear it? And, when we cross a lumber road on a

portage, are we expected to look away, and pretend it doesn't exist, either?

As for the master plan in its entirety, the success of some of the brighter ideas will depend on how well park officials are able to enforce them. Without rangers on hand, it will be difficult to change many people's established ways of camping, such as picking a popular campsite on a well travelled lake, and staying there for a week. Two more master plans for provincial parks will follow in the near future. The next to be released will most likely be for Lake Superior Park and is rumoured to be very favourable to logging interests. Then, with the provincial election drawing near, the government can unveil its plan for Quetico national park, which will kick out all the loggers.

To a person sympathetic to the preservation of a wilderness area, the report is, at best, confusing. To a conservationist it is a nightmare.



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