



Kawartha Highlands

Signature Site

Background Information ~ Summary

Introduction

Located 50 km north of Peterborough, the Kawartha Highlands Signature Site Park contains a range of natural, cultural and recreational values, each with related management issues. Situated along the southern edge of the Canadian Shield, this relatively undeveloped area encompasses 37,587 ha and features a rugged rolling landscape of small lakes, wetlands, forests and rocky barrens. The Kawartha Highlands Signature Site Park (“Kawartha Highlands”) was regulated on April 21, 2005 and is now the largest park in Ontario south of Algonquin Provincial Park. The purpose of this document is to provide the pertinent background information for all who will be involved in the management planning process for this park.

From 1997 to 2002, prior to management planning, there were opportunities for public, stakeholder and Aboriginal community input into the future of the Kawartha Highlands, including protected area designation and boundary, levels of protection and traditional use. In 2003 this input resulted in the creation of the Kawartha Highlands Signature Site Charter followed by the *Kawartha Highlands Signature Site Park Act*, which outlines site-specific policy and operational direction for the Kawartha Highlands and incorporates the provisions of the Provincial Parks Act. Key components of sound planning for the future of this park are continued public input, stakeholder involvement and Aboriginal community participation.

Access

A network of provincial highways and county roads provide convenient access to the area. Most visitors coming to the area from the south use Highways 401, 115/35, and 28 as the primary route to the southeast corner of the area (Burleigh Falls) and then reach their specific destination in the park via Highway 28 on the east, County Road 36 on the south, and County Road 507 on the west. The largest airport providing access to the Region is located near Peterborough, approximately 50 km away. The Trent–Severn Waterway passes through the Kawartha Lakes just south of the Kawartha Highlands. A number of roads, most of which began as cottage roads, reach into the Kawartha Highlands from the east, west, and south, providing vehicle access to groups of cottages that were formerly accessible only by water. There are 23 formal and informal access points to the park.

Land Tenure

There is a wide variety of land tenure within and adjacent to the Kawartha Highlands and private property has been excluded from the boundaries of the park. Significant cottage lot development began in the mid-1900s and currently there are over 500 cottage properties surrounded by the park and over 1400 cottage properties adjacent to the park. One area of mining claims/lease found within the perimeter boundary of the park is designated a forest reserve and is not part of the regulated park. Adjacent to the park, particularly on the west side, are many active aggregate permit and licence areas which are extracting dimensional building

stone, granite, sand and/or gravel. There are currently 57 recreation camps authorized under land use permits within the boundaries of the park and 13 camps immediately adjacent. The park also contains 15 trap cabins and one secondary trap cabin. Many other land use permits or licences of occupation have been issued for commercial or private uses, such as docks, parking lots, storage buildings, electrical transmission lines and telephone lines.

Purposes of the Park

The overriding priority for this park is the protection of ecological integrity so as to preserve, protect and enhance the natural composition and abundance of native species, biological communities and ecological processes. A long-term comprehensive ecological integrity monitoring program is essential to the achievement of the protection, preservation and enhancement of ecological integrity in the Kawartha Highlands. Other purposes of the park, as defined by the *Kawartha Highlands Signature Site Park Act, 2003*, are:

- to protect the park's natural and cultural heritage values, maintain its traditional uses and provide the opportunity for recreational activities that are compatible with the natural heritage values and semi-wilderness characteristics of the park,
- to manage the park so as to permit continued access to and enjoyment of private property and of Crown land that is subject to a land use permit, licence of occupation or lease where that private property or Crown land is surrounded by park lands or abuts park lands, and
- to ensure that decisions with respect to the development and any major revision of the management plan for the park are made with prior public input.

Significant Features

The Kawartha Highlands contains many highly significant natural heritage features. These features include:

1. tracts of relatively undisturbed natural landscape with wilderness qualities that are large enough to support mammals with extensive home ranges;
2. vast areas of exposed bedrock;
3. older forest stands;
4. representation of the transition zone between Palaeozoic limestone bedrock and Precambrian granite bedrock;
5. high-quality bog and fen communities; and
6. sandy and peaty shoreline communities dominated by Atlantic Coastal Plain-associated plants.

There are several areas where concentrations of species-at-risk exist within the Kawartha Highlands, and all known significant concentrations are associated with the six features described above. The Kawartha Highlands is comprised of two main watersheds (headwaters) which feed the Mississagua River and Deer Bay Creek.

Climate

The climate reflects the inland location of the Kawartha Highlands, which results in relatively short growing seasons. Localized higher precipitation occurs as a result of the influence of Lake Huron and Georgian Bay to the west. Over time, as a result of climate change, increased annual average temperature will shorten winter and the duration of lake ice cover and the summer seasons may yield an increase in the frequency of extreme weather events. This may have impacts to the resources of the Kawartha Highlands, such as wildlife, vegetation and recreation.

Earth Science Features

Bedrock geology representation of the Kawartha Highlands is considered to be provincially significant. The park lies within the Grenville Province, one of the major subdivisions of the Canadian Precambrian Shield, and more specifically within the Central Metasedimentary Belt, which is an accumulation of volcanic rocks, metasedimentary rocks and marbles. The surficial geology of the area is considered locally significant, and is described as bare rock ridges and shallow till, with over 60% of the region consisting of bare bedrock. Although there was some interest in mineral exploration in the region beginning in the mid-1950s, economically viable concentrations of minerals such as uranium have yet to be found. The soils of the Kawartha Highlands area are composed primarily of materials left behind by glaciers, with ice-scoured, bare rocklands predominant in much of the area. Both soil quality and quantity have been reduced - very recently on the geological calendar – as a result of intensive logging during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and extensive wildfires that swept through the area in the early part of the twentieth century. Most of the north-eastern, south-eastern and south-western portions of the Kawartha Highlands are rock outcrops, which may have pockets of shallow sandy till or organic deposits, but are primarily exposed bedrock and excessively drained. The vast majority of the area is composed of combinations of rock outcrop and Monteagle sandy loam soil types. Organic mucks and peat deposits are found in the seasonal and permanent wetlands that occur throughout the Kawartha Highlands.

Life Science Features

One of the most significant features of the Kawartha Highlands is that it straddles two major ecological regions and two climatic regions, resulting in high species diversity in breeding birds and reptiles and amphibians. Many species reach or approach their northern or southern range limits in this transitional area. Another key natural heritage value of the Kawartha Highlands is its relatively intact natural landscape, with connectivity to major protected areas to the north, east and west. Species with large home ranges, such as wolf, moose and bear, require such intact landscapes to maintain viable populations. Widespread open rock barrens support a distinctive assemblage of plant communities, and there is an abundance of lakes, streams, treed swamps, thicket swamps, bogs and fens. The predominant vegetative cover is upland forest, especially mixed deciduous-coniferous forests, in the northern and south-western sections. Open lakes and wetlands occur throughout and are connected by both fast and slow-moving streams and rivers, although in some instances isolated wetlands also occur. A total of 74 species of damselflies and dragonflies, 65 butterfly species, 29 species of amphibians and reptiles, 176 bird species, and 37 species of mammals are known to have been recorded from Kawartha Highlands or from within 3 km of the boundary. There is evidence of wolves or wolf/coyote hybrids in the park, which as top-level carnivores are a vital part of the ecosystem. The Kawartha Highlands, along with the Peterborough Crown Game Preserve to the east, represents a relatively large piece of contiguous habitat and is therefore an important core area for these animals. The large lakes in the area are nutrient-poor, clear water lakes that support species of sport fish such as Lake Trout, Largemouth Bass, Smallmouth Bass, Walleye, and Brook Trout. Nutrient-rich lakes can be found throughout the Kawartha Highlands in locations determined by topography, and are often influenced largely by beaver activity. These nutrient-rich lakes are characterized by shoreline bog wetlands and species of fish such as Largemouth and Smallmouth Bass, Walleye, Brook Trout, Muskellunge, and Northern Pike. There is a long fish stocking history of lakes in the Kawartha Highlands area, for species such as Lake Trout, Splake, Brook Trout and Largemouth Bass.

Cultural Heritage Features

To date, there are only two registered “pre-contact” archaeological sites within the boundaries of the Kawartha Highlands. Both of these are found within the pre-existing park, which has since become part of the larger Kawartha Highlands Signature Site Park. It is expected that many other sites would be documented with further detailed examination of the area. There are many “post-contact” built heritage resources which have been documented in the park, most of which are associated with the lumber industry (logging camps, depots, rock dams, mills, log plumes and a quarantine camp). A total of 20 abandoned mine and quarry sites have been inventoried, but this may not include remnants of poorly documented nineteenth century mining activities.

Recreational Features

The Kawartha Highlands has many features that attract visitors to the area for recreational purposes, including semi-wilderness characteristics, the many lakes, rivers, streams and wetlands, exposed bedrock, topographic patterns, sport fish and wildlife. There is a long history and wide variety of recreational activities which have taken place in the Kawartha Highlands including, but not limited to, camping, canoeing, cottaging, fishing, hiking, hunting, skiing, and snowmobiling.

Commercial Activities

Several commercial activities also occur and have a history within the Kawartha Highlands. Portions of 24 registered trap lines, 14 bait fish harvest areas and six bear management areas exist within the park. In addition, there are three commercial outfitters operating a total of four outpost camps within the park. Guiding services have been provided for resident hunters, fishing, canoeing, ecotourism and a variety of other endeavours.

Social and Economic Context

The region surrounding the Kawartha Highlands has very little economic dependency on resource extractive industries and is instead linked to, and dependent on, the southern Ontario economy for tourism, recreation and/or proximity to other manufacturing areas and consumer markets. Tourism is the most dominant industry that is reliant on the region’s natural resource base. Cottaging, camping, resort use, recreational boating and angling are likely all significant economic activities in the region and all of these activities are dependent on the natural resource base of this region.

The Kawartha Highlands was already a major natural recreational destination prior to the area being designated a provincial park. The close proximity of the Kawartha Highlands to the large population centres of southern Ontario makes the region a convenient destination for recreational pursuits. The cottaging industry is a major economic stimulus to local retail, all types of construction and repair industries, services to cottagers and marinas. There has been a historical canoe route system within the Kawartha Highlands for decades and at least two guide books have documented the routes within the park.

Park Management Planning

The *Kawartha Highlands Signature Site Park Act* and Charter have determined certain direction for the park, and the management planning process will build on existing direction contained within these documents. Broad topics to be considered during the development of a park management plan will include natural and cultural resource protection, resource use, recreational use, access and park infrastructure.