

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: St. Raphael Signature Site Strategy**

### **Introduction**

St. Raphael Signature Site (the signature site) is a remote area of interconnecting waterways and boreal forest, encompassing more than 150,000 hectares in northwestern Ontario (see Figure 1). The area exhibits a range of natural, cultural and recreational values and is known for outstanding scenery, remote character, fly-in fishing and circular canoe routes. This combination of attributes prompted the St. Raphael landscape to be profiled as one of nine “featured areas” or signature sites in the *Ontario’s Living Legacy Land Use Strategy* (Land Use Strategy) in 1999.

The lands and waters within St. Raphael Signature Site are assigned to two land use designations: a provincial park and an enhanced management area. St. Raphael Provincial Park is a waterway class park and contains many of the waterways and shorelines in the signature site. This park surrounds a remote landscape that has been designated as the Miniss Enhanced Management Area, a remote access enhanced management area. The area surrounding the signature site is managed as a general use area by the Ministry of Natural Resources.

The vision statement for St. Raphael Signature Site is:

***‘To preserve and protect the remote characteristics and unique values of St. Raphael Signature Site, while maintaining and balancing traditional, economic and recreational activities and opportunities.’***

This strategy for St. Raphael Signature Site has been prepared as a high-level direction statement. It will guide the development of a park management plan for St. Raphael Provincial Park and a resource management plan for the Miniss Enhanced Management Area.

The *St. Raphael Signature Site Strategy* was developed as part of a comprehensive planning process complete with Aboriginal input and public consultation at each stage of development. The planning stages were as follows:

1. Development of the Terms of Reference (March 2003)
2. Invitation to Participate extended to the public (April 2003)
3. Information collection and development of a Background Document (January 2004)
4. Development of an Issues and Options Document (November 2004)
5. Development of a Preliminary Strategy (November 2005)
6. Completion of the final *St. Raphael Signature Site Strategy* (January 2007)

### **Aboriginal Use**

St. Raphael Signature Site overlaps the treaty area of the Nishnawbe-Aski Nation (Treaty #9). A portion of the signature site also overlaps the documented territory of the Treaty #3 people. Communities of the Ojibway Nation of Saugeen (Treaty #3) and Mishkeegogamang First Nation (Treaty #9) have affirmed that land encompassed by St. Raphael Signature Site overlies their traditional use area. Members of these communities have strong ties to the waters and land that make up and surround the signature site. MNR recognizes the importance of Aboriginal culture and traditional land use. Aboriginal people have indicated they use the signature site area for hunting, trapping, fishing, gathering and travel. These uses may continue subject to public safety, conservation and other considerations.

The Ministry of Natural Resources will work with Aboriginal people to identify economic opportunities in the signature site area. The ministry will also continue to identify and document sites of cultural significance in the signature site and will consider these in management planning.

### **Adjacent Lands**

Activities in the adjacent general use area have the potential to impact signature site values. Specifically, remote characteristics could be adversely affected by activities that occur adjacent to the signature site. The planning of activities in the adjacent general use area should consider the implications of these activities on signature site values, and impacts mitigated whenever feasible. District ministry staff will work with Ontario Parks when reviewing local-level land use and resource management projects on adjacent lands to ensure signature site values are considered and appropriate mitigation measures employed. Measures to reduce potential effects will be centered on maintaining remote characteristics and protecting natural and cultural values in the park portion of the signature site.

### **Cultural Heritage**

The land use intent for cultural heritage in St. Raphael Signature Site is to protect cultural heritage resources. The Ministry of Natural Resources will continue to work in partnership with Aboriginal communities to locate, identify and document sites of Aboriginal cultural significance to assist in future resource management planning and project implementation. All confirmed cultural heritage resources (e.g., registered archaeological sites, sites affirmed by a cultural heritage specialist) will be protected in the signature site. Where site disturbance resulting in considerable ground disturbance is proposed in areas of cultural heritage interest (e.g., high-potential sites based on predictive modeling), provincial protocol will be used to conserve this value.

### **Earth Science**

The land use intent for earth science in St. Raphael Signature Site is to protect significant earth science features, and to promote features in the park through public education. Significant and

sensitive earth science features will be protected within St. Raphael Provincial Park. Sensitive landform features in the Miniss Enhanced Management Area will be avoided where possible during planning of access roads and aggregate extraction sites.

Commercial aggregate extraction will not be permitted in St. Raphael Signature Site. Aggregate extraction will be permitted in the Miniss Enhanced Management Area where essential for advanced exploration and mining activities, and for road construction and maintenance.

## **Energy**

At the time it was established, there were no energy generation facilities, nor any energy-related infrastructure within St. Raphael Signature Site. Commercial power generation is not permitted in St. Raphael Provincial Park. Ontario Parks may consider the use of renewable energy systems for supplying the park's energy needs (i.e., facilities related to operating the park) where it proves more economical and environmentally feasible than other forms of generated electricity.

Commercial waterpower and wind power development is not permitted in the Miniss EMA due to the long-term negative impacts to remote characteristics from energy-related infrastructure.

Small-scale renewable energy systems to generate power for tourism facilities may be permitted if compatible with signature site values. Construction of utility corridors for energy transmission and communication lines is discouraged in the signature site but will be permitted if no reasonable alternatives exist.

## **Fire Management**

The *Forest Fire Management Strategy for Ontario* establishes strategic direction for fire management in the province. The signature site is located in the Boreal Forest Management Fire Suppression Zone, in which the protection of human life, property and natural resource values are priorities. Fires in this zone will generally receive a full fire suppression response. The park management plan will provide additional direction on fire response and use in St. Raphael Provincial Park, where fire may have a positive impact on ecosystem health. In addition to fire response planning, prescribed burning is another technique that can be used to reintroduce fire to a landscape. Prescribed fire to induce forest regeneration will be explored during park management planning in consideration of park and adjacent land values. In the Miniss Enhanced Management Area, fire may also be used as a management tool with consideration for adjacent land values.

## **Fisheries**

Fishing (mainly for walleye and pike) is a popular water-based activity. Primary user groups include resident anglers, Aboriginal people and guests staying at tourism facilities. The overall intent regarding fisheries in St. Raphael Signature Site is to ensure healthy native fish populations

are sustained. MNR will undertake a review, and investigate appropriate measures to support fisheries management in St. Raphael Signature Site. Tourism operators will be encouraged to support fisheries management projects through cost and resource sharing partnerships. During park management planning, consideration may be given to phasing out the use of live bait, allowing only the use of preserved bait, or allowing only bait species harvested in St. Raphael Signature Site to be used within the park.

### **Forestry**

At the time St. Raphael Signature Site was established, no large-scale commercial timber harvesting had occurred. Commercial forestry operations are permitted in the EMA component of the signature site. The intent regarding forestry in the Miniss EMA is to ensure operations are carried out in a manner that protects signature site values. Achieving this objective will be essentially tied to maintaining the remote nature of the signature site through techniques that provide for a functionally roadless area. The enhanced management area resource management plan will be developed consistent with the Land Use Strategy direction that there will be “*no impact on wood supply, and only in exceptional cases will wood costs be affected*” as a result of modifications to resource management practices in enhanced management areas. The park management plan will contain direction on access development and closure of roads through St. Raphael Provincial Park. Prescriptions will be designed to protect signature site values and will supplement existing forest management guidelines.

### **Fur and Bait Resources**

There are active commercial fur harvesting (i.e., trapping) and bait resource operations in the signature site area. The intent for commercial fur and bait resource harvesting in St. Raphael Signature Site is to ensure operations continue in respect of signature site values. Active licence holders will have continued traditional access and use of the signature site, subject to direction in the management plans for St. Raphael Provincial Park and the Miniss Enhanced Management Area.

### **Land-based Access**

The primary land use intent for access in St. Raphael Signature Site is to provide access opportunities for recreational and commercial uses while maintaining signature site values. This will be achieved by minimizing impacts of roads and trails on the physical and visual landscape through limited well planned access for recreational purposes, and by providing direction for commercial access development and use.

Provincial park policy allows for road crossings of waterway class provincial parks where necessary to maintain commercial forest operations outside park boundaries. New roads in St.

Raphael Provincial Park will be permitted for forestry purposes. Roads for advanced mineral exploration, development and/or production are also permitted in the Miniss Enhanced Management Area, and will be permitted through the park on existing forest access roads or approved access corridors. Access roads for other commercial users (e.g., trappers, bait resource harvesters and tourism operators) and for private use will not be considered in the signature site.

Roads to access the Miniss Enhanced Management Area through St. Raphael Provincial Park will only be permitted via three crossing locations. Only one road crossing of the park from the general use area will be active at any one time, with rare exceptions such as access requirements for mining activities that are not concurrent with forest operations, or in emergency response situations. Roads in the signature site will be kept to a minimum number and density, follow existing corridors where possible (e.g., mineral exploration and/or mining proponents plan and construct roads using old forestry road beds) and will be developed to a minimum standard in keeping with approved engineering practices. Access management provisions for route planning, road design and construction standards, access control measures and deactivation/rehabilitation of roads in the signature site will be included in the management plans for the park and the EMA.

The use of snowmobiles and all-terrain vehicles will only be permitted on trails authorized for motorized vehicle use in St. Raphael Signature Site. An authorized trail is one that is identified in the park management plan or in the enhanced management area resource management plan. Trails that have traditionally been used for commercial fur harvesting, bait harvesting operations and bear hunting services may become authorized pending further examination.

While existing trails will be considered for authorization in St. Raphael Provincial Park, no new trails will be considered for motorized use. Relocation of established commercial resource harvesting trails in the park may be permitted if there is a demonstrated need. Such applications must be accompanied by the access information requirements listed in section 3.1.10.3. Proposals will be reviewed by Ontario Parks and district ministry staff.

In the Miniss Enhanced Management Area, new commercial and recreational trail proposals will be reviewed by the Ministry of Natural Resources as part of an access management plan, a work permit application, a disposition request and/or a development proposal.

### **Mineral Exploration and Mining**

St. Raphael Signature Site has geology that may be of interest to prospectors and those in the mineral exploration sector. Mineral exploration and mining activities are permitted in the Miniss Enhanced Management Area, but are not allowed in St. Raphael Provincial Park. Mineral

exploration and mining will be carried out in the EMA in a manner that considers signature site values. Guidelines for mineral exploration best practices in enhanced management areas have been developed by the Ministry of Northern Development and Mines, in conjunction with the Ontario Prospectors Association and the Ministry of Natural Resources. These guidelines will be included in the resource management plan for the Miniss Enhanced Management Area.

### **Recreation**

Activities enjoyed by recreationists within St. Raphael Signature Site include hunting, fishing, canoeing, camping, heritage and nature appreciation, boating, cross-country skiing and snowshoeing. The overall intent for recreation in St. Raphael Signature Site is to maintain remote recreational opportunities, as well as providing limited front-country recreation areas. Opportunities for education and interpretation of signature site values will also be explored.

Established canoe routes will be retained, and may be enhanced through limited maintenance (e.g., portage improvement). Development of new back-country campsites is permitted and will be explored during management planning in consideration of signature site values and recreational needs. Partnerships will be sought with tourism operators, outdoor recreation groups and local Aboriginal communities to maintain basic facilities such as fire pits and portages as needed, particularly in back-country areas. A front-country recreation area and public entry point may be developed at Minchin Lake adjacent to Highway 599 subject to further analysis during park management planning. This site may include basic facilities such as a small parking area, a boat launch, garbage disposals, picnic tables, privies and campsites. A second public entry point will be permitted to accommodate travelers approaching the signature site from roads to the south and west of the area. The access point could include parking and privies.

There are sensitive areas in the signature site that may be negatively affected by recreational use. In St. Raphael Provincial Park, sensitive sites will be identified and protected through careful planning and monitoring of recreational areas and uses. In the Miniss Enhanced Management Area, low impact and non-consumptive recreational activities will be encouraged.

### **Tourism**

The Ministry of Natural Resources recognizes that resource-based facilities are an important part of Ontario's tourism industry. The overall intent for tourism in St. Raphael Signature Site is to ensure an ecologically sustainable and remote tourism industry. Authorized tourism operations will be permitted to continue provided there is resource capacity to support these activities.

Expansion or relocation of facilities may be considered if signature site values are not negatively impacted. Where appropriate, enhanced land tenure may be considered for tourism operations

within the signature site. Proposals for new operations must be supported by detailed resource information and included in a sound business plan which demonstrates direct and sustainable benefits to local communities and provides a fair return to the Crown. Review of any proposal will include consultation with local stakeholders, Aboriginal community members and the general public.

Tourism operators access their facilities in the signature site predominantly by floatplane. This means of access will be permitted to continue as per provincial park regulations and direction provided in the management plan for the park and the EMA.

### **Vegetation Management**

Locally to provincially significant plant species and communities are found throughout the signature site. The overall intent for vegetation management in St. Raphael Signature Site is to protect rare, significant and sensitive vegetation species and communities, and to prevent the introduction and proliferation of invasive non-native plant species. Rare and significant vegetation species and communities in St. Raphael Provincial Park will be protected through park management planning. In the Miniss Enhanced Management Area, identified sensitive and culturally important vegetation communities will be considered during resource management planning. Efforts will be made to incorporate traditional Aboriginal knowledge of signature site vegetation and importance into management planning. Measures to deter and control the growth and spread of invasive non-native species will be defined in the management plans for the park and the EMA, and will focus on biological approaches. Commercial peat extraction is not permitted in the signature site.

### **Water Resources**

Maintaining water quality will be a priority in land use and water management decisions pertaining to St. Raphael Signature Site. Aquatic ecosystem health in the signature site area will be maintained through careful planning of land and resource uses in and adjacent to streams, lakes and recharge areas.

### **Wildlife**

Wildlife diversity in the St. Raphael Signature Site area is typical of northwestern Ontario's boreal region, with some species being rare or regionally uncommon. The management intent for wildlife is to help ensure healthy wildlife populations and to support protection of species at risk by sustainable management of land uses and resources in the signature site. Most wildlife species in Ontario are conserved through landscape-level (i.e., wildlife management units) and local management (e.g., trap-line management). Provincial wildlife management guidelines will be applied to activities in the Miniss Enhanced Management Area. Enhanced habitat protection

strategies may be incorporated into the management plans for the park and the EMA. Wildlife studies and species at risk research will continue in the signature site. Traditional Aboriginal knowledge of wildlife use will be important in resource management planning

Woodland caribou habitat will be considered in management planning for St. Raphael Provincial Park through appropriate zoning and stewardship policies. Woodland caribou conservation in the Miniss Enhanced Management Area will be supported by the use of forest management guidelines and any additional direction developed in the enhanced management area resource management plan.

### **Next Steps**

This signature site strategy provides broad direction for Crown land uses and resource management in St. Raphael Signature Site. The strategy is a guide for the development of the park management plan for St. Raphael Provincial Park and the resource management plan for the Miniss Enhanced Management Area.

Management approaches have been developed to achieve sustainable resource management consistent with the vision for St. Raphael Signature Site. Action items will be implemented through subsequent management planning.

Monitoring provides an assessment of the effectiveness of a plan's management objectives and strategies in achieving its overall goals or vision. Inspection of commercial resource activities in the signature site will provide data to support monitoring of the strategies' effectiveness.

### **Public Consultation**

There were extensive public consultation efforts made throughout all stages of this planning process. MNR will continue to work with interested public and stakeholders as we move forward with park and enhanced management area plan development.

For further information, please contact MNR by mail:

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