



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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Submitted via Environmental Registry of Ontario

29 August 2023

Re: Developing a Management Plan for Bigwind Lake Provincial Park (ERO File 019-6666)

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).

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.

Overall, the WCA supports the idea of converting Bigwind Lake PP to operating park status, thereby expanding opportunities for Ontario residents and visitors to access wilderness areas in a sustainable way. The WCA also endorses the Ministry's emphasis on protecting natural heritage values as an aspect of the Park's transition to operating status.

In our view, the central challenge of this planned transition will be providing improved access and basic operating park amenities, while minimizing ecological impacts on account of these improvements and their ongoing use.

To our knowledge, BLPP is not frequently included as an interim- or end-point on back-country canoe routes, since the lakes are relatively small and isolated from each other and from connecting lakes and rivers, such as the nearby Black River. Accordingly, we view the BLPP site as an area that will appeal to canoe paddlers as part of an opportunity to enjoy a relatively pristine local wilderness setting, along with hiking and other activities. In recognition of the relatively undisturbed natural setting, we would recommend that the amenities provided at BLPP should be minimalist and with fairly concentrated footprints, in order to mitigate the impact on local habitats and environments. We discourage the installation of extensive facilities to the extent possible. We encourage the provision of campsite



thunder boxes, which could also provide an opportunity to involve local school arts program in their decoration. This was done on the Dumoine River, Quebec.

Further development of the Park's hiking trail network would be welcome, along with a central kiosk and park map. A good park map should also be posted on the Bigwind web page.

It seems likely that improvements to the Old Wagon Road and perhaps other vehicle routes will be necessary to improve access to different areas of the park. However, measures to limit the presence of vehicles throughout the park, such as hike-in campsite areas, are worth considering in our view.

BLPP may be well suited for accommodating group stays with an instructional/educational focus. This could be supported with configurations featuring collections of closely grouped sites, with shared local areas for group meals and/or instructional activities. For example, a group campsite with lake access could be made available for booking by private canoe instructors arranging programs to introduce groups to flatwater paddling skills and safety awareness. In addition to a group campsite, related useful facilities in this example would include suitable canoe storage and launch areas.

We look forward to seeing more detailed proposals for the Bigwind management plan as they are made available.

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 black ink, appearing to read "Gary Ataman".

Gary Ataman, Chair
The Wilderness Canoe Association

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

Tom Connell
WCA Conservation Committee