

202

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Projets de réserves de biodiversité des lacs
Vaudray et Joannès et du lac Sabourin

Abitibi / Baie James

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PUBLIC CONSULTATION DOCUMENT

PROPOSED SABOURIN LAKE BIODIVERSITY RESERVE

PROTECTION AND MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK

SUMMARY

AUGUST 2004

Biodiversity Reserve

On March 3, 2003, the Québec government announced that the Sabourin lake territory, located south of Val d'Or, had become a "proposed biodiversity reserve", a first step toward obtaining the "biodiversity reserve" status by March 3, 2007. In the meantime, the final status, boundaries and conservation plan of this protected area will be established following a public consultation.

This decision of protecting this area acknowledges the value of the territory on the biological and ecological levels. It also aims at protecting representative samples of the ecosystems of the natural province of the Abitibi and James Bay Lowlands.

Once the decision of protecting the area was made, activities associated with mining, gas and petroleum development, forest management and the development of hydraulic resources are now prohibited under the *Natural Heritage Conservation Act*. However, non-industrial activities are permitted, provided they do not threaten biodiversity.

Public Consultation

The current consultation is aimed at receiving commentaries from the people about this protected area project and on how to manage it as proposed within the *Protection and Management Framework of the Proposed Sabourin Lake Biodiversity Reserve*. Recommendations and proposals arising from this public debate will be taken into consideration by the Ministère when it will prepare its final conservation plan. The Ministère will then have the Government adopt the limits and definitive status of this protected area.

Ecological and Socioeconomic Profile

The 378 km² territory of the proposed Sabourin Lake biodiversity reserve is made up of two main ecological entities. The western sector is hilly with thin till and rock tops, while the eastern sector is dominated by vast peat bogs. Two sugar maple stands are found in the reserve, a rare phenomenon in Abitibi. One of these is leased for home-made maple sap utilization.

The hydrographic system is characterized by a large shallow lake as well as by a long esker on which there are ten end pit lakes, including one perched lake.

The Val-d'Or woodland caribou herd uses as habitats the few rocky mounds shelter spruce and lichen pine stands in the western section of the proposed reserve. In the summer, it scatters through the vast peat bog complexes. The survival of this population is threatened since it now includes only about 30 animals. Predators are the major threat to the caribou.

Furthermore, two Algonquin communities use the reserve's territory for hunting, fishing and trapping activities. About 30 moose hunting camps are spread throughout the reserve. A network of old forest roads serves certain sectors of the reserve and allows off-road vehicle fans to access them.

About 40 vacation cottages, built along the lake's shore, have sanitary facilities of which some are not adequate. However, the tourism potential of Lake Sabourin is just starting to be recognized, especially by windsurfers and other sailing fans.

Sabourin lake shoreline residents are represented by an association that defends the quality of their local environment with conviction.

Conservation Framework

Within the Protection and Management Framework of the Proposed Sabourin lake Biodiversity Reserve, the Ministère de l'Environnement proposes several measures in order to preserve the biodiversity of this area.

First, four conservation areas would be proposed within the reserve. The Sabourin esker, the area most heavily used for vacation activities, would constitute the gateway for recreation and tourism activities. A *conservation and moderate use area* would be created there.

The western sector, which includes the caribou wintering grounds and the eastern sector, which is their habitat in the summer, would be two areas better protected and both would be dedicated to conservation and light use. In these two *conservation and light use areas*, measures would be applied in order to reduce disturbances to this vulnerable species. Hunting and trapping would be managed in such a way as to reduce the number of caribou predators, such as wolves and bears, as well as the number of moose, the usual prey of such predators. In these two areas some forest activities would be allowed, to improve the caribou habitat. Motor vehicle access to the caribou wintering grounds would be forbidden for good.

Finally, the fourth area, bordering the Caribous-de-Jourdan ecological reserve, could become an *integral conservation area* used to consolidate this ecological reserve.

Furthermore, the Ministère de l'Environnement proposes to rationalize the network of access paths by closing the paths that cross wetlands and reconfiguring those that are located on vulnerable soils as well as stream crossings, and by letting nature take over infrequently-used roads. Moreover, the use of off-road vehicles and snowmobiles would be restricted to well-marked paths. Such measures would help to preserve the quality of the forest ecosystems.

The Ministère also wants to persuade shoreline residents to restore shores which were presumably artificialized or eroded and to ensure that their sanitary facilities meet the standards in effect. Banning the use of personal watercrafts and motors more than 30 hp would allow better protection on aquatic and shoreline systems.

To preserve faunal populations, the Ministère de l'Environnement intends to encourage trappers to use all the means at their disposal to reduce accidental catches. To reduce poaching, the Ministère wants to launch an awareness campaign and to increase surveillance of the area. Moreover, beavers would be managed only on the paths that are selected following network rationalization.

To keep the exploited maple stand in the protected area, the conservation of its distinctive ecological heritage is going to require adopting special practices that will specifically exclude firewood cutting within the maple stand.

An option submitted to consultation

To improve the protection of the caribou herds, it has been proposed to include within the proposed Sabourin lake biodiversity reserve, a sector located east of Lake Crémazie which is also their wintering grounds.

Management Framework

The Sabourin lake biodiversity reserve would be managed by the Ministère de l'Environnement, supported by a conservation and development board made up of representatives of the Aboriginals, users and municipalities. Representatives of the Ministère de l'Environnement and of the Ministère des Ressources naturelles, de la Faune et des Parcs will also attend as advisors.

Changing Behaviours

Creating a biodiversity reserve within the Lake Sabourin territory will cause users to adopt new behaviours and to modify some of their activities to make them compatible with the conservation of biodiversity. Measures proposed to reduce disturbances to the woodland caribou are probably those which will affect the users most.

It will be the major challenge for reserve users if they actually want to maintain biodiversity in a protected area of national interest and to help restore the caribou herd.