

202

PR3.1b

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

Abitibi / Baie James

6212-01-203

PUBLIC CONSULTATION DOCUMENT

PROJECTED LAKES VAUDRAY AND JOANNÈS BIODIVERSITY RESERVE

PROTECTION AND MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK

SUMMARY

AUGUST 2004

Biodiversity Reserve

On March 3, 2003, the Québec government announced that the Vaudray and Joannès territory lakes, near Rouyn-Noranda, had become a "projected 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.

The 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 provinces 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 has been 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 Proposed Vaudray and Joannès lakes 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 limits of the proposed biodiversity reserve enclose the whole Vaudray and Joannès lakes basins. This territory, which extends over an area of 181 km², is a rolling plain of impermeable silty-clayey soils broken with low craggy hills. This rolling plain is cut in two halves by the Launay esker that crosses the reserve from north to south along the eastern shore of Lakes Vaudray and Joannès.

Some 467 km of roads and paths crisscross the proposed reserve, for quite a high rate of 2.6 km per km² of reserve. Furthermore, 31% of the paths, an important part, are on very fragile soils, thereby causing erosion and depositing fine particles into streams. Approximately 20 snowmobiles, 100 off-road vehicles are driven in the reserve, and approximately 250 motorboats are driven on various water bodies. Beavers regularly flood access paths and vacation land.

Hunting is quite an important activity on the proposed reserve territory. Ten trapping grounds (for each one, a commercial trapper is granted a lease with exclusive rights to the harvesting of furbearing animals), are partly located within the reserve. These trappers extract approximately 60 furs each year from the territory which is now protected as a whole. Furthermore, approximately 40 rough shelter leases are granted for hunting camps within the reserve. Each one includes from one to four blinds. On average, seven moose are harvested each year in this

territory. Hunters often cut trees and brush from the forest to open and maintain paths, build camps and blinds and clear the view to facilitate hunting. This contributes to the spread of the paths network and habitat fragmentation.

Before it was decided to protect this area, approximately 300 cords of household firewood were cut each year under 35 permits. The wood was mainly extracted from firewood harvesting areas located east of the Joannès-Vaudray road.

The shoreline residents occupy 206 vacation cottages along the shores of the two large lakes. Some have cottage leases (37). This community of approximately 600 people has access to electricity, telephone and municipal garbage collection. Sanitary facilities have much improved over the last 30 years, yet it is estimated that about 30 homes are still not in compliance in 2004.

The shoreline residents are grouped together within the Association des Lacs Vaudray et Joannès inc.

Conservation Framework

Within the protection and management framework of the of the proposed Vaudray and Joannès lakes biodiversity reserve, the Ministère de l'Environnement proposes several measures in order to preserve the biodiversity of this territory.

Three conservation areas are proposed in the protected area. Each area would be managed with a degree of protection and a plan of activities to specifically play its role.

East of the esker, a *conservation and moderate use area* would be used for recreation, faunal harvesting and, perhaps, firewood cutting.

Most of the second area would be concentrated on the inhabited esker. The recreation land and transportation and energy corridors could be excluded from the conditions of application of the *Natural Heritage Conservation Act*. In this area inhabited by more than 600 people, boating on both large lakes would be controlled to maintain the quality of the water.

Finally, the western sector of the reserve, which is less used, would be turned into a *conservation and light use area*. Hunting and trapping could be allowed, but the disruptive effects of these activities ought to be reduced to minimize their impact on the natural environment.

The Ministère de l'Environnement also 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 could have been artificialized and to ensure that their sanitary facilities meet the standards in effect. Furthermore, banning the use of personal watercrafts and motors more than 30 hp would also 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. It also proposes that beavers should be managed only on the paths that are selected following network rationalization.

In order to minimize the impact of vacationers' firewood cutting, the Ministère proposes that woodcutting should be done in the areas surrounding the proposed biodiversity reserve. On the other hand, if the conditions allow it within the protected area without major impact on biodiversity, some firewood harvesting could be considered in the reserve under new, more environmentally friendly conditions and in appropriate stands.

Management Framework

The proposed Vaudray and Joannès lakes biodiversity reserve will be managed by the Ministère de l'Environnement, supported by a conservation and development board made up of representatives of 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

The proposed Vaudray and Joannès lakes biodiversity reserve is the first "inhabited" protected area in Québec. Within this context, it is not a question of reducing user activities, but rather to make sure that new behaviours allow recreating gradually the quality of the ecosystems. In this proposal, the major challenge for reserve users is that of progressively making their activities compatible with the conservation of biodiversity and of meeting the conditions essential to maintaining a protected area.