

# QUÉBEC STRATEGY FOR PROTECTED AREAS



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**PR1.1a**

Projets de réserves de biodiversité du lac Opasatica, du lac des Quinze, de la forêt Piché-Lemoine et du réservoir Decelles

Abitibi-Témiscamingue

6212-01-207

## Opasatica lake proposed biodiversity reserve

(provisional name)

**Conservation plan**



March 2004



# 1. Plan and description

## 1.1. Geographic location, boundaries and dimensions

The location and boundaries of the proposed Opasatica lake biodiversity reserve are shown on the map in the Schedule.

The proposed Opasatica lake biodiversity reserve is located in the Abitibi-Témiscamingue administrative region, between 47°52' and 48°10' north latitude and 79°15' and 79°31' west longitude. The greater part of the proposed biodiversity reserve lies in Municipalité de Rouyn-Noranda, in the regional municipality of the same name. The south-western part of the protected area lies within the territory of Municipalité de Nédélec, in Municipalité régionale de comté de Témiscamingue.

The proposed biodiversity reserve is situated approximately 25 kilometres south-west of Rouyn-Noranda. It covers an area of 245 km<sup>2</sup>. It is accessible from routes 117 and 101 in the north and east, respectively.

One sand and gravel extraction site reserved to the State is excluded from the proposed biodiversity reserve, to the south/south-east of Trompeur lake.

## 1.2. Ecological overview

The protected area is in the natural province of the Abitibi and James Bay Lowlands. It protects ecosystems representative of the Lake Témiscamingue Lowlands natural region. The area is an undulating plain with a few isolated hills. The elevation of the territory ranges from 263 to 373 metres.

### 1.2.1. Representative elements

**Climate:** The territory of the proposed biodiversity reserve is characterized by a mild subpolar, subhumid continental climate with a long growing season. It belongs to the balsam fir-yellow birch bioclimatic field of the mixed forest vegetation subzone.

**Geology and geomorphology:** The proposed biodiversity reserve lies within the Superior geologic province, and is underlain by an Archean basement (over 2.5 billion years). The bedrock consists mainly of felsic rocks, in particular tonalite. The geologic substrate is also formed of sedimentary and ultra-mafic volcanic rocks, in particular in the west and north of the proposed protected area. The rock, which outcrops in places, is covered by glacio-lacustrine deposits or occasionally by a thin layer of till.

**Hydrography:** The proposed biodiversity reserve forms part of the Rivière des Outaouais watershed in the east and part of the Blanche river watershed in the west and takes in the whole of Opasatica lake. The lake has an area of 48 km<sup>2</sup> and is almost 33 km in length. The northern part of the lake is 6 km wide and has large bays with names such as Klock, Lamy, Verte and l'Original. The southern tip of the lake is very narrow in contrast, being not more than one kilometre wide in the Solitaire bay area. This is where the lake drains into the Solitaire river, which feeds Rémigny lake. There are also nine other lakes within the proposed biodiversity reserve.

**Vegetation:** Two thirds of the territory is forested. The glacio-lacustrine deposits are generally covered by mixed stands and occasionally by communities of tolerant softwoods. The rock outcrops, found primarily in the southern part of the proposed biodiversity reserve, support a forest mosaic of intolerant hardwoods and softwoods. The dominant species are balsam fir (*Abies balsamea*), white birch (*Betula papyrifera*), Eastern white cedar (*Thuja occidentalis*) and white pine (*Pinus strobus*). Lastly, peat bogs and alder groves are sometimes found in the valley bottoms or topographic depressions.

### 1.2.2. Outstanding elements

The Ministère des Ressources naturelles, de la Faune et des Parcs granted the status of exceptional forest ecosystems (EFE) to two old-growth forests within the perimeter of the proposed biodiversity reserve in September 2003. In both cases, the forest is a balsam fir-white birch-Eastern white cedar forest. The first forest community, covering an area of 117 hectares, is situated west of Opasatica lake, while the second, covering 113 hectares, is found on the eastern slope of the Granville river valley.

The Société de la faune et des parcs du Québec has granted the status of wildlife habitat to two islands on Opasatica lake because of the presence of a heronry and of a potentially favourable nesting site for the common tern (*Sterna hirundo*). Also worth mentioning is the presence of a yellow walleye (*Stizostedion vitreum*) spawning ground in the northern part of Opasatica lake and of a number of white-tailed deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*) yards on the periphery of the proposed biodiversity reserve.

Lastly, eight sites of cultural and archaeological interest are found within the proposed biodiversity reserve and nine just outside the boundary of the reserve. Most of the sites are located on the shores of Opasatica lake, this lake having played an important role in the history of the Native peoples owing to its strategic position as the major waterway linking the St. Lawrence to Hudson Bay. Two of the three heritage sites are found close to Buies lake and are included in the proposed biodiversity reserve. There is evidence of prehistoric Native settlement on all the sites and of European and Québec settlement on a few of the sites. One archaeological site dates back approximately 4300 years; another site is among the few sites in Québec where rock paintings may be found. The sites are well-preserved for the most part, but remain

extremely fragile because they are close to the surface. Any disturbance could partially or completely destroy them. It must be mentioned that the archaeological potential of the proposed biodiversity reserve may be greater than presently known.

### **1.3. Occupation and main land uses**

The occupations and main land uses in the proposed Opasatica lake biodiversity reserve are shown on the map in the Schedule.

There are seventeen private properties within the proposed biodiversity reserve. Also, 75 land rights have been granted within the perimeter of the proposed biodiversity reserve, as follows:

- 71 for the construction of a rough shelter in the forest; and
- 4 for personal vacation resort purposes (cottage).

Some electric power distribution equipment, with a right-of-way of 12 metres, is found within the proposed biodiversity reserve.

A snowmobile trail also runs through the western part of the proposed biodiversity reserve along Hébert lake.

The proposed biodiversity reserve straddles seven traplines forming part of fur-bearing animal management units (FAMU) 04 and 02-B.

Opasatica lake, which is up to 60 metres deep in places, attracts a considerable number of recreational boaters. The proximity of Rouyn-Noranda has promoted the development of vacation sites along the lake's eastern shores. Part of the area is served by forest roads which lead from Route 117 to Pontleroy and Bull Rock lakes. There are also 27 kilometres of main road which serve the forest area in the southern part of the proposed area.

The corporation Archéo-08 has conducted a number of archaeological digs within the proposed biodiversity reserve, in particular on the shores of Opasatica lake. This inventory work started in 1987 has

been carried out in close collaboration with the Direction du Patrimoine of the Ministère de la Culture et des Communications.

## 2. Protection status

The proposed biodiversity reserve protects a mosaic of ecosystems of exceptional ecological interest. The landscape in the territory is of exceptional value, and of interest for its rich cultural heritage.

Biodiversity reserve status would allow the pursuit of the following conservation objectives:

- ✓ the conservation of environments characteristic of the Lake Témiscamingue Lowlands natural region;
- ✓ the protection of biodiversity in a forest and lacustrine ecosystems;
- ✓ the preservation of sites of archaeological interest (known and potential);
- ✓ the acquisition of new knowledge concerning natural and cultural heritage.

## 3. Activities within the reserve

The activities carried on within the proposed Opasatica lake biodiversity reserve are governed by the *Natural Heritage Conservation Act* (R.S.Q., c. C-61.01).

This conservation plan does not specify any prohibited activity other than those prohibited in biodiversity reserves by the Act; it does specify the conditions and restrictions applicable to certain activities permitted on the land within the reserve.

### 3.1. Prohibited activities

It is important to note that under the *Natural Heritage Conservation Act*, the main activities prohibited in an area designated as a proposed biodiversity reserve are:

- mining, and gas or petroleum development;
- mining, gas or petroleum exploration, brine and underground reservoir exploration, prospecting, and digging or boring, where such activities necessitate stripping, the digging of trenches, excavation or deforestation;

- forest management activities within the meaning of section 3 of the *Forest Act* (R.S.Q., c. F-4.1);
- the development of hydraulic resources and any production of energy on a commercial or industrial basis;
- any new allocation of a right to occupy land for vacation resort purposes;
- earthwork or construction work.

### **3.2. Conditions and other restrictions applicable to certain permitted activities**

All activities, including earthwork and construction work, to ensure the proper functioning of the electric power distribution system, which includes the laying out of the right-of-way, the maintenance and repair of the lines, and the equipment or other facilities needed, are permitted within the proposed biodiversity reserve if they have been authorized by the Minister of the Environment and if they are carried on in accordance with the conditions fixed by the Minister.

The conditions of authorization fixed by the Minister may pertain to:

- the authorized width for the right-of-way and the nature of pruning work and other authorized activities; and
- the types of materials that may be used for the maintenance or layout of the right-of-way which may be taken from the area.

### **3.3. Activities governed by other statutes**

All activities likely to be carried on within the boundaries of the proposed Opasatica lake biodiversity reserve also remain governed by the other applicable legislative and regulatory provisions, including those that require the issue of a permit or authorization or the payment of fees. The carrying on of certain activities may also be prohibited or limited by other Acts or regulations applicable within the boundaries of the proposed biodiversity reserve.

A special legal framework may, within the boundaries of the proposed biodiversity reserve, govern permitted and prohibited activities in connection with:

- **Archaeological research** (especially the measures contained in the *Cultural Property Act* (R.S.Q., c. B-4));
- **Development of wildlife resources** (especially the measures contained in the *Act respecting the conservation and development of wildlife* (R.S.Q., c. C-61.1) and, where applicable, the measures contained in any applicable federal legislation);
- **Access** (especially the measures contained in the *Act respecting the lands in the domain of the State* (R.S.Q., c. T-8.1) and provided under the regulation concerning motor vehicle traffic in certain fragile environments made under the *Environment Protection Act* (R.S.Q., c. Q-2));
- **Land rights** (especially the measures contained in the *Act respecting the lands in the domain of the State* (R.S.Q., c. T-8.1) and in leases issued by the Minister of Natural Resources, Wildlife and Parks).

### 3.4. Supervision of activities

The Minister of the Environment is responsible for the application of the *Natural Heritage Conservation Act*, and is therefore responsible for the proposed biodiversity reserves established under that Act. The Minister will supervise and monitor the measures contained in the Act with regard to prohibited and permitted activities in protected areas.

All other government departments and bodies will retain their responsibilities as set out in the legislative and regulatory texts that apply within a proposed biodiversity reserve, as provided for under the *Natural Heritage Conservation Act*.

## 4. Permanent protection status

The permanent protection status envisaged for the reserve is "biodiversity reserve" status under the *Natural Heritage Conservation Act*.



# Schedule

## Map of the proposed Opasatica lake biodiversity reserve (provisional name)

