



Wasaga Beach

Park Planning: Management Topics and Options



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Opportunity to Comment

The Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry (MNRF), Ontario Parks is preparing a new management plan for Wasaga Beach Provincial Park. Once approved, the plan will guide management and development of the provincial park over the coming years. As part of the planning process, I am pleased to approve this management topics and options document for Wasaga Beach Provincial Park. This document outlines proposed management options and topics that will be addressed during the planning process. Ontario Parks has also prepared a background information document that consolidates relevant information to support planning decisions. The two documents are being released at the same time.

Ontario Parks is seeking input from Indigenous communities, stakeholders and the public on the topics and options contained in this document. To make your submission effective, please list the topic(s) you wish to address and briefly state your reasons for agreeing or disagreeing with the information or proposed management option(s). You may also provide comments on other subjects important to you.

Written suggestions or comments must be made by June 8, 2018. Comments may be provided through the Environmental Registry at www.ontario.ca/ebr (search for registry notice number 013-2524), or addressed to:

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The next stage of planning will be the development of a preliminary management plan, which will present preferred policies to guide park management, operations and development. The preliminary management plan will be released for comment and review for 45 days. All comments received throughout the planning process will be considered in the development of the final plan.

Ontario Parks recently approved a beach management secondary plan to provide up-to-date direction for managing the beach in Wasaga Beach Provincial Park while the broader park management plan is being prepared. Comments received during consultation on the secondary plan will be considered in the current planning process.

Thank you in advance for your interest and comments on the future management of Wasaga Beach Provincial Park.

Approved

26/02/2018

Bruce Bateman
Director
Ontario Parks
Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry

Date (dd/mm/yyyy)

The MNRF is collecting your personal information and comments under the authority of Ontario's Provincial Parks and Conservation Reserves Act, 2006. Your comments (not including personal information) will become part of the record of consultation and may be shared with the general public. Your personal information may be used by MNRF to follow-up with you upon request or when required. It will also be used to send you information about future MNRF initiatives involving this provincial park. Please indicate in your response if you do not wish to be notified of new initiatives. If you have questions about the use of your personal information, please contact the park planner noted above.

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Résumé

Le parc provincial Wasaga Beach gère une diversité de valeurs naturelles, culturelles et récréatives d'importance dans un secteur marqué par un fort accroissement démographique et une expansion urbaine soutenue. Ce contexte soulève des défis administratifs et opérationnels en plus d'ouvrir des possibilités. Le plan directeur du parc, lequel a été approuvé en 1978, ne répond plus à ses besoins; il doit être remplacé. Parcs Ontario a donc entamé un processus de planification dans le but de préparer un nouveau plan de gestion et de fournir au parc une orientation de la gestion qui soit pertinente, actuelle et efficace.

Le présent document a pour objectif de présenter des sujets et des options liés à la gestion qui seront pris en compte dans l'élaboration du nouveau plan de gestion du parc provincial Wasaga Beach. Parcs Ontario a également préparé un document d'information qui présente les renseignements généraux pertinents visant à éclairer les décisions en matière de planification. Le document d'information fournit le contexte et des renseignements relatifs aux sujets et aux options présentés ci-dessous; il doit être consulté pour étudier le présent document et fournir des commentaires sur les sujets et options liés à la gestion qui y sont proposés. Les deux documents sont publiés en même temps afin de recueillir l'avis des collectivités autochtones, des intervenants et du public.

Le présent document donne un aperçu des caractéristiques importantes du parc provincial Wasaga Beach et décrit les sujets liés à la gestion à propos desquels Parcs Ontario souhaite recueillir des commentaires. Ce sont les suivants :

- Élaboration de nouveaux énoncés de mission et de vision
- Cadre décisionnel en matière d'usages et d'activités autorisés
- Considérations relatives aux frontières
- Options :
 - Hébergement la nuit
 - Classification du parc
 - Sentiers d'accès à la plage
 - Renommer les plages
- Autres sujets relatifs au plan de gestion préliminaire
- Fournir des suggestions ou des commentaires sur les documents de planification ou sur le processus de planification

Pour de plus amples renseignements en français, veuillez contacter le Centre d'information sur les ressources naturelles au 1 800 667-1940.

1 Introduction

Wasaga Beach Provincial Park manages a diverse range of significant natural, cultural and recreational values within an area of intense population growth and urban development. This setting creates administrative and operational challenges as well as opportunities. The Park Master Plan, approved in 1978, no longer meets the needs of the park and needs to be replaced. As a result, Ontario Parks has started a planning process to prepare a new management plan to provide the park with relevant, current and effective management direction.

The purpose of this document is to present management topics and options, which will be considered in the development of a new management plan for Wasaga Beach Provincial Park. Ontario Parks has also developed a background information document that presents relevant information to support planning decisions. The background information document provides context and information related to the topics and options presented below; it should be referred to when considering and providing comments on this management topics and options document. Both documents are being released at the same time for input from Indigenous communities, stakeholders and the public.

2 Park overview

Wasaga Beach Provincial Park is a 1844.3 hectare (ha) recreational class provincial park located on the shores of Nottawasaga Bay in southern Georgian Bay. It was established under the *Provincial Parks Act* in 1959 and is now regulated under the *Provincial Parks and Conservation Reserves Act* (PPCRA). Wasaga Beach Provincial Park is situated entirely within the municipal boundaries of the Town of Wasaga Beach.

The park is a popular tourist destination, especially in the summer, and welcomes over one million visitors each year from across the province and national or international destinations. In addition to drawing tourists, Wasaga Beach Provincial Park is located within a community and is used year round by local and nearby residents. The park offers an extensive year-round trail network, an interpretive centre focused on the rich cultural history of the area, 14 kilometres (km) of freshwater beach and picnic areas, and public access to Georgian Bay. The beach is a strongly valued recreational and cultural feature; it is recognized as one of the top ten beaches in Canada, and contributes significantly to the culture, identity and economy of the Town of Wasaga Beach.

Cultural heritage features in the park include two events of national significance recognized under the federal *Historic Sites and Monuments Act* (Nancy Island Historic Site and the Ayling and Reid Flight), one site of provincial significance recognized by the Ontario Heritage Trust (Schooner Town), over 30 archaeological sites, and a rich local history associated with lumbering and tourism.

In addition to having important recreational and cultural resources, the park contains provincially, regionally and locally significant natural features such as the largest and least disturbed parabolic dunes in Ontario, wetlands, a portion of the Nottawasaga River, an active freshwater beach and dune system, ancient beach ridges, distinct vegetation communities, and a number of species at risk¹.

3 Options for purpose and vision statements

Site-specific purpose and vision statements for Wasaga Beach Provincial Park will be prepared through this management planning process. They will reflect the fundamental goal of Ontario's protected area system, which is:

to permanently protect a system of provincial parks and conservation reserves that includes ecosystems that are representative of all of Ontario's natural regions, protects provincially significant elements of Ontario's natural and cultural heritage, maintains biodiversity and provides opportunities for compatible, ecologically sustainable recreation.

3.1 Purpose statement considerations

The 1978 Master Plan includes a goal statement for Wasaga Beach Provincial Park; it will be updated and presented as a purpose statement in the new management plan. The purpose statement describes why the park was established and how it contributes to the protected areas system. The purpose statement will be presented for comment in the preliminary management plan.

Ontario Parks would like your input on which of the following elements you feel should form part of the purpose statement:

- protect significant or representative elements of Ontario's natural and cultural heritage, including:
 - significant or rare ecosystems, including provincially significant parabolic and freshwater dunes, prairies, and wetlands
 - species at risk and their habitats
 - artifacts and information from the HMS Nancy and the War of 1812
 - Indigenous history associated with the park area
 - cultural history of the community of Wasaga Beach and surrounding area
- provide a variety of accessible, high quality, year-round, ecologically sustainable recreational opportunities, such as the all-season trail network and public access to Georgian Bay
- play an active role in the natural, cultural, economic and social health and growth of the community of Wasaga Beach
- provide high quality interpretive and educational opportunities and experiences based on the park and surrounding area's cultural and natural heritage
- maintain biodiversity through the protection of species and their habitats and through control of invasive species
- provide opportunities for scientific research

3.2 Vision statement considerations

A vision statement will be developed for Wasaga Beach Provincial Park as part of this planning process. The vision statement is an extension of the purpose statement, and provides an outlook on the desired state of the provincial park in 20 years.

As with the purpose statement, the complete vision will be presented for comment in the preliminary management plan, however, ideas and topics have been identified by the planning team that can guide the development of the vision statement.

Ontario Parks would like your input on which of the following elements you feel should form part of the vision statement:

- Manage the park for the benefit of future generations.
- Protect the park's ecological integrity and contribute to climate change resilience
- Provide outstanding, ecologically sustainable, all season, welcoming recreational and educational experiences
- Balance diverse interests
- Pursue education, outreach and partnerships

4 Permitted uses and activities

Wasaga Beach Provincial Park receives numerous requests to permit new or change existing recreational activities for a variety of reasons and from a variety of sources. Topics that have recently been, or are often, raised relate to the dog beach, kiteboarding and kiteboard launch areas, clothing optional (nude) beach use, sky diving, and the designated swimming area.

Decisions about permitted uses or activities do not always require consultation; direction regarding many permitted uses is provided in the PPCRA and associated regulations, as well as in overarching provincial park policies.

The new management plan will not address all current and future decisions associated with permitted uses. However, input received during consultation on this document will be considered by park managers for operational purposes and may inform more specific direction in the preliminary management plan.

To assist the park superintendent in making decisions that do not require or include consultation, the following decision framework has been prepared.

Ontario Parks would like your input on whether there are additional questions or considerations that should be included in the decision framework.

When considering proposed permitted uses or changes to existing uses, the park superintendent will determine:

- Is the proposed activity or use prohibited by law?
 - If not, do legislative or regulatory guidelines exist for implementation?

- Is the proposed activity or use prohibited by government, MNRF, or Ontario Parks policy?
 - If not, do policy guidelines exist for implementation?

If the use or activity is not prohibited by law and/or policy, the park superintendent will review relevant information associated with the topic, use professional judgement, and may seek input or advice from other knowledgeable sources, to consider the risk, extent, severity, and duration of potential benefits and pressures on the following topics:

- park purpose, vision and objectives
- health or safety of park visitors and staff
- natural, cultural and recreational values
- park operations and assets
- partnerships or relationship building with Indigenous communities, stakeholders, the municipality, and members of the public
- provincial, regional and local economies, including Ontario Parks' business model

Should the park superintendent determine that the potential benefits of permitting a proposed new use or activity, or changing an existing use, do not outweigh the potential pressures or risks, the use or activity will not be permitted.

5 Boundary considerations

A review of Wasaga Beach Provincial Park's boundary is underway. The review will result in proposals to add or remove land from the provincial park. In particular, there are several provincially-owned properties within the Town of Wasaga Beach that are not currently part of the provincial park but may be considered for future addition to the park. However, due to the complex nature of the review, specific boundary options are not available at this time to be presented for input as part of this management planning process.

In addition to reviewing land ownership, title information, and comments received during consultation, Ontario Parks will consider a standard set of questions with respect to each parcel of property.

Ontario Parks would like your opinion on which of the following questions should be included when considering a parcel of property:

- How would a proposed addition/deletion of this parcel of property affect Ontario Parks' ability to achieve park and PPCRA purpose and objectives?
- How would a proposed addition/deletion of this parcel of property affect existing or historical infrastructure or uses?
- How would a proposed addition/deletion of this parcel of property affect Indigenous communities, stakeholders, or members of the public?

- How would a proposed addition/deletion of this parcel of property increase or decrease operational or financial burden for the park, MNRF, the Ontario government, stakeholders, or others?

Changes to the park boundary require an amendment to Ontario Regulation 316/07 under the PPCRA and would be subject to applicable legislative, environmental assessment, and consultation requirements.

6 New options for consideration

6.1 Overnight accommodation

A range of accommodation types is offered across the provincial park system consisting of campsites accessible by vehicle, foot, or watercraft, as well as a variety of roofed accommodations such as yurts, tents, cottages, lodges, trailers and cabins. Wasaga Beach Provincial Park currently provides day use opportunities only. The park does not offer overnight accommodation, which is uncommon when compared to other operating provincial parks. Wasaga Beach Provincial Park could offer overnight accommodation, which would enable park visitors to extend their visit to the park and surrounding area.

If it is determined that providing overnight accommodation in the park is a preferred direction, the type and location for this development would be chosen to minimize impacts to park values and stakeholders, and to ensure operational efficiency. Possible types of accommodation could be campsites accessible by vehicle or foot, or roofed accommodations (tent, yurt, trailer or cabin). Possible locations for overnight accommodation could be in the Dunes Area of the park near the Trail Centre, along the river, or near the intersections of Klondike Park Road and Veteran's Way or Golf Course Road and Klondike Park Road. Other possible locations could be closer to the beach areas on inland park property, such as along Shore Lane or on 24th Street.

Ontario Parks would like input on the following questions:

- should Wasaga Beach Provincial Park provide overnight accommodation?
- if so, what type of opportunity should be provided, and where should it be located?
- do you think introducing overnight accommodation in the park would contribute to or detract from local tourism and economic development?

6.2 Park classification

Park classification organizes Ontario's provincial parks into broad categories, each of which has particular purposes and characteristics. Classification defines an individual park's role in providing opportunities for meeting the provincial park objectives. Each park shares with others in its class particular characteristics, which help determine its specific function.

Wasaga Beach Provincial Park is currently classified as a recreational class park. The PPCRA states that recreational class parks:

provide a wide variety of compatible outdoor recreation opportunities in attractive natural surroundings.

Ontario Provincial Parks - Planning and Management Policies (1992) further describes recreational parks as playing a key role in meeting Ontario's demand for outdoor recreation by providing opportunities for physical activities such as bicycling, swimming and skiing, as well as playgrounds and play areas for group activities and sports, and by providing opportunities to develop outdoor skills such as sailing and camping. Educational opportunities, both informal and organized, are also offered to visitors at recreational class provincial parks.

There is no doubt that the description of recreational classification is relevant to Wasaga Beach Provincial Park. There is, however, another classification that could also be applied based on the PPCRA and *Ontario Provincial Parks - Planning and Management Policies* (1992) descriptions. Natural environment class parks are described in the PPCRA as parks that

protect outstanding recreational landscapes, representative ecosystems and provincially significant elements of Ontario's natural and cultural heritage, as well as provide high quality recreational and educational experiences.

Ontario Provincial Parks - Planning and Management Policies (1992) further describes natural environment class parks as protecting significant resources in accessible locations, which substantial numbers of people are able to enjoy. These parks provide excellent opportunities for interpretation, outdoor activities and recreation. They make a major contribution to the province's supply of day-use, and facility-based camping opportunities and, to a lesser degree, back-country camping opportunities.

Table 1 and 2, below, provide an overview of the class, size and approximate number of visitors from the operating provincial parks on the lower Great Lakes coasts.

Provincial Park	Size (ha)	Approximate annual visitation
Awenda	2915	148 000
MacGregor Point	1204	146 000
Pinery	2532	607 000
Rondeau	3254	156 000
Killbear	1756	356 000
Presqu'île	937	207 000
Sandbanks	1509	605 000

Table 1: Natural Environment class provincial parks

Provincial Park	Size (ha)	Approximate annual visitation
Wasaga Beach	1844	1 100 000
Craigleith	66	50 000
Sauble Falls	20	78 000
Point Farms	307	75 000
Wheatley	241	79 000
Port Burwell	231	115 000
Long Point	150	133 000
Turkey Point	316	118 000
Selkirk	73	32 000
Rock Point	187	69 000
Darlington	208	123 000

Table 2: Recreational class provincial parks

Based on the description of park values, uses, and opportunities described in previous sections, as well as consideration of how other operating provincial parks on the lower Great Lakes shorelines are classified, both recreational and natural environment classifications could be appropriate for Wasaga Beach Provincial Park.

It should be noted that a change in classification would not noticeably affect the park's day to day operations. Classification relates more to the park's role within the protected areas system, and characteristics or features of the park and its operation.

Ontario Parks would like input on the following questions:

- Should Ontario Parks retain the recreational classification for Wasaga Beach Provincial Park, or change the park's classification to natural environment?
- Why do you feel this way?

6.3 Beach access paths

Ontario Parks maintains or allows many access paths from parking, road allowances, or other developed areas, including private residences, to the shoreline. In some instances, accessibility mats are provided to facilitate access for those with mobility challenges, strollers, walkers, etc.

While the significant numbers of paths that currently exist provide easy access from nearly every adjacent private property and developed area, they have a detrimental impact on the function and integrity of the beach and dune system due to the degree of fragmentation, erosion, and vegetation removal that occurs as a result of all of the paths considered as a whole. Ontario Parks is working to minimize damage resulting from access paths through dune ecosystems while continuing to provide convenient shoreline access for park visitors. Approaches taken to achieve this goal are reducing the number and/or width of paths, ensuring that recreational, cultural and natural values are considered in site planning, or installing infrastructure or signs to educate and direct foot traffic.

Convenient and accessible access to the park's shoreline will continue. However, Ontario Parks would like input on the following questions:

- Should Wasaga Beach Provincial Park retain the same number of access paths at the current allowable width (3 m), or
- Should Wasaga Beach Provincial Park retain the same number of paths but reduce the width, or
- Should Wasaga Beach Provincial Park reduce the number of paths over the longer term?

6.4 Rename the beach areas

Beach areas 1 through 6 had formal names in the past: Oakview, Springhurst, Oxbow, Schoonertown, Dunkerron, the Forum, and the Point. The beach areas are currently numbered, which does not give a good sense of the types of beach experiences or

environments that exist in each beach area. Ontario Parks could work with the Town of Wasaga Beach, Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport, Indigenous communities, stakeholders and members of the public to rename the beach areas. This could give visitors and residents alike a better sense of what each beach area has to offer, or could better reflect the history of the different beach areas. Renaming the beach areas would not change how each beach area is managed, and would result in expenses related to updating signs and communication material (trail maps, park tabloid, etc.) for Ontario Parks, the Town of Wasaga Beach, and others.

Ontario Parks would like input on the following questions:

- Should Ontario Parks explore renaming the beach areas, or should the existing numbering system be kept as it is?
- Why?

7 Other topics to be addressed in the Preliminary Management Plan

The next stage of planning will be the development of the preliminary management plan. This document will present Ontario Parks' preferred approach to managing Wasaga Beach Provincial Park over the coming years. Indigenous communities, stakeholders and the public will have an opportunity to review and provide comments on the draft policies and direction contained in the preliminary management plan. All comments received throughout the planning process will be considered in the development of the final management plan.

In addition to developing draft policies and direction on the topics and options described above, Ontario Parks will address the following subjects in the next stage of planning:

- Site-specific park objectives related to protection, recreation, heritage appreciation and science
- Zoning (identification of areas where specific policies apply or where specific management actions will occur)
- Policies relating to the protection, use, development, or management of:
 - Natural heritage values (e.g., wildlife, vegetation, species at risk, invasive species)
 - Recreational values (e.g., trail network, access points)
 - Cultural heritage values (e.g., historic and archaeological sites, Welcome Centre)
 - Land management and park boundary
 - Infrastructure and utility corridors (e.g., buildings, parking areas, play structures, drainage infrastructure)
 - Science, research and monitoring

- Implementation priorities
- Summary of involvement to date

8 Providing input or comments

Ontario Parks is seeking input from Indigenous communities, stakeholders and the public on the options and topics contained in this document. When preparing a submission, please keep in mind the legislative and regulatory context within which the park operates. Park policies, operation and management must comply with applicable legislation, including the purpose and objectives of the PPCRA (see background information document).

Resource management and planning decision-making is based on consideration of a wide range of information including current legislation and policies, public response and professional judgement. Information provided during consultation is evaluated on its merits, rather than on the basis of numbers.

ⁱ Species at risk are defined as those species listed on the Species at Risk in Ontario (SARO) list in Ontario Regulation 230/08 under Ontario's *Endangered Species Act*. This list is developed by the Committee on the Status of Species at Risk in Ontario (COSSARO).