

ONTARIO



PARKS

BIGWIND LAKE

Provincial Park Preliminary Management Plan

2024

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Opportunity to comment on the Bigwind Lake Provincial Park Preliminary Management Plan

Ontario is providing more opportunities to get outside and enjoy more time in nature, including improved access to greenspaces throughout the province. To achieve this, the province has proposed the creation of the first new full-service operating provincial park in over 40 years at Bigwind Lake Provincial Park.

Following an incredible response in the initial stage of consultation, we've actively listened to your feedback. Building upon this valuable input, we conducted extensive studies on environmental and cultural values, potential impacts, and key design elements to build the park. As we continue to engage with the local community and stakeholders, and maintain ongoing discussions and consultation with Indigenous communities, we are excited to present our preliminary management plan for the proposed operating park.

As we enter this second stage of consultation, your input on the preliminary management plan is crucial in refining our park planning efforts. Ontario Parks envisions a future that adapts to the evolving needs of our community. With a firm commitment to inclusivity, the park will cater to changing demographics, diverse visitor dynamics, and the growing demand for unique outdoor experiences.

The detailed design phase of this project will begin in 2024 and will prioritize environmental design to ensure the park remains a vital part of the natural and cultural landscape for generations to come. We will embrace technology and prioritize sustainability, aiming to create a shared vision where nature, diversity and innovation converge, offering an unparalleled and enjoyable outdoor experience.

Our final management plan, which will guide park management over the next 20 years, will be refined to incorporate your input and new information as it becomes available. This iterative approach ensures that your input and evolving insights continue to shape the park's design and management.

Comments can be submitted through the Environmental Registry of Ontario (number 019-7814) or sent to bigwindlakeprovincialpark@ontario.ca. Comments will be accepted until May 4, 2024. The ministry will carefully consider all comments received.

For further information on this proposal, please contact:

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Your input is greatly valued as we shape the future of Ontario Parks with our newest and most modern operating park.

Charlotte Beckett

Director, Ontario Parks Growth and Partnerships Branch

Jason Travers

Director, Ontario Parks Operations Branch

The Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks (MECP) is collecting your personal information and comments under the authority of section 29 of the [Provincial Parks and Conservation Reserves Act, 2006](#) for the purpose of public consultation on park management planning. 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 MECP to follow-up with you upon request or when required, and to send you information about future initiatives involving this park. Please indicate in your response if you do not wish to be notified of new initiatives. Any personal information you provide will be protected in accordance with the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* and will be handled in accordance with the government of Ontario's Privacy Statement: www.ontario.ca/page/privacy-statement. If you have questions about the use of your personal information, please contact the individual identified above.

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1 Introduction

Bigwind Lake Provincial Park is a 1,967-hectare (ha) natural environment class park¹ located in the geographic township of Oakley, Town of Bracebridge, in the District Municipality of Muskoka (Figure 1). The park is approximately 20 kilometers (km) east of the Town of Bracebridge. The park was originally established in 1985 and is managed by Ontario Parks in the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks (MECP).

The park protects upland forests of sugar maple, hemlock and yellow birch, and low-lying swamps, marshes, and meadows. The park is currently non-operating, which means it offers low-intensity, self-guided recreational opportunities, such as hiking and paddling, but does not have staffing or maintained facilities and services.

This management plan:

- proposes the creation of four-season campgrounds, day-use areas, and backcountry camping facilities to meet the rising demand from Ontario residents
- provides site-specific management policies that will guide the park's operation over a 20-year period

The proposed facilities would make the park operational, enhancing recreational opportunities for visitors. Importantly, the plan is committed to maintaining the protection and health of local wildlife and the environment.

The document includes text boxes providing information on:

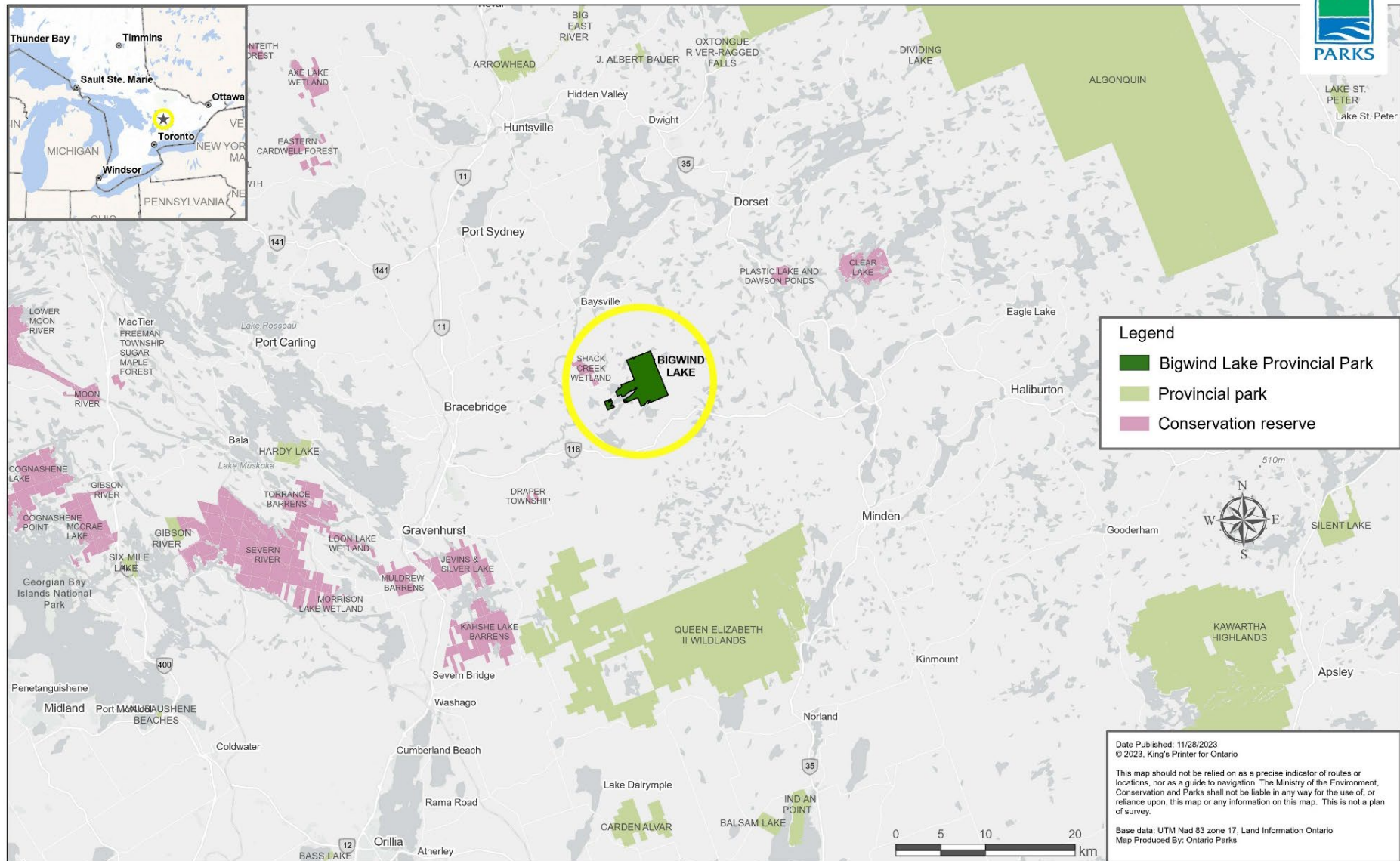
- Background details and study results informing proposed policies.
- Feedback received during consultation that has guided the proposed policies.
- Legislation and policies directing park management.
- Topics that require further information before final policies can be prepared.

1.1 Park management planning context

This management plan has been developed consistent with legislation and policies including the [Provincial Parks and Conservation Reserves Act, 2006](#) (PPCRA), Ontario Provincial Parks: Planning and Management Policies (MNR 1992) and Ontario's Living

¹ Natural environment class parks protect outstanding recreational landscapes, representative ecosystems and provincially significant elements of Ontario's natural and cultural heritage and provide high-quality outdoor recreational and educational experiences.

FIGURE 1: REGIONAL CONTEXT



Legacy Land Use Strategy (MNR 1999). The management planning process is guided by [Ontario's Protected Areas Planning Manual](#) and Guidelines (MNRF 2014a).

1.2 Park boundary

Provincial park boundaries are designated in *Ontario Regulation 316/07: Designation and Classification of Provincial Parks* under the [Provincial Parks and Conservation Reserves Act, 2006](#). Bigwind Lake Provincial Park is a 1,967-ha provincial park. The majority of the park is located east of Bigwind Lake with a small approximately 71-ha area on the west end of Bigwind Lake (Figure 2).

There are 14 lakes fully enclosed within the park boundary, including Crosson, Gullfeather and Keyhole Lakes. The park's boundary ends at the water's edge of some adjacent lakes, namely Bigwind, Pine and Saw Lakes.

There are many "un-named" lakes within the park boundary (e.g. south of Gullfeather Lake). Ontario Parks is interested in your feedback on whether there are local names used for any of these lakes.

There are two municipal roads on the west side of the park that are excluded from the park boundary.

1.2.1 Proposed park boundary expansion

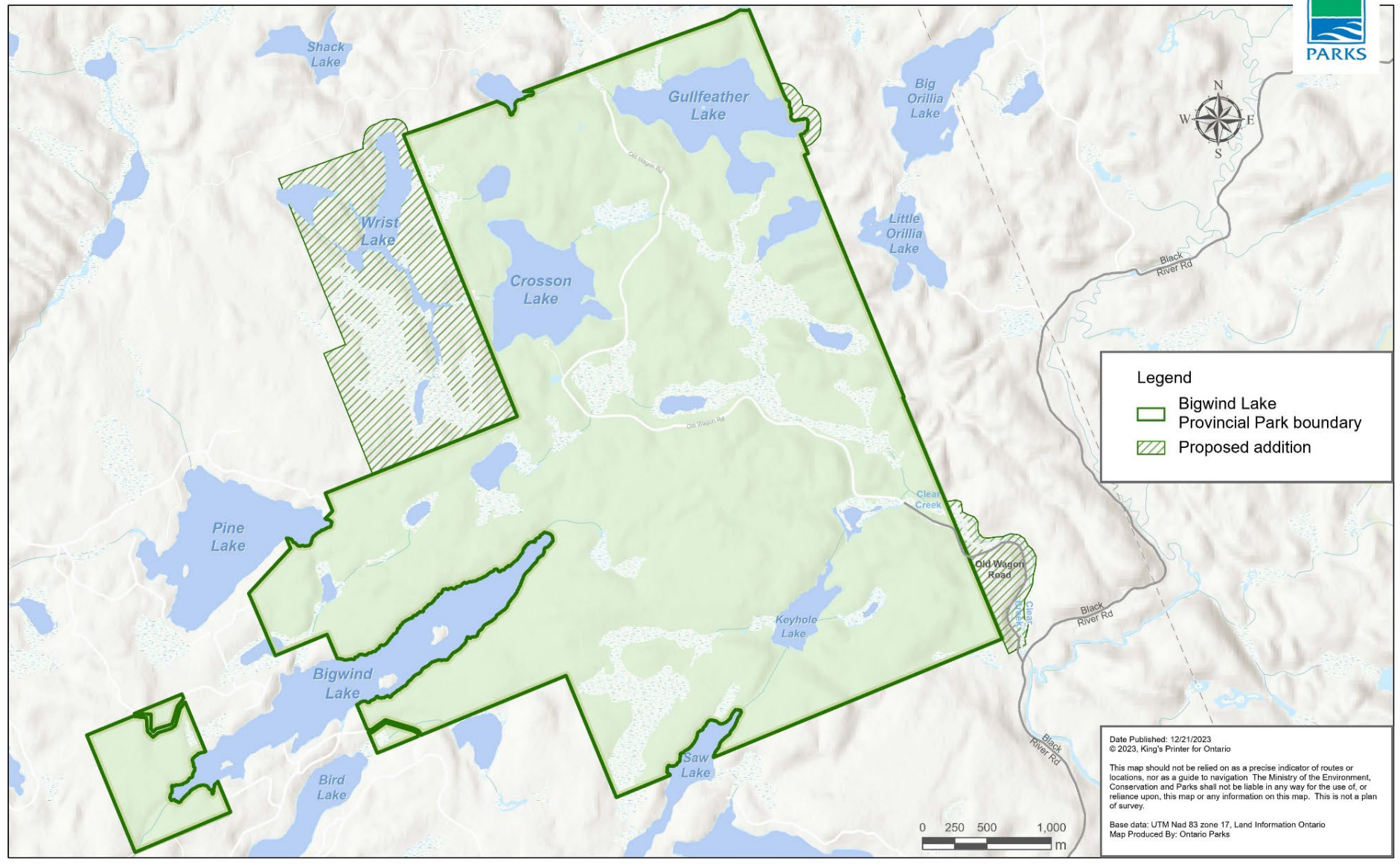
Ontario is proposing to expand the boundary of Bigwind Lake Provincial Park to add approximately 314 hectares of Crown land, including:

- 274 hectares of land northwest of the park, which includes Wrist Lake, and extensive conifer (i.e. evergreen) forests and wetlands
- 6 hectares of land to include shoreline on the east side of Gullfeather Lake
- 34 hectares of land southeast of the park to include portions of Old Wagon Road, Clear Creek and a rare stand of red spruce trees

This proposed park boundary expansion would provide long-term protection, increase landscape connectivity² and provide enhanced opportunities for recreational activities, such as hiking and backcountry camping.

² Landscape connectivity looks at how features on the ground impact the movement of species across their region.

FIGURE 2: BOUNDARY



Consultation on the boundary regulation proposal is occurring concurrently with consultation on this preliminary management plan. See ERO number 019-8310 at ero.ontario.ca for more information.

Zoning and site-specific policies presented in this preliminary management plan for the proposed additions would only take effect if the areas are regulated under the [*Provincial Parks and Conservation Reserves Act, 2006*](#).

1.2.2 Adjacent land to the park

Bigwind Lake Provincial Park is surrounded by a combination of Crown land, managed by the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry, and private land. Large areas of private lands are found to the south and east of the park, including cottage lots adjacent to the park on Bigwind, Pine and Bird Lakes. Private land is not included within the park boundary and as such park policy does not apply to these areas.

1.3 Indigenous communities and traditional territories

Indigenous communities have lived on and relied upon the lands and waters within their traditional territories and treaty areas long before Bigwind Lake Provincial Park was established in 1985, and they continue to rely on these lands and waters to exercise their constitutionally protected Aboriginal and treaty rights which includes various practices, customs, and traditions integral to Indigenous communities' distinctive cultures and ways of life. Some examples of these practices, customs and traditions may include hunting, trapping, fishing, and gathering food for personal, social and ceremonial purposes; traditional teachings; and ceremonial and spiritual activities.

Bigwind Lake Provincial Park is located within:

- the traditional territories of some of the Chippewa and Mississauga Nations that are signatory to the Williams Treaties (1923)
- the traditional territories of several First Nation signatories to the Robinson Huron Treaty of 1850
- the Métis Nation of Ontario's asserted Georgian Bay Métis Harvesting Area

The park is also near historic and contemporary Métis communities, including the Historic Georgian Bay Métis community, whose members are citizens of the Métis Nation of Ontario.

Many Aboriginal and treaty rights are connected to the natural environment and are primarily exercised on Crown lands in Ontario, including within provincial parks and

conservation reserves. Ontario is committed to meeting its constitutional obligations that may be owed to Indigenous communities, including the duty to consult and, where appropriate, accommodate.

Further, Ontario Parks is working to rebuild and renew relationships with Indigenous peoples grounded in principles of trust and respect. The aim is to seek opportunities to protect, study and enjoy provincial parks and conservation reserves together alongside Indigenous communities.

During the first stage of consultation in 2023, we heard your interest and expectation that we actively engage with Indigenous communities on this proposal.

How we engaged:

- Indigenous communities were notified prior to the first public consultation period.
- In response to requests from individual Indigenous communities, Ontario Parks continues to hold meetings to share project updates and gather feedback.
- Indigenous communities were invited to attend field visits and inform an assessment of the potential for archaeological resources and our knowledge of the cultural history of the park.

See Appendix 1 for a detailed summary of engagement with Indigenous communities during stage 1 of the management planning process.

What we heard:

- Indigenous communities have been supportive of the proposal, expressing a range of interests in the planning and implementation of the project, and the use and operation of the proposed operating park.

Next steps:

- Ontario is committed to meeting its constitutional obligations that may be owed to Indigenous communities, including the duty to consult and, where appropriate, accommodate.
- Ontario Parks will continue to engage communities through formal consultation opportunities.
- Ontario Parks will continue to meet regularly throughout the design process with interested Indigenous communities and explore potential partnership opportunities.

1.4 Name of the park

Feedback received during consultation included requests for Ontario to consider changing the name of Bigwind Lake Provincial Park to address local concerns around potential confusion regarding access to the park and access to Bigwind Lake. To change the park's name, MECP would propose an amendment to O. Reg. 316/07 under the PPCRA.

Ontario Parks will continue to collect feedback from Indigenous communities, stakeholders and the public to inform the consideration of a name change.

Bigwind Lake Provincial Park is named after Bigwind Lake. The lake is believed to be named after Chief Bigwind from the Chippewas of Rama First Nation.

The regulated boundary of the park includes a portion of the Bigwind Lake shoreline and does not include the lake itself. There is no authorized public access from Bigwind Lake into the park.

1.5 Ecological integrity

The [*Provincial Parks and Conservation Reserves Act, 2006*](#) states that the maintenance of ecological integrity shall be the first priority and the restoration of ecological integrity shall be considered in all aspects of the planning and management of Ontario's system of provincial parks.

Ecological integrity is a concept that addresses three ecosystem attributes – composition, structure and function. This concept is based on the idea that the composition and structure of the protected area should be characteristic for the region and that ecosystem functions should proceed normally.

The identification of values and pressures on those values, and an analysis to determine appropriate actions and priorities to address those pressures, is considered the basis for maintaining and enhancing ecological integrity.

During the first stage of consultation in 2023, we heard that you valued the natural environment at Bigwind Lake Provincial Park. Ontario Parks is committed to the maintenance of the ecological integrity of the park, ensuring the park will remain a vital part of the natural and cultural landscape for generations to come.

Extensive studies were conducted to evaluate the Bigwind Lake Provincial Park proposal. Summary documentation provided recommendations on the maintenance and restoration of ecological integrity (GHD 2023a). Study results and recommendations were considered when preparing this preliminary management plan and will continue to inform the project during the detailed design phase.

1.6 Social and economic benefits

Provincial parks can bring a positive social and economic benefit to local communities.

The local economy will benefit from park visitor-associated spending in local communities, on items like groceries, supplies, restaurant meals, fuel and entry to tourism attractions. Local communities will also experience increased outdoor recreational and employment opportunities year-round, as the park is expected to employ seasonal and student staff, many of whom will be hired locally.

2 Park classification

Ontario's provincial parks are classified into categories based on how they contribute to meeting the objectives of the provincial park system (section 3.3). Park classification defines a park's role in providing opportunities for environmental protection, recreation, heritage appreciation and/or science, and determines the type and extent of activities that may take place in a park.

Bigwind Lake Provincial Park is a natural environment class park. Natural environment class parks protect outstanding recreational landscapes, representative ecosystems and provincially significant elements of Ontario's natural and cultural heritage and provide high-quality outdoor recreational and educational experiences.

3 Park purpose, vision and objectives

The following purpose and vision statements are proposed to guide the protection and management of Bigwind Lake Provincial Park. The objectives listed are from the [Provincial Parks and Conservation Reserves Act, 2006](#) and guide the management of all provincial parks in Ontario.

Based on feedback received, these guiding statements may be refined and park-specific objectives may be developed.

3.1 Purpose

The purpose of Bigwind Lake Provincial Park is:

To protect the park's natural and cultural environment, and maintain landscape connectivity³, while providing a range of compatible, sustainable, inclusive and high-quality four-season recreational and educational experiences for park visitors.

3.2 Vision

The vision for Bigwind Lake Provincial Park is:

A modern, four-season destination that offers a variety of unique recreational and educational opportunities for visitors, while protecting the natural and cultural environment and maintaining large undisturbed areas for wildlife and species at risk.

3.3 Objectives

Management of Bigwind Lake Provincial Park will be consistent with the four objectives for provincial parks, as described in the [Provincial Parks and Conservation Reserves Act, 2006](#):

1. To permanently protect representative ecosystems, biodiversity and provincially significant elements of Ontario's natural and cultural heritage and to manage these areas to ensure that ecological integrity is maintained.
2. To provide opportunities for ecologically sustainable outdoor recreation opportunities and encourage associated economic benefits.

³ Landscape connectivity looks at how features on the ground impact the movement of species across their region.

3. To provide opportunities for residents of Ontario and visitors to increase their knowledge and appreciation of Ontario's natural and cultural heritage.
4. To facilitate scientific research and to provide points of reference to support monitoring of ecological change on the broader landscape.

4 Key park values

The following surveys and studies were completed in 2023 to assess important aspects of Bigwind Lake Provincial Park's natural and cultural environments (also known as values), such as wildlife and their habitats, water quality, and historical artifacts.

- Life science surveys and mapping focused on:
 - vascular plant, moss, and lichen diversity and distribution
 - bat diversity, roosting and foraging habitat
 - amphibian diversity and breeding habitat
 - turtle diversity, basking and nesting sites
 - snake diversity and basking sites
 - marsh bird diversity and breeding sites
 - Eastern Whip-poor-will breeding sites
 - raptor and Pileated Woodpecker nesting sites
 - Eastern Hemlock and Black Ash distribution
 - invasive plant diversity and distribution
 - breeding bird diversity and distribution
 - moth, butterfly, dragonfly and invertebrate diversity
 - significant wildlife habitat and landscape connectivity
 - lake chemistry, fish diversity and fish habitat
 - stream and river classification and assessment
- Earth science assessment of geomorphology, soils and hydrology
- Stage 1 Archaeological Assessment

4.1 Natural heritage

4.1.1 Life science

Bigwind Lake Provincial Park is situated in Ecodistrict 5E-8 and contains representative

examples of Algonquin Dome-influenced wildlife, forest and wetland habitats. The park forests are dominated by mature (100- to 130-year-old) Sugar Maple, Yellow Birch, American Beech, Eastern Hemlock and Eastern White Pine, all growing atop rugged, acidic, granitic gneiss soils. Beneath this canopy thrives a rich diversity of spring ephemeral wildflowers, ferns, mosses and lichens. Park wetlands exhibit a variety of compositions and structure – water flow is slow and often beaver-influenced. Wetland habitat types include poor fens, sedge meadows, thicket swamps and Black Spruce-dominated kettle bogs. Lakes in the park are cool, deep and oligotrophic, with narrow sand/gravel or peaty emergent shores (Brunton 1993; LeGros 2018).

Over 230 species of vascular plants, 27 bryophytes (mosses and liverworts) and 65 lichens have been recorded in the park. These include the above-mentioned species as well as a disjunct population of Red Spruce (iNaturalist), Swamp Moonwort, Smaller Fern Moss, lungwort and carnivorous species, such as sundews, bladderworts and Pitcher Plant (LeGros 2018; NHIC 2023b; Olar 2023). Due to the diversity of wetland habitats and challenges with accessing areas of the park, there is likely a high number of unidentified plant species.

The park supports 16 species of amphibians and nine species of reptile, such as Smooth Green Snake, Midland Painted Turtle, Gray Treefrog and Red-Spotted Newt (LeGros 2018; Olar 2023). Many of these species are dependent on the park's permanent wetlands and ephemeral woodland pools.

Ninety (90) species of bird have been observed in the park with 62 species displaying evidence of breeding in the park. Wood warblers such as Blackburnian Warbler, Common Yellowthroat and Ovenbird are abundant during breeding season and are accompanied by less common species such as Canada warbler, Eastern Wood-pewee and Pileated Woodpecker. Park lakes and rivers support Common Loon, Common Merganser, a breeding colony of American Herring Gulls and a small heronry of Great Blue Herons (LeGros 2018; NHIC 2023a; Olar 2023).

Fifteen (15) species of fish have been found in park waters, including Rainbow Trout, Lake Trout, Yellow Perch, White Sucker, Creek Chub, Pumpkinseed Sunfish, Northern Redbelly Dace, Brown Bullhead, and both large and smallmouth bass (GeoProcess Research Associates Inc. 2023; LeGros 2018). There is likely a greater diversity of fish species yet to be identified in the park. See section 7.1.1 for more information on fisheries within the park.

Preliminary investigations of invertebrate and fungi diversity suggest the park has diverse and abundant moth, butterfly and dragonfly populations, including populations of bog copper butterflies. The provincially rare, Spike-lip Crater (snail) has also been observed within the park near Bigwind Lake (iNaturalist; NHIC 2023a; Olar 2023). The

park's relatively intact forest soil appears to support an abundance of mycorrhizal and saprotrophic fungi, but a detailed inventory has not been undertaken.

Twenty-eight (28) species of mammals have been observed within the park, including Little Brown Myotis (bat), beaver and Algonquin Wolf. Critical winter habitat for deer and Moose have been identified within the park (LeGros 2018; Olar 2023).

Significant wildlife habitat and landscape connectivity has been mapped within the park (Bowman and Cordes 2015; Olar 2023). The science of landscape connectivity involves mapping the potential routes that wildlife travel to access food, water, shelter and breeding habitat based on topography and ecosystem types. Understanding how Bigwind Lake Provincial Park fits within the greater landscape and how species use the park provides a perspective on the park's ecological value within the region.

Areas in the park with higher connectivity value (Figure 3) contribute to a landscape-level connectivity corridor for many species and provide important habitat for species including the Algonquin Wolf and Moose. Connectivity corridors also help to facilitate shifts in the ranges of plants, animals and natural communities as they adapt to climate change.

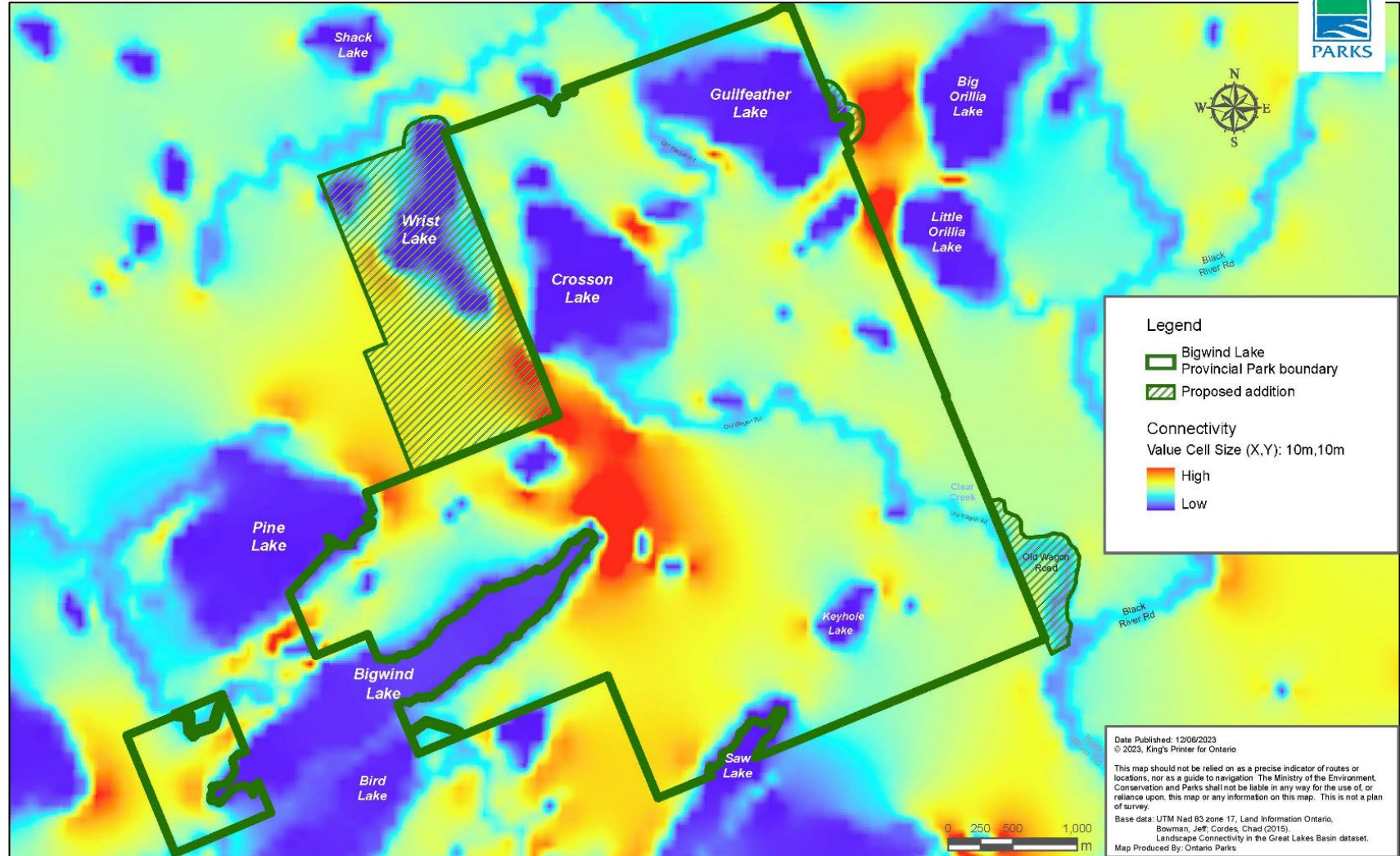
Between 2014 and 2016, the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry (MNRF) conducted an extensive Algonquin wolf monitoring program. Temporary GPS tracking collars were attached to Algonquin Wolves in and adjacent to Algonquin, Kawartha Highlands and Queen Elizabeth II Wildlands provincial parks. The home ranges and seasonal movements of these rare and threatened animals were remotely monitored to better understand how they use the landscape. MNRF recorded Algonquin Wolves travelling through Bigwind Lake Provincial Park.

To date, 14 species on the Species at Risk in Ontario list have been found in Bigwind Lake Provincial Park. These include eight species of special concern, three threatened species and three endangered species. See section 7.1.4 for more information on species at risk.

4.1.2 Earth science

Earth science features of Bigwind Lake Provincial Park are considered locally significant and include representation of gneisses of the Opeongo Domain of the Algonquin terrain (Easton 1992). These gneisses have been described as granitized, banded, pink and grey rock (Lawrence 1973).

FIGURE 3: LANDSCAPE CONNECTIVITY



Landscape connectivity looks at how features on the ground impact the movement of species across their region. Figure 3 illustrates the degree of connectivity in different areas of the park. Areas with higher connectivity values are important corridors for wildlife to safely travel, and access food, water, shelter and breeding habitat. These corridors are identified based on topography and ecosystem types.

The topography of the park is characterized by a knobby, hummocky and undulating to rolling landscape. The bedrock is cut by one regional fault through the Saw Lake and Keyhole Lake area creating valley-like features (GHD 2023b). Indications of glacial action include glacial polish and depositional features, such as the bouldery-sandy till which thinly mantles the hills. Boulder trains are found at the mouths of the valleys and a small area of outwash deposits is found at the south end of the park (Lawrence 1973).

4.2 Cultural heritage

Simply defined, our heritage is everything that we value and want to preserve for future generations. Cultural heritage is the portion of our heritage that retains the evidence of human activity.

Bigwind Lake Provincial Park has a rich and varied history of use. With occupation of the area beginning in the late Paleolithic period approximately 10,000 years ago, the area encompasses a chronology of Indigenous and Euro-Canadian histories (ARA 2023).

The park lies within the treaty, traditional and/or ancestral territories of numerous Indigenous peoples and communities (section 1.3). As such, it has been identified as both a historical and current harvesting site (ARA 2023).

A Stage 1 Archaeological Assessment was completed in 2023 which provided baseline information about the Indigenous and settler history of this landscape and known cultural heritage values in the park.

During the Stage 1 Archaeological Assessment, a consultant archaeologist conducted a background study to review the geographic, land use and historical information for Bigwind Lake Provincial Park and the surrounding area. The background study was supplemented by a property inspection.

Indigenous communities on the project's mailing list (see Appendix 1) were invited to attend field visits with the consultant archaeologist and review the draft report for the Stage 1 Archaeological Assessment. Additionally, three communities provided profiles of their community's history, which were included in the Stage 1 Archaeological Assessment Report.

Ontario Parks is interested in learning more about the Indigenous history and cultural values in the park through further engagement with Indigenous communities.

The Stage 1 Archaeological Assessment Report (ARA 2023) identified the following historical information:

- Chief Bigwind, a Chief of the Chippewas of Rama First Nation, used the area to harvest moose and deer for his family and community.
- The area also fell within the traditional hunting territory of Thomas Port of the Chippewas of Rama First Nation and was a noted Chippewa Travel Corridor to Lake Couchiching.
- A portage trail between Saw (previously named Mud) Lake and Keyhole (previously named Beaver) Lake is noted on the 1861 Plan of Oakley.
- Mickle Dymont & Co. operated a camp on the west side of Crosson (previously named North) Lake from 1900 to 1904. It included a sleep cabin, cookery, stable, office and blacksmith shop. The camp was removed after it was abandoned, although some remnants remain. Mickle Dymont & Co. logged the area until 1938.
- Mickle Dymont & Co. operated log slides along the streams leading into the Black River, utilizing Crosson Lake, Gullfeather (previously named Gull) Lake or Keyhole Lake.
- Logging ceased around the park until the Boyes Brothers began operations in the late 1950s until 1964, a year before Bigwind Lake Reserve was created. No structures were built in the area that is now the provincial park, except a possible tote road from Saw Lake to Keyhole Lake.

The Stage 1 Archaeological Assessment identified areas where archaeological potential is high and recommended a Stage 2 Archaeological Assessment be conducted before any development occurs. A Stage 2 Archaeological Assessment aims to identify any archaeological resources that may be present and typically involves digging test pits at 5- to 10-metre intervals and screening the soil for artifacts. A Stage 2 Archaeological Assessment is anticipated to occur in 2024 and Indigenous communities will be invited to participate. If any cultural heritage values are found, they will be identified and managed in accordance with the *Ontario Heritage Act*.

A reconnaissance inventory of cultural resources was conducted for the park in the early 1970s (Stevens 1973). It primarily examined the remnants of built heritage and historical landscapes related to the intense logging that once took place, including remnant logging dams, camps, roads and a sawmill.

The remnants of a Junior Ranger Camp operated by the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry (MNR) can be found on the south shore of Crosson Lake. The camp was active from at least 1969 to 1987, during which time, hundreds of youth were employed and actively engaged in resource management activities in the surrounding area and local communities (ARA 2023).

5 Potential pressures on park values

The protection of Bigwind Lake Provincial Park's natural and cultural values is a priority. During the management planning process, pressures on park values are identified and policies are proposed to prevent, minimize or adapt to the effects.

Potential pressures identified in the park include:

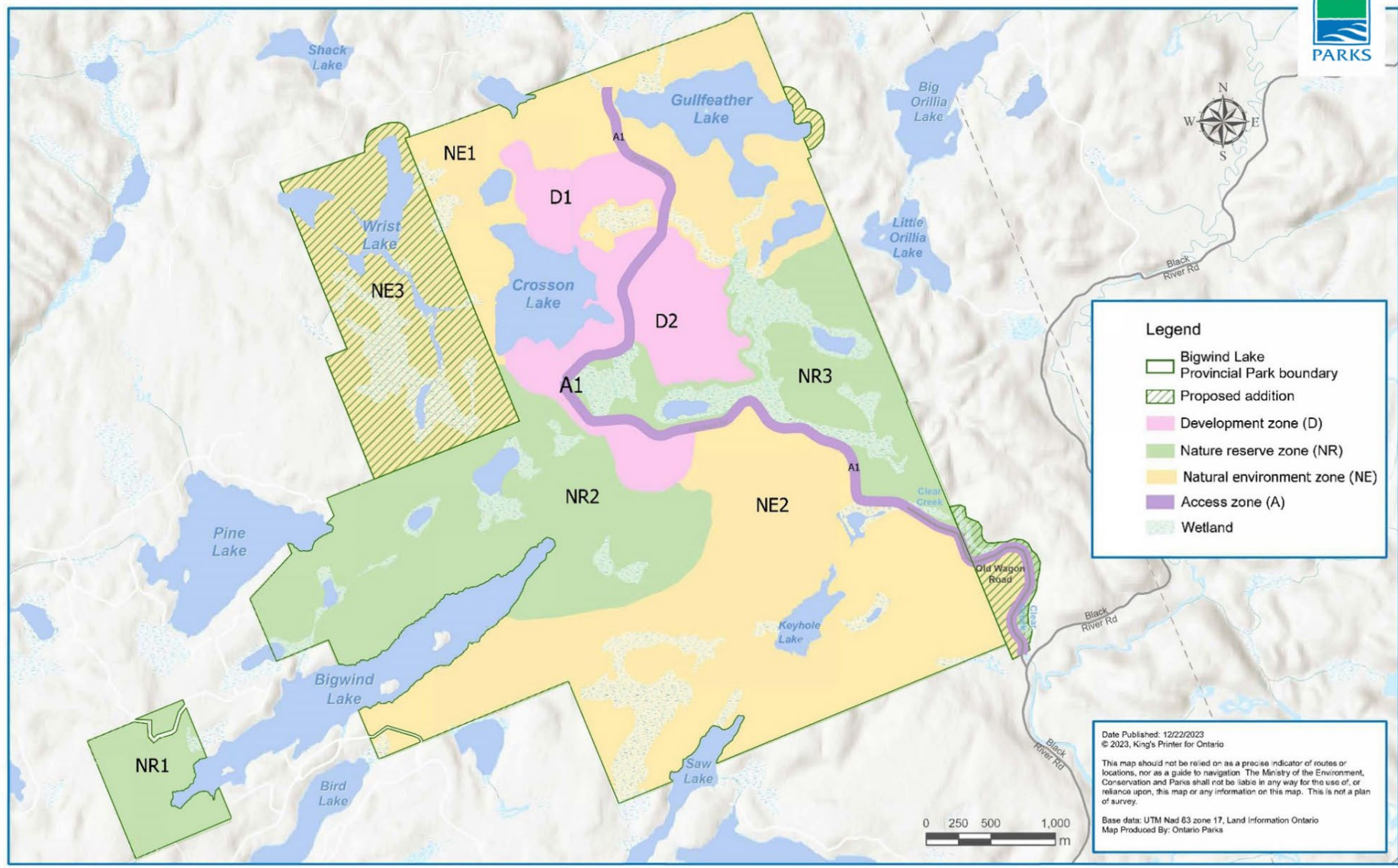
- unauthorized activities, such as all-terrain vehicle use and power boat use
- unauthorized trail and campsite creation in sensitive habitats
- introduction of invasive species, such as plants, forest pests and wildlife diseases (e.g. phragmites, knotweed, Dog Strangling Vine, Hemlock Woolly Adelgid, Emerald Ash Borer, snake fungal disease)
- climate change effects, such as extreme storms, floods, droughts and shifting seasons
- effects while creating proposed facilities, such as increased road mortality for some species, species habitat loss and fragmentation, increased light and noise pollution, and wildlife habituation (i.e., animals losing their natural fear of humans)

6 Zoning

Zones are established in provincial parks to guide policy and management decisions based on the sensitivity of natural and cultural values, potential for recreational uses and desired amenities. Distinct policies are applied to each zone to ensure park values are protected, and educational and recreational opportunities are provided sustainably.

Bigwind Lake Provincial Park has four types of zones: access, development, natural environment and nature reserve. These zones are shown in Figure 4 and are described below.

FIGURE 4: PROPOSED ZONING



6.1 Access zones

Access zones provide the main access to park facilities and services.

Study results identified Old Wagon Road via Black River Road as the preferred access into the park. Keeping the entrance and road alignment in the same general location, with necessary upgrades, would result in fewer potential adverse effects on the natural environment with less grading and clearing requirements.

During the detailed design phase of the project, some portions of the park access road may be rerouted to avoid natural heritage values (e.g. wetlands).

A1: Access (64 ha)

Description:

A1 encompasses the main access road, Old Wagon Road, starting at the park entrance at the southeast corner of the park and ending near Gullfeather Lake. A1 will be approximately 80-metres wide, and may also include a multi-use, accessible trail adjacent to Old Wagon Road, and utilities and other necessary services. A portion of the Ontario Federation of Snowmobile Clubs (OFSC) trail will be in this zone. Some of the proposed park addition would also be included in A1.

Management intent:

This zone is intended to provide access to park and recreational opportunities, such as walking and bicycling, on the multi-use trail. Portions of the trail will be used for snowmobiling in the winter.

6.2 Development zones

Development zones provide park facilities and services for a wide range of day use and camping activities. They should constitute a relatively small portion of the park.

The locations of the proposed development zones were informed by opportunity and constraint mapping, which utilized natural heritage surveys, LiDAR mapping, and hydrotechnical and geotechnical assessments. Mapping identified areas of the park where construction of infrastructure is possible and areas to avoid to protect park values.

The development zones currently include a 50- to 200-metre buffer around areas where infrastructure is proposed to allow for some flexibility during the detailed design phase of the project. Following the detailed design, the development zones will be reduced to provide a 50-metre buffer around infrastructure.

D1: North development (54 ha)

Description:

D1 is located north of Crosson Lake and west of Old Wagon Road (A1).

Management intent:

This zone is intended for campgrounds, day-use areas and associated infrastructure.

D2: Central development (144 ha)

Description:

D2 is located near the centre of the park. It is southeast of Crosson Lake and on both sides of Old Wagon Road (A1).

Management intent:

D2 is intended for a wide variety of visitor services and park facilities, such as a visitor services hub, campgrounds, and administrative and maintenance areas.

6.3 Nature reserve zones

Nature reserve zones include natural and cultural values which require management distinct from that in adjacent zones. Trails, interpretive signs and other minimal infrastructure may be permitted. Campsites are not permitted nature reserve zones.

Three nature reserve zones are proposed to protect sensitive species and habitat, with a focus on landscape connectivity and large core areas with minimal disturbance for wildlife.

The proposed nature reserve zones may be refined or expanded during the detailed design phase of this project. Additional site visits will occur to ensure these zones encompass the values they are intended to protect.

NR1: West nature reserve (71 ha)

Description:

NR1 encompasses the provincial park area on the west end of Bigwind Lake to the water's edge. This zone is dominated by upland forest species, including Sugar Maple, American Beech and Eastern White pine. This small area has been identified as important habitat for terrestrial wildlife moving between the adjacent network of cottage lakes. The site's mature forests also provide a thermal refuge⁴ for large mammals from the physical stress of extreme heat during summer months. A municipal road that runs through the northeast corner of this parcel is not part of the park.

Management intent:

To conserve and monitor the site's integrity as a wildlife corridor and thermal refuge, this zone is intended to be managed primarily for research and monitoring. Unlike the other nature reserve zones, trails are not permitted in NR1. This trail-free area will contribute to the nature reserve zone connectivity corridor by providing an undisturbed area for wildlife.

NR2: Central nature reserve (388 ha)

Description:

NR2 spans a large area on the west side of the park dominated by extensive tracts of mature deciduous and evergreen forests. Upland and lowland forest species present include Sugar Maple, Yellow Birch, Eastern Hemlock and Balsam Fir, as well as Pink Lady Slipper, Hobblebush and a wide diversity of wood ferns.

This large area encompasses the majority of critical habitat used by terrestrial wildlife as they move within and through the park. Additionally, the mature forests provide a thermal refuge for large mammals from the physical stress of extreme heat during summer months. The size of this nature reserve also offers shelter to reclusive wildlife, such as Algonquin Wolf.

⁴ A thermal refuge is an area that provides a buffer from regional climate effects, typically a secluded cool location to rest during a period of extreme heat.

NR2 also contains some smaller waterbodies, and portions of the shorelines of Bigwind and Pine Lakes. Protecting these shorelines allow natural processes to occur without impacts created by significant human activity – acting to maintain lake health while providing a sanctuary for nesting waterbirds and young fish.

Management intent:

This zone is intended for research and monitoring, nature appreciation, and low-intensity recreational opportunities, such as hiking and cross-country skiing. To protect ecological values, specifically the site’s integrity as a wildlife corridor and thermal refuge, trails will be routed to minimize disturbance to wildlife.

NR3: East nature reserve (269 ha)

Description:

Dominated by a vast mosaic of wetlands, NR3 protects nearly the full reach of Clear Creek including the eastern lands that water it. These wetlands provide critical breeding and foraging habitat for a wide diversity of birds, reptiles and amphibians, and protects much of the identified Blanding’s Turtle habitat within the park. These wetlands have proven to be an important hunting location for the six species of bats confirmed in the park (two species are classified as endangered under the [*Endangered Species Act, 2007*](#)). The cool waters flowing through this nature reserve zone also offer thermal refuge and an important summer feeding ground for Moose.

The zone would also include a small portion of the proposed addition east of Old Wagon Road, which contains Clear Creek.

Management intent:

To conserve and monitor the site’s integrity as a wildlife corridor and thermal refuge, this zone is intended for research and monitoring. It also offers opportunities for nature appreciation and low-intensity recreational activities, such as hiking and cross-country skiing. Trails will be routed to minimize disturbance to wildlife.

6.4 Natural environment zones

Natural environment zones include natural, cultural and aesthetic landscapes in which minor infrastructure, such as backcountry campsites, trails and minimal interpretive facilities, may be permitted to support recreational activities.

NE1: North natural environment (414 ha)

Description:

NE1 includes the natural environment in the north end of the park. It includes Crosson Lake, Gullfeather Lake and an un-named lake south of Gullfeather Lake. The zone would also include the proposed addition on the east side of Gullfeather Lake if it is added to the park.

NE1 is primarily forested upland communities of maple hardwood and hemlock-cedar conifer, peppered with meadow marsh and conifer swamps. The understory of this zone is diverse and includes many species of ephemeral wildflowers, including trilliums, Trout Lily and Spring Beauty.

Management intent:

This zone is intended to provide opportunities for nature appreciation and recreational activities, such as hiking, paddling, cross-country skiing and backcountry camping.

NE2: South natural environment (603 ha)

Description:

NE2 spans the southern area of the park. It includes Keyhole Lake, portions of the shorelines of Bigwind and Saw Lakes, and many smaller waterbodies. The zone would also include a small portion of the proposed addition west of Old Wagon Road.

NE2 is dominated by sugar maple mixed with American Beech, Yellow Birch, White Pine, Basswood, Red Oak and White Spruce. Other common forest species found in this zone include Starflower, Goldenthread, Bunchberry and a variety of ferns. NE2 includes scattered areas of organic rich conifer swamps where White Spruce, Balsam Fir, Eastern White Cedar, Pink Lady Slipper, Sphagnum Moss and the few remaining Black Ash can be found.

Portions of an Ontario Federation of Snowmobile Clubs trail will be rerouted to be within NE2. There is also a private recreation camp under a land use permit in this zone. See section 7.1.8 for more information.

A municipal road runs through the southwest corner of NE2 and is not part of the park.

Management intent:

This zone is intended to provide opportunities for nature appreciation and recreational activities, such as hiking and backcountry camping. Snowmobiling is permitted on the OFSC trail in NE2.

NE3: Wrist Lake natural environment (274 ha)

Description:

NE3 encompasses the proposed addition northwest of the park.

It contains Wrist Lake and other smaller waterbodies. NE3 is dominated by hemlock-cedar evergreen forests and an extensive wetland complex. The drier uplands in the north support communities of maple and birch deciduous forest, peppered with mature White Pines. The understory of this zone is diverse, and includes many species of ephemeral wildflowers, including trilliums, Trout Lily and Spring Beauty.

Management intent:

NE3 is proposed with the intention to permit hunting to continue in this area if it is added to the park (see section 7.1.2.2 for more information on hunting).

This zone is also intended to provide opportunities for nature appreciation and recreational activities, such as hiking, cross-country skiing and backcountry camping.

7 Policies

7.1 Resource management policies

7.1.1 Fisheries

In 2023, surveys were conducted in Crosson, Gullfeather and Keyhole lakes to obtain information on fish community composition, baseline lake conditions, and high value and sensitive habitats within the nearshore environment. See section 4.1.1 for more information.

A total of 15 species of fish have been identified in Bigwind Lake Provincial Park (section 4.1.1).

Crosson Lake was historically stocked by the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry (MNR) with Walleye (1939 and 1942), Brook Trout (1964, 1966 and 1983), Rainbow Trout (1981-2007) and Lake Trout (1972). While survey work in 2023 did not detect these species, surveys in 2005 and discussions with anglers suggest the Rainbow Trout and Lake Trout may still be present in Crosson Lake, but in very low numbers. It is possible the Lake Trout population may be a native remnant population –

mixed with stocked material – but detailed genetic work on remaining individuals would be needed to confirm this.

7.1.1.1 Fisheries management

Fisheries will be managed consistent with MNRF's Fisheries Management Zone (FMZ) 15.

In 2022, MNRF developed a draft fisheries management plan for FMZ 15 which outlines the status of fisheries, sets fish population objectives, and provides direction for the management of recreational fisheries and aquatic resources. See ERO number 019-5715 at ero.ontario.ca for more information.

Ontario Parks will work collaboratively with MNRF, interested Indigenous communities and researchers to maintain and enhance native self-sustaining fish populations in the park.

Stocking will be considered to enhance recreational fishing opportunities or aquatic ecosystem restoration where ecologically appropriate.

Should remnant native populations of Brook Trout or Lake Trout be confirmed in lakes within the park, Ontario Parks may undertake a conservation and restoration program in collaboration with MNRF and interested Indigenous communities.

7.1.1.2 Sport fishing

Sport fishing is permitted in the park subject to regulations for FMZ 15 as described in the Ontario Fishing Regulations Summary.

Largemouth bass, yellow perch and pumpkinseed sunfish are the primary sport fishing species confirmed within the lakes of Bigwind Lake Provincial Park.

7.1.1.3 Commercial bait harvesting

There are two commercial bait harvest areas that encompass the park (PS-0245 and PS-0246). These licences are managed by MNRF. Existing commercial bait harvesting operations may continue and active licences may be transferred.

If in future an application is made by a current licence holder to transfer their licence, the park's nature reserve zones would be removed from the area of the new licence.

New commercial bait harvesting operations will not be permitted.

7.1.2 Wildlife

7.1.2.1 Wildlife and habitat management

During the first stage of consultation in 2023, the following themes emerged as important for wildlife and habitat management:

- protection of natural habitat and wildlife (e.g. turtle nests)
- maintenance of wildlife corridors and areas for animals to use as refuge (e.g. large buffers between campsites, leave large areas of the park undeveloped)
- management of human-animal conflict through education

These themes will inform the detailed design phase of the project and future park operations.

Projects to maintain, enhance, rehabilitate or restore native wildlife habitat (e.g. turtle nesting habitat, snake hibernacula, fish spawning shoals), and to protect species and habitat against the effects of climate change, will be implemented if feasible and appropriate.

Animal populations or individual animals may be managed as necessary to ensure:

- human health and safety
- the health of the species
- park values are protected
- ecological integrity is maintained

7.1.2.2 Sport hunting

Sport hunting is not permitted in Bigwind Lake Provincial Park.

If the proposed boundary additions to the park are regulated under the [Provincial Parks and Conservation Reserves Act, 2006](#) (PPCRA), MECP will request that MNRF propose an amendment to *Ontario Regulation 663/98: Area Descriptions* (O. Reg. 663/98) under the [Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act, 1997](#) (FWCA) to allow hunting to continue in NE3.

See ERO number 019-8310 at ero.ontario.ca for more information on the boundary regulation proposal, including proposed changes to FWCA O. Reg. 663/98.

7.1.2.3 Bear management areas

Bear management areas (BMAs) are areas of Crown land used by tourist operators licenced by MNRF to provide black bear hunting services. The park is located within a licenced BMA (BR53-02); however, hunting is not permitted in the park.

The proposed boundary additions to the park are also located within this BMA. If future amendments are proposed by MNRF to FWCA O. Reg. 663/98 to permit hunting to continue in NE3, BMA operations would also be permitted to continue in NE3 (section 7.1.2.2).

No new BMAs will be permitted in the park.

7.1.2.4 Commercial fur harvesting

A registered trapline (BR-06) covers most of the park, and a trapper's cabin is located on the southern shore of Gullfeather Lake. This licence is managed by MNRF. This existing commercial fur harvesting operation will not be permitted to continue in the park.

New commercial fur harvesting operations will not be permitted in the park.

7.1.3 Vegetation management

In 2023, surveys were conducted to obtain information on the diversity and location of vascular plants, bryophytes and lichen in the park. See section 4.1.1 for more information.

Vegetation management will be focused on promoting the health and diversity of native vegetation communities and the park's ecological integrity.

Projects to enhance or restore native vegetation will be implemented, if feasible and appropriate. Extirpated native species may be reintroduced if biologically feasible and desirable for perpetuating park values, using seed stocks native to the park or surrounding area if possible.

To protect the values associated with the river habitats found within the park, special consideration is necessary when vegetation management occurs within 30 metres of a river's edge. Best management practices for maintaining and, where feasible, enhancing vegetation cover within this buffer will be considered.

Trees will be removed if they pose a risk to human safety or infrastructure, or if necessary to support recreational opportunities.

Pesticides (e.g. herbicides, fungicides, insecticides) may be used to maintain ecological integrity or ensure public health and safety. Whenever possible, biological and mechanical controls will be given preference over the use of chemicals.

7.1.4 Species at risk and rare species

Fourteen (14) species identified as special concern, threatened or endangered on the Species at Risk in Ontario list under the [Endangered Species Act, 2007](#) (ESA) have been found in the park, including:

- Black Ash (endangered)
- Little Brown Myotis (bat; endangered)
- Northern Myotis (bat; endangered)
- Algonquin Wolf (threatened)
- Chimney Swift (threatened)
- Bald Eagle (special concern)
- Canada Warbler (special concern)
- Common Nighthawk (special concern)
- Eastern Wood-pewee (special concern)
- Evening Grosbeak (special concern)
- Olive-sided Flycatcher (special concern)
- Snapping Turtle (special concern)
- West Virginia White (butterfly; special concern)
- Wood Thrush (special concern)

Monitoring of these species is ongoing.

Ontario Parks is working to meet the requirements of the ESA for this proposal. Actions may include mitigation measures to avoid or minimize disturbance and habitat enhancement measures that will benefit species at risk.

Species at risk and their habitats will be protected in a manner consistent with the ESA, regulations and guidelines, and other relevant policy or best practices.

Ontario Parks may undertake management actions for species at risk and rare species, as supported by research and directed through approved recovery strategies, government response statements or other species-specific management plans.

7.1.5 Alien and invasive species

In 2023, 27 alien or invasive species were recorded in the park during plant surveys and other on-site assessments.

Alien species are plants, animals and microorganisms introduced by human actions outside their natural past or present distribution. These species may originate from other continents, countries or provinces, or from other parts of Ontario.

Invasive species are alien species that are harming, or likely to harm, the natural environment.

The following alien and invasive species have been found within, or near, the park:

- Common Reed (phragmites)
- Rusty Crayfish
- Emerald Ash Borer (beetle)
- Orange Daylily
- Tufted Vetch
- Common St. John's Wort
- Ox-eye Daisy
- Common Mullein

Where possible, efforts will be taken to control or eradicate invasive species in Bigwind Lake Provincial Park. Invasive species management will aim to reduce or prevent impacts to native species, biodiversity, ecosystem function and recreational opportunities.

7.1.6 Fire management

Fire management in provincial parks is guided by the Fire Management Policy for Provincial Parks and Conservation Reserves (MECP and MNDMNR 2021).

The goal of fire management in provincial parks is to protect public safety and promote and encourage the use of fire as a natural ecological process for the maintenance and restoration of ecological integrity.

Bigwind Lake Provincial Park is located within the Northeast Fire Region as identified in MNRF's Wildland Fire Management Strategy (2014b). An assets, resources and opportunities map will be developed to provide guidance when responding to wildland fires in the park.

Prescribed burning may be utilized as a resource management tool. Prescribed burning is the deliberate, planned and knowledgeable application of fire by authorized personnel to achieved ecological or hazard reduction objectives.

7.1.7 Cultural heritage management

Cultural heritage values will be assessed and managed in accordance with the [Ontario Heritage Act](#) (OHA), and other applicable legislation and policies. See section 4.2 for information on the park's cultural heritage values.

Ontario Parks will work with Indigenous communities on matters related to identifying, mapping and managing Indigenous values, sites and artifacts within the park. Ontario Parks is committed to meeting its constitutional obligations that may be owed to Indigenous communities and working to rebuild and renew relationships with Indigenous peoples. See section 1.3 for more information.

The remnants of the former Junior Ranger Camp in D2 will be retained and may be restored or adapted for the park's education and heritage appreciation programming.

7.1.8 Land management

This section presents policy for authorizations to use or occupy land in the park for private, commercial, or other uses that are not for park purposes.

An existing private recreation camp located on the south side of Bigwind Lake is permitted under a land use permit managed by MNRF. Access to the recreation camp is via a trail off of Bigwind Lake Road at the west end of NE2 (this trail is also used by the OFSC). No new private recreation camps are permitted in the park.

There are currently four licences for commercial resource activities that overlap the park boundary. See sections 7.1.1.3, 7.1.2.3 and 7.1.2.4 for more information.

Authorizations or permits may be issued to the above permit and licence holders for activities, such as building maintenance, trail maintenance and all-terrain vehicles (ATV) use for access purposes.

7.1.8.1 Snowmobile trail

Ontario recognizes the importance of snowmobiling as a recreational value in the park, and its contributions to the local and regional economy. In 2023, Ontario Parks staff met with representatives of the OFSC and the local Happy Wanderers Snowmobile Club to discuss the future of snowmobiling in the park.

A proposed reroute of the current snowmobile trail maintains the TOP B Trail network and provides snowmobilers access to some park amenities, while avoiding snowmobile travel through the proposed campground areas to ensure the safety of park visitors and snowmobilers. Ontario Parks will continue to engage the OFSC and local club during the detailed design phase of this project, which will determine the location of the trail reroute through A1 and NE2.

The Ontario Federation of Snowmobile Clubs (OFSC) trail in the park will retain its connection to the Trans Ontario Provincial (TOP) B Trail network. Ontario Parks will work with the OFSC to reroute the existing snowmobile trail from its current northwest location to a more southern route within A1 and NE2 (Figure 4).

A portion of the existing B Trail on the west side of the park will be connected to A1 with a new trail through NE2. In A1, snowmobilers will use the proposed trail adjacent to Old Wagon Road. Snowmobilers will access the trail from the west at Bigwind Lake Road or from the southeast corner of the park adjacent to Old Wagon Road.

There will also be snowmobile access to the visitor services hub and its facilities (e.g. washrooms) via the trail adjacent to Old Wagon Road in A1. The portion of the existing OFSC trail north of the visitor services hub will be closed. During the snowmobile season, the trail adjacent to Old Wagon Road south of the visitor services hub will be designated for snowmobile use only.

The OFSC currently has a land use permit for two bridges in the park, one on Old Wagon Road near Crosson Lake and another on the west end of NE2 along the B Trail. Ontario Parks may issue additional authorizations and permits to the OFSC for water crossings and trail maintenance in the park.

Snowmobile trails are not permitted in nature reserve zones within the park.

7.1.9 Water management

Bigwind Lake Provincial Park is located on the divide of the Muskoka River (02EB) and the Severn River-Lake Simcoe (02EC) watersheds. Crosson, Gullfeather and Saw Lakes are in the Severn River-Lake Simcoe watershed.

Two weirs⁵, and associated structures, are situated at the inlet and outlet of Crosson Lake. The condition and status of these structures will be monitored and managed through MECP's Dorset Environmental Science Centre. They will be maintained or removed as required.

Sustaining high quality water resources is fundamental to the protection of the park and adjacent land features and values.

The park's water system will be monitored on a regular basis in accordance with Ontario's [Safe Water Drinking Act, 2002](#) and the [Health Protection and Promotion Act](#).

7.1.10 Science and research

Any government agency or external party who wishes to carry out research in the park must obtain a research authorization letter from Ontario Parks. Researchers may also need to obtain additional permits or approvals (e.g. [Endangered Species Act, 2007](#) permits).

Research activities and facilities should be compatible with protection and/or recreational values in the park and subject to policies associated with the park's classification, unless otherwise authorized by Ontario Parks. Conditions will be detailed within written agreements and/or land use permits including maintenance and decommissioning responsibilities.

Ontario Parks is interested in research and monitoring on the following themes for Bigwind Lake Provincial Park:

- Advancing understanding of Indigenous archaeology and cultural heritage as it relates to the park and greater Muskoka area.
- Landscape connectivity: Effectiveness of modelling and the park's nature reserve zone corridor.
- Long-term monitoring to evaluate the effectiveness of mitigation measures implemented during the creation of the operating provincial park.

⁵ A weir is a water control structure installed to manage water levels.

Ontario Parks is gathering information to identify additional research and monitoring themes for the park. The preliminary list below was developed based on comments received during the first stage of consultation, recommendations from studies conducted to inform the project and input from Ontario Parks science staff.

- Ecological processes and the health of wetland ecosystems.
- Economic value of park benefits (e.g. human health benefits of nature, ecosystem service valuation).
- Effects of climate change on biotic communities.
- Influence of hyperabundant native species on ecosystem health and species diversity.
- Invasive species monitoring tracking presence, spread and removal efforts (e.g. Hemlock Woolly Adelgid).
- Long-term monitoring to track:
 - bird populations and breeding activity
 - Algonquin Wolf populations and habitat usage
- Potential impact of recreational uses (e.g. trails, camping, fishing) on ecological integrity, and effectiveness of mitigation measures.
- Species at risk monitoring, including examinations of habitat change.
- Wildlife tracking to help track population changes within the park and guide future management decisions.

7.2 Outdoor recreation management policies

During the first stage of consultation, the following themes emerged as important for outdoor recreation management:

- Variety of hiking trails (length and difficulty).
- Winter activities (e.g. skiing, snowshoeing, snowmobiling).
- Sports facilities, such as disc golf course, soccer field and volleyball court.
- Cycling opportunities.

These themes will inform the detailed design phase of the project and future park operations.

Bigwind Lake Provincial Park will provide many opportunities for outdoor recreational activities, such as camping, hiking, swimming, paddling, bicycling, cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, and snowmobiling.

A variety of camping opportunities will be offered, including:

- tent, trailer and recreational vehicle (RV) camping
- roofed accommodations (e.g. rustic cabins)
- walk-in and backcountry camping

Hiking, cross-country skiing and snowshoeing are permitted on designated trails. Bicycling is permitted on the multi-use trail adjacent to Old Wagon Road, on interior campground roads and in other areas designated for that use. Snowmobiling is only permitted on the OFSC trail. See section 7.3.2.5 for more information on trails.

Opportunities for swimming and paddling (e.g. swimming docks, canoe and kayak rentals) will be offered in the park's day-use areas. See section 7.3.2.4 for more information.

Horseback riding and aircraft landing are not permitted in the park. Power boats are not permitted on lakes fully enclosed within the park boundary (e.g. Crosson Lake, Gullfeather Lake, Keyhole Lake). ATV use is not permitted in the park, except by persons who have occupational authority in the park that permits this form of access (e.g. recreation camp land use permit holder) and/or by persons with written permission from the park superintendent.

For policies on sport fishing and sport hunting, see sections 7.1.1.2 and 7.1.2.2.

7.3 Park operations and development policies

7.3.1 Accessibility

Accessibility will be a priority focus during the detailed design phase of the project to support visitors in their enjoyment of the natural beauty and recreational opportunities the park has to offer, regardless of their abilities.

Ontario Parks will develop and implement accessible infrastructure and services, creating a more inclusive and equitable outdoor experience for everyone.

7.3.2 Infrastructure

During the first stage of consultation, the following themes emerged as important for infrastructure:

- Green buildings and infrastructure.
- On-site renewable energy generation (e.g. solar, wind, geothermal).
- Water conservation initiatives, such as rainwater collection, low-flow taps, showers and toilets, and rain gardens.

These themes will inform the detailed design phase of the project. Ontario Parks is still gathering your feedback on proposed infrastructure. The types and locations of infrastructure and amenities offered in the park may be refined.

This proposed operating provincial park will be designed with the visitor experience in mind, featuring modern buildings and amenities, such as electric vehicle (EV) charging stations, roofed accommodations, and electrified campsites. The park will also incorporate environmental sustainability measures to ensure that it remains a vital part of the natural and cultural landscape for generations to come.

Infrastructure and facilities may be removed, upgraded or replaced as required.

7.3.2.1 Access, roads and parking

Old Wagon Road will provide the primary access into the park at the southeast corner via Highway 118 and Black River Road. Park access will not be provided on the north side of the park. Ontario Parks will work with the local municipality and the Ministry of Transportation to ensure municipal and provincial roads are appropriate for park access purposes.

Old Wagon Road will be upgraded to provide a two-way, paved road with specifications suitable for four-season use. Some portions may require minor rerouting. Additional roads will be developed to provide access to campgrounds, day-use areas, the visitor services hub and other park facilities.

Parking areas will provide access to park facilities and may be equipped with EV charging stations, where feasible, to accommodate increased EV use. A park-once⁶ approach will strive to connect park visitors to facilities via multi-use parking areas and an integrated trail system to minimize the need for an extensive network of roads and

⁶A park-once approach focuses on site planning that provides the ability to park a vehicle once and access park facilities without driving for the duration of a visitor's stay.

parking areas. To achieve this, a larger parking area is proposed in the visitor services hub in D2.

Size, location and surface material for roads and parking areas will be determined during the detailed design phase of the project, and will consider ecologically sensitive areas, topography, geotechnical considerations, a park-once approach, and the overall visitor experience.

Measures to reduce road mortality for wildlife, such as reptiles and amphibians, will be installed where needed (e.g. bridges, eco-passages, exclusion fencing). Innovative techniques focused on ecological integrity, connectivity and species protection will be prioritized.

7.3.2.2 Campgrounds

During the first stage of consultation, the following themes emerged as important for campgrounds:

- Accessible campsites.
- Balance of electrical and non-electrical options.
- Full-service campsites with RV hookups.
- Private campsites with large buffers.
- Radio-free and generator-free areas.
- Rustic camping opportunities.
- Waterfront camping opportunities.

These themes will inform the detailed design phase of the project and future park operations.

Campgrounds will be developed in D1 and D2 around the eastern side of Crosson Lake (Figure 4). The campground will include:

- approximately 250 car, trailer and RV campsites
- up to 25 walk-in campsites
- up to 25 roofed accommodations (e.g. rustic cabins)

Washrooms, showers, dishwashing and laundry facilities, and other infrastructure may be developed to support the campgrounds.

7.3.2.3 Backcountry campsites

With the visitor experience in mind, the proposed locations of backcountry campsites will support a range of skill levels and encourage skill development. Visitors new to backcountry camping can start with the opportunities provided on Crosson Lake, which are close to park amenities, while others may be drawn to more remote opportunities on Gullfeather Lake, the un-named lake south of Gullfeather and Keyhole Lake.

The number of campsites on each lake and their specific locations will be determined during the detail design phase of the project with consideration of feedback received during consultation.

Up to 25 backcountry campsites will be developed. Campsites will be dispersed throughout the park with:

- canoe-in campsites on Gullfeather Lake and the un-named lake south of Gullfeather Lake
- hike-in campsites on Keyhole, Saw and Bigwind lakes
- canoe- and hike-in campsites on the west side of Crosson Lake and on Wrist Lake

Backcountry campsites may be relocated, if necessary, to protect natural or cultural values. Backcountry campsites are not permitted in nature reserve zones.

7.3.2.4 Day-use areas

During the first stage of consultation, the following themes emerged as important for day-use areas:

- Accessible buildings and facilities.
- Communal campfire locations.
- Docks for fishing opportunities.
- Pet-friendly areas.
- Recreational equipment rentals (e.g. canoes, kayaks, bicycles).
- Water-permeable parking lots.

These themes will inform the detailed design phase of the project and future park operations.

Day-use areas in D1 and D2 may offer amenities, such as docks, equipment rentals, picnic shelters, playgrounds, pet exercise areas, washroom facilities and parking.

Some day-use facilities will also be developed in D2 at the visitor services hub. See section 7.3.2.6 for more information.

7.3.2.5 Trails

During the first stage of consultation, the following themes emerged as important for trails:

- Short hiking trails (94% of survey respondents said 1-4 km hiking trails were very important).
- Scenic lookouts (86% of survey respondents said trails should lead to, or incorporate, scenic lookouts or viewing towers).
- Mountain biking opportunities.
- Biking and walking routes connecting park facilities (park-once approach).
- Accessible and inclusive design where feasible, including accessible trail brochures.
- Interpretive trails, signs and species explanation tags where feasible.

These themes will inform the detailed design phase of the project and future park operations.

An integrated trail network will be developed to provide a variety of recreational opportunities and minimize the need for roads and parking areas. Trail design will consider sensitive natural areas, public safety and operational needs.

The trail network may include:

- an accessible trail adjacent to Old Wagon Road
- walking trails throughout the campgrounds to connect campsites to various park facilities
- a trailhead located at the visitor services hub to provide the primary access point to the trail network
- hiking, cross-country ski and snowshoeing trails
- portage trails to provide access to lakes with canoe-in backcountry campsites (section 7.3.2.3)
- a natural “active trail” with introduced challenges and obstacles that fit into the surrounding environment and promote exercise, movement and creativity

Existing trails and portages will be assessed and may be incorporated into the design of the park's trail network. Trails and portages may be closed and rehabilitated to protect sensitive values, or for health and safety, or operational reasons.

Trail features may include:

- bridges or boardwalks to minimize impacts to surrounding habitat, prevent the creation of unauthorized trails and mitigate safety hazards
- viewing platforms at locations with attractive vistas or other significance

Trails will not be developed in NR1 and mountain biking trails are not permitted in nature reserve zones.

For information on the OFSC snowmobile trail, see section 7.1.8.1.

7.3.2.6 Visitor services hub

During the first stage of consultation, the following themes emerged as important for visitor services and the visitor experience:

- Accessible, gender-neutral washroom facilities.
- Communal campfire locations.
- Recreational equipment rentals (e.g. canoes, kayaks, bicycles).
- Shared spaces and facilities for special events, group gatherings and educational programming.
- Store with basic supplies, grocery items, locally-sourced products and Indigenous-made items.

These themes will inform the detailed design phase of the project and future park operations to meet a wide range of visitor needs and interests.

A visitor services hub in D2 will provide park information, day use and camping permits, and other services and amenities to enhance visitor experience, such as:

- a park store to purchase merchandise, such as clothing, food and other supplies
- recreational equipment rentals
- Discovery program space (e.g. classroom space, interpretive displays)

The visitor services hub will act as the central node for the proposed park-once approach. To achieve this, trailheads for the park's trail system, washroom facilities and a larger parking area for approximately 250 vehicles are proposed here.

This area will serve as a meeting place for friends and family, and may offer picnic shelters, outdoor seating and other spaces where groups can gather. The park's administrative offices and staff accommodation may also be located here.

7.3.2.7 Maintenance complex

A maintenance complex in D2 may include features, such as staff offices, heated maintenance bays, storage facilities, water treatment infrastructure and parking with EV charging outlets.

D2 will also include a trailer sanitation station (i.e. trailer dump and fill station).

7.3.2.8 Utilities

The park will include utilities necessary for park operations, such as:

- electrical distribution
- water distribution
- water and wastewater treatment facilities
- telecommunications (e.g. cellular service, internet)
- garbage, recycling, and compost depot

7.3.3 Operations plan

A park operations plan will be developed to provide staff with the necessary direction to manage the park on a day-to-day basis. The park operations plan will include such topics as budget, staffing, training, maintenance schedules, enforcement priorities and emergency management.

The provisions of the park operations plan will be consistent with park policy and Ontario Parks Operating Standards (MECP 2021).

7.3.4 Commercial operations

Ontario Parks may enter agreements with local businesses and industry leaders related to tourism or the provision of services for visitors, such as:

- unique recreational opportunities
- outfitting services and equipment rental (e.g. camping equipment, canoes, skis)
- food and beverage concessions (e.g. restaurant, café)
- guided tours or workshops (e.g. learn to backcountry camp, Indigenous-led programming, land-based learning)

7.3.5 Partnerships

During the first stage of consultation, the following themes emerged as important for partnerships:

- Community groups.
- Conservation based organizations, such as science centres, wildlife rehabilitation centres and field naturalist groups.
- Education-based organizations or groups.
- Indigenous communities, artists and teachers.
- Local businesses and artisans, including arts and crafts products, music, breweries, and coffee.
- Recreation-based organizations or groups.

Partnerships play a role in both the growth and protection of the protected areas system in Ontario. They support new perspectives, meaningful involvement and innovative solutions, and can lead to increased visitor engagement, fostering a sense of stewardship and community among locals and visitors to the park. Partnerships can also provide avenues for knowledge sharing, where best practices, technical expertise and insights can benefit park operations and visitor experiences.

Ontario Parks is committed to exploring partnerships that align with the purpose and vision of the park as well as other involved partners, such as Indigenous communities. Activities undertaken as part of a partnership or collaborative effort must be in keeping with the [Provincial Parks and Conservation Reserves Act, 2006](#), its regulations, policies and all other applicable legislation.

Ontario Parks is interested in your feedback on these preliminary themes to guide the exploration of potential partnerships for Bigwind Lake Provincial Park:

- Unique recreational opportunities.
- Enhanced retail experience.
- Indigenous community involvement.
- Accessibility and inclusion.
- Green infrastructure design.

7.3.6 Education and heritage appreciation

Bigwind Lake Provincial Park will offer year-round interpretive programs and products including, but not limited to:

- curriculum-based school programming
- staff-led programs, such as guided hikes and evening programs
- self-guided learning using products, such as trail guides and interpretive signage

Ontario Parks is gathering additional information to inform the development of educational themes for the park. The preliminary list below was developed based on comments received during the first stage of consultation and recommendations from studies conducted to inform the project.

- Building an appreciation and understanding of the flora and fauna in the region.
- Citizen science programs and activities, such as reforestation, species monitoring and bio-blitzes.
- Curriculum-based school programming for a wide range of grade levels and abilities.
- Impacts of road ecology and invasive species spread.
- Opportunities to learn about Indigenous heritage and culture through Indigenous designed and led programming, and elder- or knowledge holder-led walks.
- Outdoor skills workshops, such as Leave No Trace techniques, water safety, canoe/kayak lessons and learn to camp workshops.

8 Implementation priorities

Short-, medium- and long-term implementation priorities are typically presented in a preliminary management plan. Ontario Parks is still gathering your feedback on the creation of an operating provincial park at Bigwind Lake Provincial Park. Feedback received during consultation and the detailed design phase of the project will inform the development of implementation priorities for the park.

Implementation may be subject to:

- applicable legislation and policies (e.g. ESA, OHA, Project Evaluation Policy)
- site planning
- the availability of financial and human resources

Implementation may include further opportunities for consultation, as required.

9 Examination of the management plan

This management plan will be examined in accordance with the provisions of the [*Provincial Parks and Conservation Reserves Act, 2006*](#) to determine whether it is still current, relevant and effective, or if amendments or a plan replacement is needed. In circumstances where the plan is not providing sufficient direction, or to address specific issues or pressures, it can be examined prior to the next scheduled examination, and adjusted or replaced as necessary.

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[*Safe Drinking Water Act, 2002, S.O. 2002, c. 32*](#)

Appendix I: Summary of Indigenous community, stakeholder and public involvement

Indigenous community, stakeholder and public involvement are an important part of the Bigwind Lake Provincial Park management planning process.

The proposal and management planning process was publicly announced by the Minister on June 22, 2023. The following is a summary of involvement undertaken to date:

Summary of Indigenous community involvement

Stage 1 – Invitation to participate and comment on the background information document

Indigenous communities were notified prior to the June 22nd announcement and public consultation period with an invitation to participate in an overview session about the proposal. Ontario Parks presented the details of the proposal, background information of the park, anticipated timelines, and invited ongoing and meaningful engagement with communities throughout the process.

During the consultation period (June 22 – September 4, 2023), a letter was sent to the following communities requesting their review of background information and involvement in the planning process:

- Williams Treaties First Nations
 - Alderville First Nation
 - Hiawatha First Nation
 - Mississaugas of Scugog Island First Nation
 - Curve Lake First Nation
 - Chippewas of Beausoleil First Nation
 - Chippewas of Georgina Island First Nation
 - Chippewas of Rama First Nation
- Henvey Inlet First Nation
- Magnetawan First Nation
- Shawanaga First Nation
- Wasauksing First Nation
- Nipissing First Nation
- Dokis First Nation
- Wahta Mohawks First Nation
- Moose Deer Point First Nation

- Métis Nation of Ontario Region #7

One formal comment was received from the Métis Nation of Ontario's Georgian Bay Traditional Territory (Region 7) Regional Consultation Committee.

In response to requests from four Indigenous communities and groups, Ontario Parks held individual meetings to share project updates and gather feedback on interests in the project and future park operations.

Summary of stakeholder and public involvement

Stage 1 – Invitation to participate and comment on the background information document

An invitation to participate and comment on the background information document and the proposed development was released following a public announcement on June 22, 2023. Letters were mailed to persons and organizations on the project contact list, along with social media postings and an Ontario Parks blog post. A notice was posted on the Environmental Registry of Ontario (ERO) for an extended comment period from June 22 – September 4, 2023.

149 comments were received from the public and stakeholders through the ERO, email, phone or mail. Comments in support of the proposal were generally strongly supportive of expanding recreational opportunities within the Ontario Parks system and suggested types of recreational activities, features and partnerships they would be interested in seeing incorporated into the park.

Common concerns raised by respondents included impacts to ecological integrity, amount of proposed infrastructure and development, lack of transparency with public engagement and consultation, and concerns regarding impacts to the local community.

A survey was developed through Survey Monkey to gather feedback on the Bigwind Lake Provincial Park proposal with specific questions regarding interest in facilities and amenities which could be included in the final design of the park. A total of 6,994 responses were received.