

Algonquin Provincial Park

~ A Brief History of Cottage Lease Policy ~

Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources

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Introduction

Spanning over 7,630 square kilometres, Algonquin Provincial Park is the third largest provincial park in Ontario. Established in 1893, Algonquin is also Ontario's oldest provincial park. The park was first established to protect and promote the ecological, social and economic values in the area. Even 120 years ago, source water protection, preservation of a primeval forest, a field for experimental forestry, a place of health resort, beneficial effects on climate, the area's rich biological diversity, deeply rooted cultural history as traditional First Nation hunting and gathering grounds, and timber assets were recognized (Ontario Royal Commission on Forest Reservation and National Park, 1893).

Today, Algonquin Provincial Park receives approximately 100,000 campground visits, 178,000 day use visits and 278,000 backcountry visits each year. Algonquin's backcountry visitation makes up 60% of all backcountry (interior) use in the Ontario provincial parks system. In addition to recreational activities, the park also supports other activities including timber harvesting, scientific research, lodging, youth camps and cottaging.

Ontario Parks, a branch within the Ministry of Natural Resources, manages the vast array of services and facilities in Algonquin Park, including cottage tenure. This document provides an overview of the establishment and management of cottage "leases" (i.e. leases, licences of occupation and land use permits) in the park.

I - The Early Years

In 1893, the Ontario government passed the *Algonquin National Park Act* creating, despite its name, the first park in Ontario under provincial jurisdiction. This Act and park were created to protect the rich but decreasing natural resources of the area, and to promote the area's vast outdoor recreational opportunities (Addison, 1974). Shortly after the park was established, the first two cottages were leased on Canoe Lake in 1905, followed by a lodge (Addison, 1974).

Park visitation increased following the completion of the Ottawa, Arnprior and Parry Sound Railway (via Algonquin) in 1897. To meet growing recreational demand, several lodges were established including the Highland Inn, the Algonquin Hotel and the Minnesing, Nominigan and Mowat Lodges. While the superintendent, George Bartlett,

recognized the economic benefits to be gained from increased tourism, he strove to balance recreation and wilderness protection by insisting that cottages be kept out of the park interior (Killan, 1993).

In the 1920s, the provincial government had a \$15 million budget deficit. To help address this, Algonquin Park Superintendent, John Miller, was asked to generate additional revenue from the park. Approaches included selling maple syrup, selling licenses to graze cattle, and making cottage lots available for lease to the general public (Killan, 1993). Cottage development expanded over the next decade and by 1931, approximately 213 leases were generating annual revenues of just over \$5,000.

The pace of development slowed with the appointment of Park Superintendent Frank A. McDougall in 1931. His focus was to develop a long-term plan for the park, and to reconfirm the policy to maintain the interior of the park in a “state of wilderness” for all time. This meant no lodges or cottages were to be established in the park’s interior, and that further cottage development was to be restricted to lakes near the railway and highway. Many aspects of McDougall’s master plan for Algonquin were implemented, including keeping subsequent cottage development in the Highway 60 corridor and away from the park interior.

Tourism increased rapidly with construction of the highway through the park in the 1930s. At the time, the concept of multiple land use as a conservation approach began to shape park policy. With that, the 1940s saw a steady increase in cottage development and overall park use. By 1954, there were 454 cottage leases established in Algonquin.

II - A Change in Policy Direction

Decreasing game and fish stocks, overall visitor impacts on the environment and demands for equal outdoor recreational opportunities for the public triggered a review of broader park policy in the early 1950s. This review led to the establishment, in 1954, of Ontario’s first *Provincial Parks Act* with objectives for protection and public recreation, a policy and long term plan to restore parks to a more natural state and the revision of policy related to cottages in parks. This new policy directed that no new leases, licenses of occupation or land use permits for private tenure were to be issued. Additionally, the existing 454 leases were to be phased out as the last permitted 21 year lease for each lot expired.

By recommendation of the Algonquin Provincial Park Advisory Committee, the phase-out policy for private tenure was incorporated into the park Master Plan in 1975 (Algonquin Provincial Park Advisory Committee, 1973). As cottages had been

established over many years, leaseholders were concerned that the phase-out policy would unfairly affect some sooner than others. For the next three years, this phase-out decision continued to receive pressure from the Algonquin Park leaseholders association.

III - Lease Extensions

Due to mounting pressure from existing leaseholders, the phase-out policy was amended in 1978 to allow cottage leases on record as of August 1978 to be extended until 1996 or until the death of the leaseholder or surviving spouse. Leaseholders who did not opt for this extension would have their leases terminated on the expiry date.

Debate continued on this issue until 1985, when a review of cottage lease policy was initiated (Killan, 1993). Through that review, recommendations were provided by the Provincial Parks Council, the public and environmental non-government organizations such as Wildlands League to extend the leases, but to maintain the intent to phase out the cottages over time. A decision was made to extend the leases for 21 years, with the intent that the leases would be terminated in or before 2017 (OMNR, 1998).

IV – Current Policy

Current policy reflects the original 1954 decision to phase out cottages and the 1986 decision which established the December 31, 2017 end date for leases. This policy is reflected in provincial park regulation, park policy, the Algonquin Provincial Park Management Plan and current lease documents.

V - Cottage lot statistics

The following provides a brief summary of Algonquin cottages by lake, tenure type, and location (backcountry vs. frontcountry). Backcountry, or park interior, cottages are defined here as being situated on a lake that is at least one portage away from a lake with an access point such as a parking area with a boat launch.

Number of Cottage Lots By Lake

Lake	Location	Total
Bonita Lake	Frontcountry	1
Brule Lake	Backcountry	2
Cache Lake	Frontcountry	62
Canoe Lake	Frontcountry	48
Cauchon Lake	Backcountry	1
Cedar Lake	Frontcountry	10
Galeairy Lake	Frontcountry	1
Grand Lake	Frontcountry	2
Joe Lake	Backcountry	6
Kioskokwi Lake	Frontcountry	3
Lake of Two Rivers	Frontcountry	6
Little Cauchon Lake	Backcountry	5
Little Joe Lake	Backcountry	1
Manitou Lake	Backcountry	2
North Tea Lake	Frontcountry	1
Radiant Lake	Backcountry	4
Rain Lake	Frontcountry	1
Rock Lake	Frontcountry	24
Smoke Lake	Frontcountry	89
Source Lake	Frontcountry	15
South Tea Lake	Frontcountry	10
Whitefish Lake	Frontcountry	9
Total		303

Number of Cottage Lots By Type of Authorization

Tenure	Leases	License of Occupation	Land Use Permit	Park Total
Total	285	10	8	303

Number of Cottage Lots By Location (Backcountry vs. Frontcountry)

Location	Total Number	Area (hectares)
Backcountry (Park Interior)	21	11.3
Frontcountry	282	112.6
Total	303	123.9

VI - Map

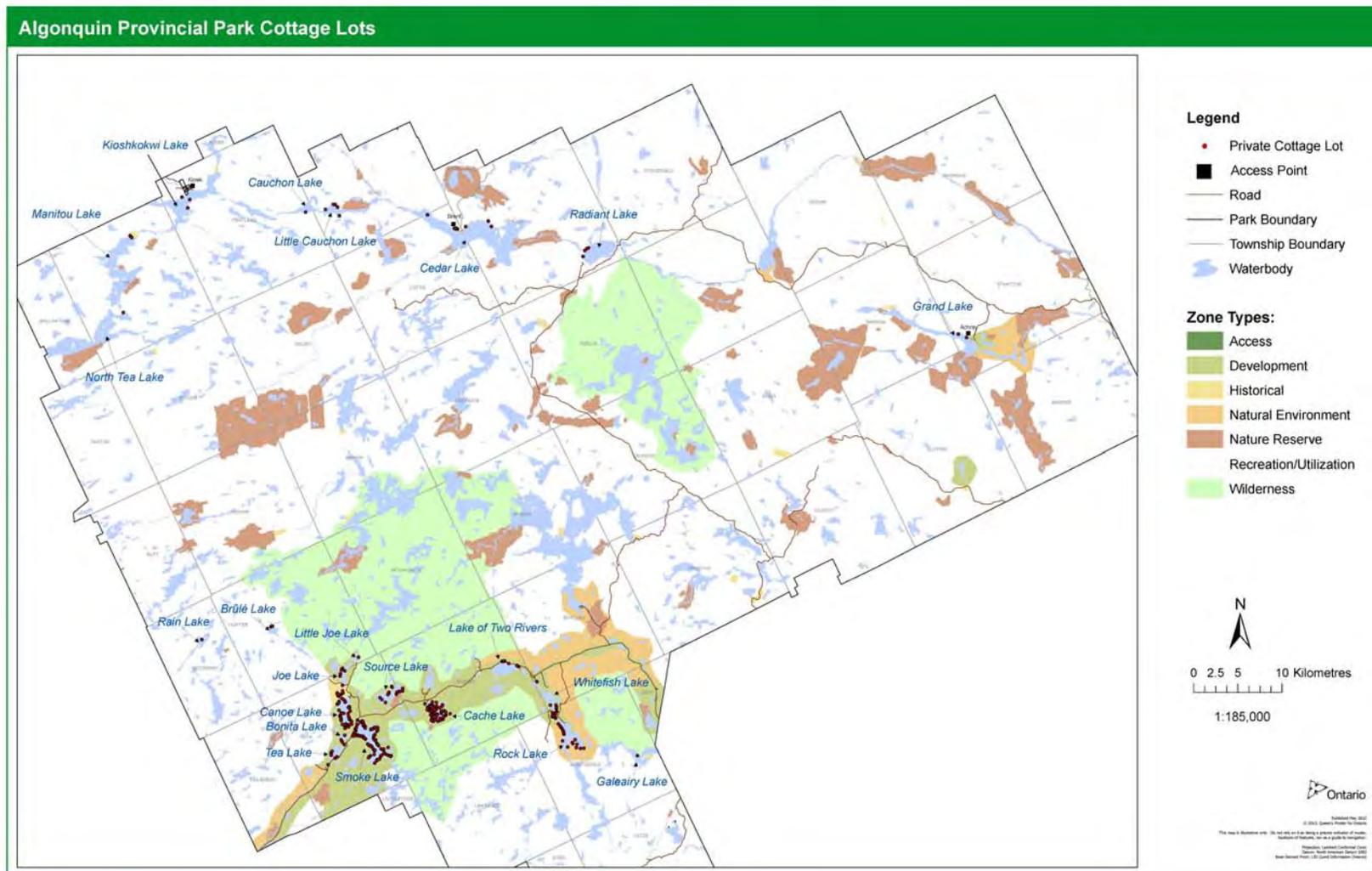


Figure 1 - Distribution of cottage lots

VII – Cottage images and pictures





VIII - References

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