

Shelburne River Candidate Wilderness Area

November 2008

Public Consultation Summary

Overview

This document is a summary of public comments received by Nova Scotia Environment during the consultation on Shelburne River Candidate Wilderness Area.

In March 2007, Premier MacDonald announced the purchase of more than 10,000 hectares of high value conservation land from Bowater Mersey Paper Company Ltd (now AbitibiBowater Ltd). On July 26, 2007 the province announced it would designate all of these lands, creating 30 new parks and protected areas, including Shelburne River Wilderness Area.

On May 30 2008 Nova Scotia Environment invited Nova Scotians to comment on the decision to establish Shelburne River Wilderness Area. A discussion newsletter was released highlighting the proposed boundary for the 2,263 hectare area and providing background information.

Members of the public were invited to view maps and discuss the proposal with department staff at a public open house in Caledonia on June 17. The session included a brief presentation and a series of discussion tables focusing on key topics. Stakeholder groups were invited to meet directly with staff to share information or discuss specific concerns throughout the consultation period, which concluded on August 8.

During the consultation, many of the natural, cultural and recreational features of the land were discussed. Issues related to access and the proposed boundary were also raised. This input will be considered as part of the final designation decision.

As part of the designation process, a socioeconomic analysis of the impact of designating the area is being prepared for Nova Scotia Environment by the consulting firm Jacques Whitford Limited. This study will be released for public comment prior to designation.

How You Participated

More than 60 individual responses were received by email, phone, mail, and collected at the public information session held in Caledonia. At the meeting, comments were tracked using questionnaires, maps, and notes taken by staff. Consultation also provided an opportunity for staff to meet with regional and provincial stakeholder groups to discuss how the candidate area relates to their interests.



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What You Said

There were a number of common themes in the comments received. In general, all respondents favoured wilderness area designation along this portion of the Shelburne River. People repeatedly mentioned protecting biodiversity as an important motivator for designation. They also consistently highlighted the importance of the area in preserving wilderness recreation opportunities and heritage values. Questions were asked about the exclusion of certain roads and the potential for adding adjacent Crown and private land. None of the comments received indicated opposition to establishing the wilderness area.



Wilderness Area Boundary

The largest number of comments focused on the candidate wilderness area boundary. Many people felt that more of the surrounding Crown lands should be included. These comments often highlighted ecological values, wildlife corridors, enforcement considerations, and recreation opportunities in these additional areas.

Nearly half of the respondents requested wilderness area designation for Crown land west of the candidate area. Protection for this area often referred to as “The Boot” (due to its boot-shaped boundary), has long been advocated by several non-government organizations and some other local stakeholders. People emphasized its location among adjacent protected areas, as it connects important remote wildlife habitat and provides exceptional wilderness recreation value.

A little over one-third of respondents expressed concern about the three roads excluded from the candidate area. Most people understood that two of the three roads provide necessary right-of-way access for AbitibiBowater. However, concern was expressed by some that future land owners may not gate and control access as AbitibiBowater currently does, making the road system and the wilderness area vulnerable to off-highway vehicle (OHV) use.

Many of these submissions stated specific concern that the exclusion of the third road, leading through the candidate area to access “The Boot”, signaled future harvesting plans for this parcel of Crown land. Comments suggested including this roadbed in the wilderness area to reduce disturbance of sensitive species requiring remote interior forest habitat, and eliminate unauthorized OHV-use through “The Boot” into Tobeatic Wilderness Area.

Crown land at Pollard’s Falls was identified in almost one-third of the submissions as an important addition. Many noted that the old growth forest on this land is part of a larger site recognized in 1974 by the International Biological Programme. It is noted as one of the most significant stands in the province, containing some of the largest trees found in the Maritimes.

Respondents also identified privately owned lands they felt would make valuable additions to the wilderness area. The area most often cited was land owned by Nova Scotia Power at the mouth of Shelburne River. People noted that adding this land provides protection for the entire river corridor and would connect the candidate area to Lake Rossignol. Some suggested that more AbitibiBowater land west of the candidate area to Little Tupper Lake and Tobeatic Lake be acquired and added. The rationale given for this suggestion was based on providing better protection of the river corridor and important interior lakes, as well as improving habitat conservation, wildlife corridors and wilderness recreation opportunities.

Confusion was expressed by some over the range of regulations governing the number of different management areas in the vicinity of the new wilderness area (i.e. Tobeatic Wilderness Area, Tobeatic Wildlife Management Area, Kejimikujik National Park and National Historic Site, undesignated Crown land, AbitibiBowater private land). A request was made for the department to simplify rules for users wherever possible.

Special Values and Features

Numerous comments identified special values and features in or around the candidate area. Many of these comments were based on personal experience and detailed local knowledge.

Respondents identified key natural features in the area such as a variety of old forest sites, wetland complexes and habitat for rare species (including endangered mainland moose, marten, and coastal plain plants). The value of the river as a natural corridor connecting habitats was repeatedly mentioned.

The area is regarded as a special destination for wilderness travelers, known for its remote canoeing, camping, and angling opportunities. Several people shared their personal experiences in the area, but many also referred to the river's rich history in wilderness recreation and backcountry travel. The importance of preserving the canoe-routes and fishing holes highlighted in Albert Bigelow Paine's century-old story *The Tent Dwellers*, as well as traditional Mi'kmaq travelways was relayed by many people.

The issue of motorboats for access was raised by some respondents. A few people were in favour of allowing access on the lower sections of the river from Lake Rossignol for hunting and angling. More people specifically asked that motorboats not be permitted. Several respondents oppose the use of any vehicles in wilderness areas. A commitment to not allow the use of outboard motors, made in the *Shelburne Canadian Heritage River Management Plan* (1996), was referenced in a few submissions.

In some cases, concern was expressed that general access to the wilderness area is limited due to the locked gate controlled by AbitibiBowater on the main road into the area. Others noted that easy access, due to the presence of roads intersecting the candidate area, could negatively impact key natural features the wilderness area was designed to protect such as important remote terrestrial and aquatic habitat and wilderness recreation opportunities. Examples highlighted by some people included the increased risk of invasive species introduction due to road presence and use (e.g. seeds transported by vehicles, bass illegally introduced by anglers), and potential for over-fishing.

Socio-Economic Values

Several respondents expressed concern for the local economy due to a recent downturn in the forest industry. They viewed parks and protected areas as a

positive alternative use of Crown land in the area, with potential to draw tourists and new residents to the region. Shelburne River Wilderness Area, including a river with Canadian Heritage River status, was referred to as a "tourism icon" that could help increase the profile of nearby protected areas and surrounding communities.

A few people raised concern about lost mineral exploration and potential development opportunities. However, the majority of respondents viewed the designation as a positive boost for the local economy, especially if efforts are made to dove-tail marketing of the area with current programs promoting other parks and protected areas in the region.

The potential for collaborative research opportunities was highlighted by some respondents, given the number of ongoing projects conducted in the area by researchers at Kejimikujik and the Mersey Tobeatic Research Institute. It was suggested that community-based projects such as "Loon Watch" and "Water Quality Monitoring" could be expanded to include lakes and waterways within the new wilderness area.

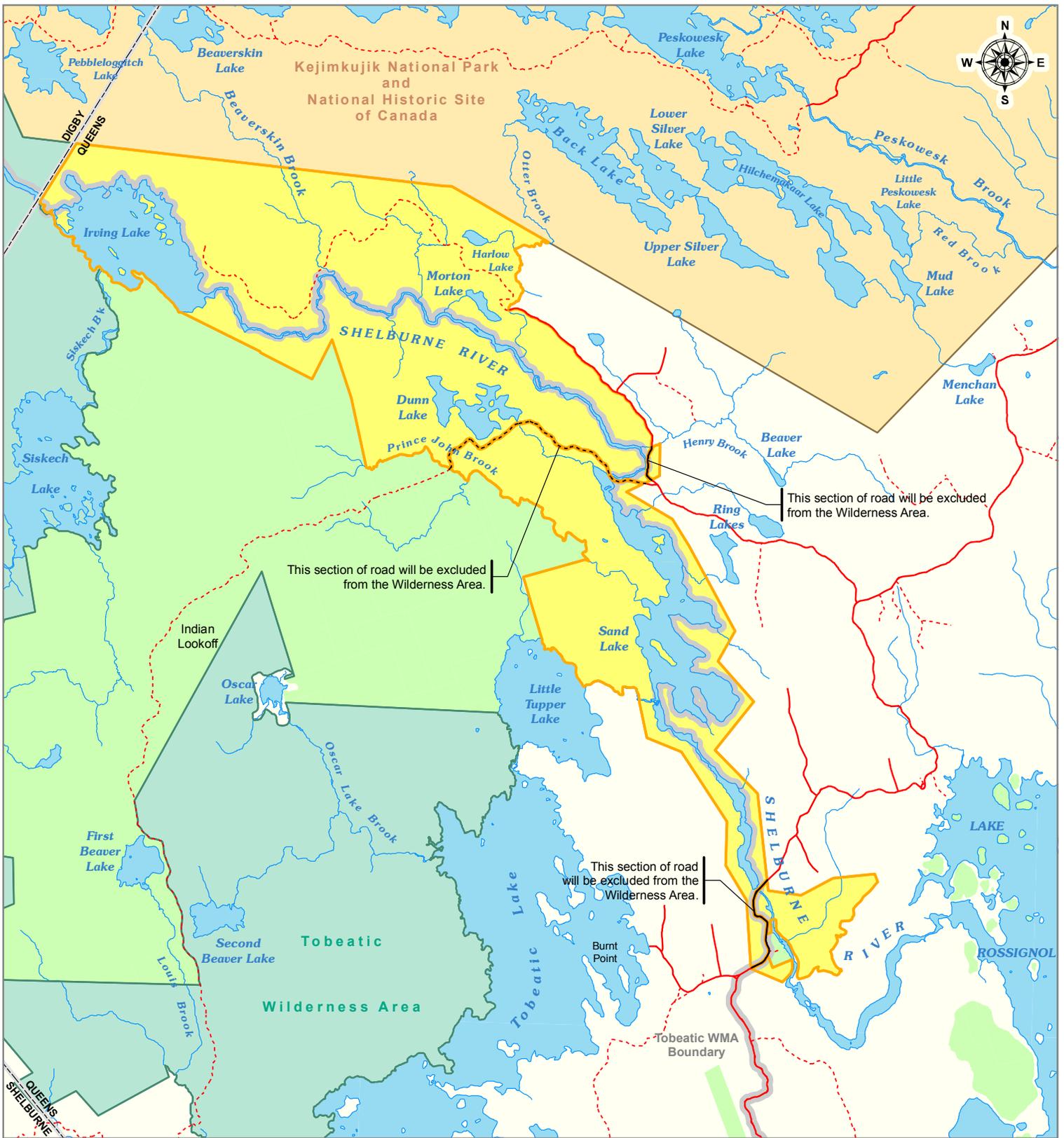
Next Steps

The province is currently consulting with the Mi'kmaq with respect to the proposed designation. In making decisions about the designation, government will consider a range of factors, including public comment, Mi'kmaq interests, and the socioeconomic analysis.

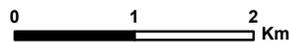
Once all consultation is complete, the Minister of Environment will bring forward a recommendation, for approval of the Governor in Council, considering the designation of this area under the *Wilderness Areas Protection Act*.

Information Sharing

We thank all those who provided comment during the public consultation process. A full set of submissions received during the comment period is available for viewing at the Nova Scotia Environment office in Halifax (5151 Terminal Road). Nova Scotia Environment considers participant identity as personal information, in keeping with the provisions of the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*. The privacy of a participant's identity will be protected by the department, unless the participant consents to the release, or if the submission has been made public by the participant. Any person or group may give prior consent, in writing, to the release of their submission.



Shelburne River Wilderness Area Proposed Boundary



- Shelburne River Wilderness Area 
- Kejimikujik National Park 
- Tobetic Wilderness Area 
- Tobetic Wildlife Management Area (WMA) Boundary 
- Crown Land 

Produced by Nova Scotia Environment (NSE), May 2008. www.gov.ns.ca/nse/protectedareas/

Information shown was obtained courtesy of the NS Department of Natural Resources and Service NS & Municipal Relations, NS Geomatics Centre.

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