



Issues Related to the New Lease Proposal for Rondeau Provincial Park

Submitted Pursuant to EBR Registry # 011-1300
By The Algonquin Park Residents' Association

November 17, 2010

Issues Related to the New Lease Proposal for Rondeau Provincial Park

This document has been prepared by the Algonquin Park Residents' Association (APRA). It provides APRA's position on issues related to the lease extension proposal for Rondeau Provincial Park, as posted on the EBR on October 4, 2010. This submission will comment on the overall decision making process, lease transfer policy, and septic system considerations.

Decision Making Process

APRA strongly recommends that objective, pre-determined criteria be used in the decision making processes regarding leaseholds in Algonquin and Rondeau. The situations in Rondeau and Algonquin are extremely different, and to reflect their unique characteristics, the decisions on each should be completely separate. However, the criteria used to develop park specific leasehold policy can be the same.

To this end, APRA suggests the following framework:

Each leaseholder community should be assessed on whether it:

- Occupies a footprint that:
 - Does not diminish the unique characteristics of the Park.
 - Represents a minuscule physical area of the Park.
 - Is environmentally low impact.
- Conforms to the Park's approved objectives, classification and uses.
- Does not conflict with the activities and enjoyment of other users.
- Pays its own way – covers the Park's operating costs.
- Provides substantive income to the Park (reducing taxpayer funding).
- Makes a sizable economic contribution to surrounding communities.
- Makes a positive, ongoing contribution to experience of other Park users.
- Contributes to the Park's ongoing legacy.
- Has, and will continue to have, an ongoing cooperative working relationship with the Park Superintendent and staff.

The Algonquin leaseholder community performs extremely well against these criteria, and its continued presence in Algonquin offers both the Park and the people of Ontario substantial ongoing benefits. (A comprehensive brief detailing APRA's position can be found at www.algonquinparkresidents.ca. An excerpt from that brief, titled "Myths and Realities" is attached to this submission.)

As for the Rondeau leaseholder community's performance against these criteria, that is a matter for discussion between Rondeau residents and the Ministry.

Lease Transfer Policy

APRA is extremely concerned that the Rondeau lease transfer restriction may ultimately become de facto policy for Algonquin. We strongly oppose any reduction of Algonquin leaseholders' current ability to transfer leases.

The blanket lease transfer freeze recently imposed on Algonquin (without any notice to leaseholders) further heightens our concern. This action potentially accelerates the termination of existing leases – prior to 2017. If an Algonquin “leaseholder” were to pass away at this point, the lease would effectively end (contrary to the terms of the current leases). It is totally inappropriate to impose such restrictions on Algonquin simply because Rondeau is undergoing a policy change. One should not impact the other, and the freeze should be lifted.

Septic Systems

APRA strongly feels that appropriate septic systems should be in place. To that end APRA has just completed a voluntary septic system inspection program, all at leaseholder expense. This was done in conjunction with the Mattawa-North Bay Conservation Authority (MNBCA), the Haliburton District Health Unit, and Algonquin Park staff. (The vast majority of Algonquin leases fall under MNBCA’s jurisdiction.) Leaseholds which had installed approved septic systems within the preceding few years were specifically excluded from the program.

The program achieved a 95% inspection rate – far higher than any program MNBCA has ever run. Only 15% of inspected properties required remedial action (which is either complete or in process). APRA recommends that a mandatory inspection with appropriate remedial action be a condition precedent of a lease extension for those 14 properties that were not inspected.

Conclusion

Algonquin and Rondeau are very special places and hold the distinction of being the two oldest parks in Ontario, each with its own rich heritage. Now, each is at a critical crossroad, and the Ministry must work with each to find unique solutions. With this in mind we make the following recommendations:

1. Employ specific, objective criteria in the decision making processes regarding leaseholds in both parks.
2. Look at successful alternatives regarding the issue of septic systems.
3. Remove the lease transfer restriction imposed on Algonquin.

As we have in the past, APRA will continue to work pro-actively with the Ministry to achieve the best outcome for the people of Ontario.

Respectfully submitted by the Algonquin Park Residents Association on November 17, 2010.

Contact Information:

executive @algonquinparkresidents.ca
Brian Maltman, President, APRA: 416 618-4444

Appendix

The following section, titled “Myths and Realities of Algonquin Cottage Leaseholds”, is an excerpt from APRA’s 2006 brief regarding lease renewal in Algonquin Provincial Park (previously presented to the Minister of Natural Resources and members of the Ontario government).

MYTHS AND REALITIES OF ALGONQUIN COTTAGE LEASEHOLDS

Myth # 1

Cottage Leaseholding is not compatible with Park Objectives.

Reality:

Algonquin Park is a Natural Environment Park, not a wilderness. That means there are multiple uses there, such as recreation services including stores, a fast food outlet and a restaurant, nature services, logging, private summer camps for children, private lodges, scientific research facilities, AND cottage leases. Cottage leases are no less compatible than any of the other current uses.

Myth # 2

There are far too many leases in Algonquin Park taking up a significant portion of the Park.

Reality

There are only 304 cottage leases in the Park on 19 out of more than 2000 lakes, and most of these leases are on lakes adjacent to the Highway 60 corridor or railroad rights of way. Cottage leases *collectively* occupy less than 1/6000 of Algonquin's total area.

Myth #3

Having cottages in the Park is bad for the environment.

Reality

Cottaging in Algonquin is a very low-impact activity. Nearly all of the buildings are of modest size and construction, set back from the shore to blend in with the surrounding forest, and have no road access and no hydro. Outboard motors are limited to 20 hp, and the use of "sea-doo's" as well as activities like water-skiing are not permitted. The vast majority of cottages are used only half of the year, and Algonquin leaseholders are presently engaged in (and supporting) a septic system reinspection project.

Myth # 4

Cottagers are "at odds" with Park officials and other users of the Park.

Reality:

Algonquin Cottagers have a positive and constructive relationship with Park officials, and a past Park Superintendent has agreed that we have earned the right to stay. We have provided assistance to canoeists, inexperienced campers, those who are lost or injured, and those who are engaged in fire fighting activity throughout the Park. Beyond this, most Park users don't even notice us.

Myth #5

Leaseholders don't pay their way or contribute to the well-being of Algonquin.

Reality

Algonquin leaseholders pay land rents for their cottage lots and are in fact a stable source of revenue for the Park. In addition, they pay a service fee to cover their share of the services provided by the Park, and parking fees like everyone else. As well as their patronage of many local businesses, Algonquin cottagers, through organized associations, provide regular support to the Huntsville Memorial Hospital Foundation, and to The Friends of Algonquin.

Leaseholders have "given back" in other ways. They serve on the board of The Friends of Algonquin, the Local Citizens Committee of the Algonquin Forestry Authority, the Committee of External Advisors (assisting Ontario in negotiations for the land Claim advanced by the Algonquin First Nations). They have written widely read books and created world famous nature recordings and films of the Algonquin environment. These have increased public appreciation and understanding of the Algonquin environment and have therefore furthered the educational and tourism objectives of Ontario Parks. Leaseholders have also served on government commissions charged with developing management policy.

Myth #6

There are no other leases in the Park.

Reality

There are seven summer camps for children and three lodges for visitors vacationing in the Park. There are also several businesses in various locations that operate under contracts issued for the provision of various services.

Myth # 7

There is a great deal of public concern about the continued existence of cottage leases in Algonquin Park.

Reality

The presence of Algonquin cottage leaseholds, along with leaseholds for lodges and summer camps are perceived by most as a non-controversial part of today's Algonquin.

During the recent public hearings into Bill 11, the *Provincial Parks and Conservation Reserves Act 2005*, at which approximately 18 interest groups participated over a two day period, not a single concern was raised regarding the existence of cottage leases in Algonquin Park, even though there is a provision in the new Act specifically conferring upon the Minister the right to extend the term of existing cottage leases (s. 13).

Myth # 8

Regulations for the management of Ontario Parks must be the same for every park in the system.

Reality

Ontario has wisely chosen a flexible approach to preserving the unique characteristics of each park within the parks system. It has long been entrenched in Ontario park management that Regulations need to be tailored to the needs of each park. This applies to cottage leaseholds too, according to the MNR's 1985 *Statement of Philosophy of Integrated Resource Management*. Hence, renewing Algonquin leases is consistent with current practice and does not open the door to any change in policy or practice elsewhere within the park system.

Myth # 9

Cottage leases are not allowed within the boundaries of other Parks.

Reality

There are many other Provincial Parks with cottages in them here in Ontario and in other provinces. Killarney Provincial Park has numerous cottages within its boundaries that are owned outright and predate the formation of that park. In 2005, Ontario created the Kawartha Highlands Provincial Park. It has hundreds of privately

owned homes and cottages within its perimeter. There are 5000 cottages in 17 provincial parks in Manitoba; 2000 cottages in provincial parks in Saskatchewan; and 500 cottages in provincial parks in Alberta. Algonquin is far from unique in this regard.

Myth # 10

All other leases in Algonquin Park are terminating in 2017, so cottage leases should terminate as well.

Reality

The commercial leases in the Park (the children's summer camps and lodges) were extended in 2005 for renewable tenure of up to 60 years. The same opportunity should be afforded to cottage leases given the positive role cottagers have played over the course of the Park's history, environmentally, economically, and by assisting other Park visitors.

Myth # 11

Termination of the leases is a simple matter that comes with no cost.

Reality

The termination of leases in Algonquin Park would put an end to a vibrant, longstanding community with a history and roots that go back well over 100 years, and in which many members have a continuous family presence stretching across many generations. The end of cottage leases would require the destruction of all cottages in the Park, and the associated loss of many millions of dollars of property value to the families involved. Algonquin Park would lose the regular and stable source of revenue in leasehold rents and fees, and businesses in surrounding communities would lose the patronage of leaseholders and their extended families.

Myth # 12

Leaseholders accepted an extension of their leases to 2017 and agreed to leave thereafter.

Reality

Leases were extended following a policy review in 1986, and the government recognized that the policy of eventual termination, while not reversed at the time, was open to review in the future. This was evident in the government's refusal to ask

leaseholders to relinquish any further claim for extension beyond 2017. Algonquin leaseholders have never acknowledged termination as a fair or proper policy for the Park.

Myth # 13

Because of cottage leases in Algonquin, there is no more wilderness.

Reality

Leases are situated along the Highway 60 corridor and on lakes in the north with road access or on railway rights of way. These areas are not intended to be “wilderness”. The Recreation / Utilization zone along the highway corridor, and other road access lakes, serve as buffers for the Wilderness zones, according to the Management Plan for Algonquin.

Myth # 14

There are no campsites available for overnight campers to the Park and this is where the real demand by users is.

Reality

There is a reservation system for Algonquin (and other Ontario Parks) campsites, accessible via toll free telephone, or internet. Demand for this type of campsite has remained stable for several years, and fluctuates with the weather. The largest part of the expansion to Visitor Services over the last 20 years has been in services to users traveling the Highway 60 corridor. These include:

- Visitor Centre and bookstore
- Algonquin Logging Museum
- NHE (Natural Heritage Education) publications
- Algonquin Gallery
- Increase in number and length of interpretive trails
- Group Education programmes
- Mountain Bike, cross-country skiing and hiking trails

None of these experiences cross paths with cottage leaseholds.