

Socioeconomic Analysis Summary for Three New Wilderness Areas

Blue Mountain-Birch Cove Lakes, Ship Harbour Long Lake, and Shelburne River

February 2009

Overview

Before a new wilderness area can be designated, an analysis of its socioeconomic impact must be made available to the public. It is required by the *Wilderness Areas Protection Act*.

This is a summary of a socioeconomic analysis prepared for Nova Scotia Environment by Jacques Whitford Limited, a private environmental consulting company.

The study assesses the socioeconomic effects of designating three new wilderness areas within Crown land parcels at Blue Mountain-Birch Cove Lakes, Ship Harbour Long Lake, and Shelburne River. It considers a range of social and economic benefits and costs of each designation. It is not intended to be a strictly mathematical exercise, since many costs and benefits are difficult to quantify.

The study has been prepared as a draft discussion paper to foster awareness and to support informed discussion and decision-making. It has been reviewed by government departments and a university economist. Now, individuals and groups are invited to comment on the discussion paper draft. This is part of the public consultation required by the *Wilderness Areas Protection Act*.

Public comments will be reviewed by Jacques Whitford and considered by them in making the draft discussion paper final. The final version of the discussion paper will be released to the public.

You can view and download the draft discussion paper, submit comments, and find more information about the candidate wilderness areas by visiting the department's web site, writing in, or calling the Protected Areas Branch until **February 27, 2009**.

Effects of Designation

Forestry Values

Designation prohibits commercial forest harvesting. Jacques Whitford concludes that the socioeconomic effect of designation is approximately equal to the foregone stumpage value of the candidate wilderness area lands.

Potential foregone gross revenue at Blue Mountain-Birch Cove Lakes is estimated at \$1.5 million, based on calculations of total present stumpage value of all the potential working forest of the area. For Ship Harbour Long Lake, the figure is approximately \$18.3 million and for Shelburne River approximately \$3.9 million. These figures assume repeated harvesting of 100% of the potential working forest of each candidate wilderness area over time.

Mining Values

Future exploration and mine development are prohibited by designation, except where pre-existing mineral licenses exist. There are no known economic deposits within the wilderness areas, although there is current exploration interest in the Ship Harbour Long Lake region. The effects of designation on the mineral industry cannot be quantified, as they primarily relate to lost opportunities related to the discovery and development of potential deposits, which are currently unknown.

Tourism Values

Designation will secure protected lands suitable for developing and marketing nature tourism opportunities in all three candidate wilderness areas. The discussion paper does not quantify tourism values. As a result of designation, tourism values for all three wilderness areas are expected to increase over time.

Bear-baiting is not permitted in wilderness areas. Therefore, a loss of value associated with guided bear hunting for Ship Harbour Long Lake Candidate Wilderness area is predicted if these activities cannot be relocated elsewhere.

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Research and Education Values

Designation of these wilderness areas will secure a protected land base which is ideal for education and research on natural ecosystems. The draft discussion paper does not quantify current research and education values. As a result of these designations, these values are predicted to increase for all three wilderness areas.

Vehicle and Bicycle Use

These designations will restrict the use of vehicles in the wilderness areas, including off-highway vehicles (OHVs). The draft discussion paper estimates socioeconomic effects would be minimal. Main forest access roads which pass through the Ship Harbour Long Lake and Shelburne River wilderness areas will be excluded from the areas' boundaries. Existing OHV use in Blue Mountain-Birch Cove Lakes is very limited. OHV use is not permitted on lands surrounding and routes accessing Shelburne River. The main OHV routes in the vicinity of Ship Harbour Long Lake are outside the candidate area. The connectivity of the regional trail system will be maintained. Some side trails will be closed.

Some mountain bike trails overlap with Blue Mountain-Birch Cove Lakes. Generally, bicycle use is not permitted in wilderness areas, but the use of a trail may be authorized under the *Wilderness Areas Protection Act*, through a trail management agreement with a user group. It's expected designation will not greatly effect bike trails.

Fishing, Hunting, and Trapping

All three areas are used for fishing and, to varying extents, for hunting and trapping. Since fishing, hunting, and trapping are permitted in wilderness areas, designation will have a limited impact on these activities, although use patterns may change due to vehicle use restrictions..

Wilderness Recreation

Designation will be good for non-motorized, low-impact, outdoor recreation opportunities such as hiking, paddling, bird watching, etc. The existing natural settings that form the foundation for these activities will be protected. Wilderness recreation in all three wilderness areas is expected to increase over time.

Cultural and Heritage Values

Designation of natural areas with cultural and heritage significance helps protect the province's uniqueness and diversity. It contributes to a sense of identity and community. Key indicators used to assess cultural and heritage values included archaeological significance, and long-standing traditions of hunting, fishing and recreation. Designation will benefit cultural and heritage values for all three wilderness areas.

Existence Values

Existence values are benefits which are not associated with direct use of an area. Maintaining large natural spaces can strengthen cultural identity and heritage values, and inspire artists and others. They also represent a legacy for future generations. Designation will secure existence values for all three wilderness areas.

Climate Change Mitigation

Designation will increase long-term carbon storage because protected forest areas store more carbon than land managed for forest harvesting, even when accounting for carbon storage in wood products from trees that have been harvested. The study calculates carbon-storage benefits in two ways: (1) using the value of carbon credit markets; and (2) using the value of damages avoided.

The overall value of protecting all three wilderness areas for carbon dioxide-related climate change mitigation, using the carbon credit market value estimate, ranges from \$2.8 to \$5.4 million. Using the damage cost avoidance estimate, the range is \$59 to \$117.9 million.

Water Regulation

Forests and their aquatic ecosystems regulate water flows, reduce flooding, recharge groundwater, and help prevent soil erosion. They also ensure good water quality and aquatic habitat. Designation will help secure these values by maintaining the natural forest and plant life of the areas. Together, the three new wilderness areas include about 150 lakes and ponds (about 1,100 hectares), more than 200 km of streams and rivers, and almost 1,800 hectares of wetlands.

Biodiversity Maintenance

Designation will help maintain large patches of roadless older forest which provide important – and increasingly rare – habitat for species that depend on, or prefer, large natural areas. Protection also promotes the development of old-growth forests. It supports special and sensitive habitats (for species such as rare coastal plain flora and endangered lichens) and typical examples of Nova Scotia's landscape diversity.

Other Values

Due to project scope and data limitations, the socioeconomic analysis did not consider all possible values. For example, the study did not evaluate the impacts of designation on human health, adjacent land values, community or regional development, or environmental services such as soil protection, or air quality maintenance.