



Dedicated Protected Area Designation in the Whitefeather Forest

Keeping the Land—Whitefeather Forest Land Use Strategy

The Whitefeather Forest Land Use Strategy (Keeping the Land 2006) was approved by Pikangikum First Nation and the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources (OMNR) in June 2006. A new interim protection land use category, called 'Dedicated Protected Areas' was applied to 436,025 hectares or 35.7% of the Whitefeather Forest planning area. This interim protection step recognizes the importance of continuing a cross-cultural dialogue (Ahkee Dialogue) to arrive at culturally-appropriate, protected area regulatory designations.

Background

The Whitefeather Forest Planning Area is located in Northwestern Ontario and is comprised of over 1.2 million hectares of boreal forest (Figure 1). The planning area is bounded by traplines currently held by Pikangikum people, and some additional areas in which Pikangikum First Nation has an historical interest as part of their ancestral lands, but where the traplines are currently held by non-aboriginal people.

In the mid 1990's Pikangikum First Nation initiated communication with the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources investigating the possibility of a forestry opportunity on their traditional lands. This was followed by a period of intense developmental activities from 1997 to 2003 which included partnership and consensus-building between Pikangikum and the OMNR. Information gathering and dialogue with other interested parties was undertaken concurrently and a public planning process



Elders Solomon Turtle, the late George K. Strang and William Strang considering presentations during a Strategic Action Planning meeting, photo copyright Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources

*“Long ago there were
no boundaries... we have
to respect other
neighbouring First
Nations and not take
any land away
from them.
This is why we have to
work within traplines.”*

*Elder Solomon Turtle
(in translation)*

was implemented in 2003 – community-based land use planning for the Whitefeather Forest. A primary goal of planning has been to secure economic renewal for Pikangikum people with a focus on a forestry opportunity.

Keeping the Land 2006 is the culmination of a focussed three year cross-cultural dialogue between Pikangikum First Nation and the OMNR. As expressed in their vision statement, the people of Pikangikum look to the future to maintain their ancestral responsibilities for Keeping the Land and for the continued survival and well being of their people. This vision respects the teachings and wisdom of the Esteemed Elders of Pikangikum who have related that their ancestral lands are a gift from the Creator that provides for their way of life, including enduring livelihood opportunities for their people. In return these lands are to be sustained in their abundance and diversity.

Initiative

The Whitefeather Forest Land Use Strategy – *Keeping the Land*, is made up of three key components; Stewardship Strategy; Customary Activities and Community Economic Development. Individually these components interlock to become part of a larger whole, the customary relationship of Pikangikum people to the land they have cared for since time immemorial.

As a land use intent, Dedicated Protected Areas (Figure 2) are the umbrella for several new opportunities all of which are complementary to the purpose of protecting specific values and landscapes. This allows for the use of forest resources such as non timber forest products to support

livelihood activities, especially those deep rooted in the culture and historical activities of Pikangikum people. Dedicated Protected Area's exclude commercial forestry, mineral exploration, mining and commercial power generation development; they are also incompatible with road building, aggregate extraction, peat extraction and any other industrial uses.

Natural and cultural heritage features in the planning area provide extensive opportunities to experience tranquility and hence activities such as eco-cultural tourism, recreation and appreciation will be enhanced by this land use intent. The planning, design and management of Dedicated Protected Area's and the suite of activities within these areas can provide opportunities for partnerships, employment and direct economic benefits for Pikangikum. Protection can be achieved in a variety of ways, at different scales and to different degrees under the guidance of the customary stewardship approach for Keeping the Land.

The dialogue between Pikangikum First Nation and OMNR/Ontario Parks will continue to develop an agreement for the appropriate designation of the Dedicated Protected Areas. The dialogue is rooted in mutual respect and will work toward a shared understanding of:

- Pikangikum First Nations indigenous relationship with the land in the past, present and future
- The protection of customary activities such as hunting, fishing, trapping and gathering by First Nations people in the Dedicated Protected Areas
- Pikangikum First Nations goals for protection which include but are not limited to the

adoption of Pikangikum customary stewardship processes in Dedicated Protected Areas management

- OMNR's goals for protection which include but are not limited to the completion of Ontario's system of dedicated Protected Areas
- Joint Pikangikum and OMNR responsibilities and support required for planning and management of activities in Dedicated Protected Areas
- How future development proposals will be considered in the Dedicated Protected Areas

Lessons Learned

The Whitefeather Land Use Strategy and Ahkee Dialogue process has confirmed many basic tenets of civil society.

- *Treat people the way you would like to be treated.* Respect is a key component of any good relationship. The Elders of Pikangikum set a high standard for respectful relationships by openly sharing their knowledge and demonstrating respect for the knowledge of others.



Whitefeather Forest Planning Area



- *Patience is a virtue.* Working with a partner on an important project on a long-term basis requires patience. Add the challenge of language and the patience requires a focussed commitment to see it through. Language challenges went in both directions and became opportunities.
- *Listen and learn.* For the people involved in this process it has been personally enriching. The process has provided for a cross-cultural experience that has culminated in a respectful partnership based on consensus.

Conclusions

The Ahkee Dialogue will continue and culminate in the regulation of Dedicated Protected Areas in a cross-culturally harmonious manner. While these areas will be regulated by Ontario using provincial legislation, they will also be established in harmony with the customary Keeping the Land stewardship framework of Pikangikum people. The Dedicated Protected Areas will achieve conservation and natural and cultural heritage features representation that will celebrate and sustain the northern

boreal forest and indigenous cultural landscape of Pikangikum people. The goal is for these areas to become an innovative and internationally acclaimed network of protected areas which will contribute to a larger network of protected areas showcasing the First Nation's and Ontario's natural and cultural heritage. Community and public consultation opportunities will be provided to regulate the Dedicated Protected Areas.

“I want to emphasise the teachings that our parents have taught us. This is a continuing knowledge passed down from one generation to the next. We are elders now and continue to teach. This is what ‘Keeping the Land’ is all about. This is why we want to build the teaching centre – to continue to teach our youth at that centre”

Elder Lucy Strang (in translation)



Bloodvein River between Knox and Peisk Lake, photo copyright Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources

www.parks-parcs.ca

Please visit our site for further information or alternative document formats.

Canadian Parks Council