



This report summarizes the public comment received by Nova Scotia Environment and Labour during the consultation on the draft management plan for Tobeatic Wilderness Area.

Overview

Nova Scotia Environment and Labour released *Focus on the Tobeatic - Tobeatic Wilderness Area Draft Management Plan* on April 23, 2004. This discussion document presented information about Tobeatic Wilderness Area's natural, cultural, and recreational values. It also proposed guiding principles, management goals, and a management framework for the Wilderness Area.

The department set up library information displays, and hosted a series of six open houses in western Nova Scotia and Halifax, concluding June 18. In addition, the draft plan was distributed by direct mail, was available at regional Environment and Labour offices, and was posted on the web. A public comment worksheet accompanied the draft management plan. Some people used the worksheet, while others sent letters, wrote on maps, or had their thoughts recorded by staff.

Public Consultation Response

Environment and Labour received 215 individual written responses, and recorded 160 comments from some of the 225 people that took part in the six open houses.

Vision, Context, and Values

Broad support was expressed for the vision, *Our Tobeatic*, outlined in the Draft Management Plan. Suggestions included emphasizing the importance of wilderness preservation, better recognizing the human heritage of the region, including First Nations use of the land, and featuring the role of the Tobeatic region as a place for research and learning.

The *Context and Values* section of the draft plan was also broadly supported. Suggestions for improving this section included emphasizing the human history of the Tobeatic region, and providing more detail on the wildlife that inhabit

the Wilderness Area. People also suggested featuring the role the Wilderness Area as a large natural area within the working lands of southwestern Nova Scotia.

Principles and Management Goals

The proposed guiding principles were well received. Many people placed a priority on ecological integrity, ranking it as most important among the four principles, and suggesting that it guide all decision-making. Others desired a greater emphasis on implementation, with leadership by Environment and Labour.

The nine proposed management goals were well supported. Ecosystem protection and wilderness recreation stood out as people's most important management goals. Some people expressed concern over proceeding too quickly with tourism, marketing, and development.

Management Framework - Ecosystem Protection

Respondents expressed strong support for ecosystem protection. Many people commented on biodiversity and wilderness values, stating that these should be the highest priority for management, with other objectives considered as secondary. Many recommended restoration for parts of the Wilderness Area that have been degraded, to allow natural processes to recover.

Many people valued scientific understanding as key to effectively managing the Wilderness Area. Respondents also emphasized the need for natural and cultural heritage research. Others suggested that monitoring be improved to follow known stressors and key indicator species. Many supported efforts to protect species-at-risk.

Respondents suggested that Environment and Labour work to remove non-native invasive

species such as Scotch broom and small mouth bass from the Wilderness Area. Others felt more detailed protocols were required for wildfire and insect management. Some people suggested active restoration of lakes and rivers to counter the effects of acid rain.

Management Framework - Recreation

Respondents provided a wide range of comment on recreation management. Topics included vehicle use, campsite leases, user registration, hunting, trapping, sportfishing, and nature tourism.

Public opinion was split on the use of vehicles in Tobeatic Wilderness Area. Many people felt vehicle use should not be limited to the Silvery Lake and McGill Lake Crown roads, and should be permitted on established trails and old roads to other destinations within and beyond the Wilderness Area. Many others felt that vehicles do not belong in the Wilderness Area at all, and called for stringent vehicle management and increased enforcement.

The future of campsite leases within Tobeatic Wilderness Area was an important topic for many people. Many people recommended that the department allow the continuation of campsite leases, with an increased stewardship role for the lease holders. Many others suggested eliminating campsite leases in Tobeatic Wilderness Area altogether to restore the wild character of the Wilderness Area, and minimize impacts from camp use.

Other people supported the retirement of campsite leases following their current term, with the option of relocating to a Crown land site outside the Wilderness Area. Another suggestion was to allow some campsite leases to remain in the Wilderness Area if lease holders committed to following more stringent lease conditions such as accessing the site by non-motorized means, monitoring and reporting area conditions, and communicating with other users.

Some people discussed the importance of the long-standing camps and the stewardship of leaseholders to the heritage and protection of the area. They also noted the importance of camps for family recreation and for passing on traditions to new users. Other people recognized the history of

camp use, but felt that campsite leases represent a privileged use of the Wilderness Area which is not consistent with protection and wilderness recreation goals.

Many comments were received regarding user registration. People discussed the advantages and disadvantages of voluntary and mandatory permit systems. They also emphasized the information that could be gained on visitor use patterns, public safety and enforcement through a permit system. Some people felt that user registration was not necessary, especially for local users.

A variety of ideas were shared on hunting, trapping, and sportfishing in Tobeatic Wilderness Area. Many respondents suggested that these activities should continue, as they are an important part of the region's wilderness recreation heritage. Many others felt that these activities should not continue within the Wilderness Area, due to the area's protection and research objectives, and potential conflicts with other users. Some people suggested continuing to allow sustainable hunting and fishing, with a trapping closure.

Many respondents commented on tourism marketing and development. Some supported nature-based tourism to encourage economic development and to help promote an appreciation of the area. Others cautioned that increased tourism could bring negative environmental impacts, so should be a low priority for the Wilderness Area at this time.

Management Framework - Adjacent Land

Broad support was expressed for the idea of voluntary land management that complements the values of Tobeatic Wilderness Area.

Many respondents felt that Environment and Labour should encourage voluntary complementary management with neighbouring landowners. Many supported completing a boundary review exercise to examine adjacent land management, evaluate adjacent lands for addition to the Wilderness Area, and to consider boundary realignment to reflect watersheds. Several people suggested specific candidate lands for addition to the Wilderness Area. Others suggested that the department further explore the connectivity of the

Wilderness Area to other protected areas in the surrounding landscape.

Some people emphasized that the plan should not adversely affect the owners of private land surrounded by the Wilderness Area. Many others felt that the department should continue encouraging such inholding owners to adopt a voluntary stewardship role. Others called for Environment and Labour to develop a more detailed and time bound acquisition strategy for inheld properties.

Management Framework - Implementation

People agreed that implementing the management plan is a high priority. People wanted to see the plan work “on the ground.” Some emphasized the need for a time line for priority actions. Others discussed the importance of measurable results, regular reporting, and a high level of public involvement.

Most people felt that increased enforcement is critical for proper implementation. Suggestions included providing a wider range of enforcement tools, increasing funding levels, and increasing staffing.

Stewardship by existing users was also raised as an important approach for implementing the plan. Many people suggested that users could play a role in monitoring, reporting, and providing advice for ongoing management. Others stated support for a “Wilderness Watch” program, noting that it has been carried out informally by existing users for many years.

Next Steps

Nova Scotia Environment and Labour will carefully consider all public comment, and the advice of the Tobeatic Advisory Group, in developing the management plan for Tobeatic Wilderness Area.

The final management plan will be written by the department, and approved by the Minister of Environment and Labour. Once released, the full plan will be available to the public on the protected areas website, and through Environment and Labour offices in Kentville, Bridgewater, Yarmouth, and Halifax.

Information Sharing

We thank all those who provided comment on the draft management plan. A full set of the submissions received during the comment period is available for public viewing at Environment and Labour offices in Halifax (5151 Terminal Road) and Bridgewater (60 Logan Road).

Nova Scotia Environment and Labour considers participant identity as personal information, in keeping with the provisions of the *Freedom of Information & Protection of Privacy Act*. The privacy of a participant’s identity will be upheld 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.

Ideas and suggestions are welcome on any aspect of the Protected Areas Program. For more information please contact us or visit our website.



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**Thank you for your interest in the
protection and management of
Tobeatic Wilderness Area.**