

Summary of Byron Kellar's Report on the Possibility of a Baptiste Lake Public Beach

November 2, 2011

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Background

Byron Kellar's initial step in this project was to meet with MNR officials on the matter of disposing of Crown lands adjacent to Baptiste Lake. MNR officials summarized the position of the Government of Ontario in the following terms. The sale or transfer of all public lands in Ontario is in a "hold position" due to current Aboriginal land claims (Golden Lake Algonquin, in our case), which includes Baptiste Lake and adjacent lands. In addition, since Baptiste Lake is classified as a cold water lake having a native lake trout population, the provincial government strictly monitors shoreline activity and development due to the sensitivity of cold water lakes to development.

In 1991, the MNR rejected an application for a public park (and beach) in Paddy Cox Bay (at the west end of the main basin), due to the low quality of the site (steep, uneven, no dry beach, limited wet beach, impact of soil and vegetation disturbance, impact on water quality).

There are a number of unopened concessions, which are 66 feet wide, that are adjacent to Baptiste Lake and that are owned by Hastings Highlands. Correspondence between Mayor Ron Emond and Council member Lorraine Fell in 2008 provided a list of possible access points that are municipal concessions. After visiting these sites, and having conversations with Lorraine Fell, Byron concluded that only two locations had some potential – the Paradise Point unopened concession and the old MNR boat launch located on North Baptiste Lake Road, which is by far the superior site. The latter site, with about 150 feet of shoreline, is owned by MNR. It is very flat with a sandy beach, boat launch, picnic area and parking. There are no public toilets.

Byron attended a meeting in Maynooth in August with the mayor and council of Hastings Highlands, and he inquired as to their thoughts on a public beach on Baptiste Lake. After an extensive discussion, the council concluded that residents and visitors, over the decades, have established access and use of the lake that seems to have fulfilled their requirements. It was suggested that another site – the MNR beach/boat launch on Diamond Lake – be investigated in terms of meeting the needs for a public beach in the area.

Byron visited the Diamond Lake beach site a number of times during last summer and concluded that it is certainly the best publicly owned beach in the area – he called it a "five star" beach in our conversations.

Conclusion

The Diamond Lake beach site is clearly the best in our area, with relatively easy access for most Baptiste Lake residents. The BLA could support the municipality making improvements to this site, such as garbage pick-up and public toilets, or it could remain silent on this issue. In summary, there does not appear to be much public support, nor does there appear to be a suitable site, for a public beach on Baptiste Lake.