

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

PRELIMINARY AREA OF INTEREST FOR A NATIONAL PARK IN THE EAST ARM OF GREAT SLAVE LAKE, NORTHWEST TERRITORIES.

Claude Mondor
Chief, Area Identification
Park Establishment Branch
National Parks Directorate
Parks Canada
March, 2006

The Northwestern Boreal Uplands (Natural Region 17), which stretches from the Great Bear Lake in the west to the shores of Hudson Bay in the east, is one of the twelve regions currently unrepresented in the national parks system of Canada. In 1970, an area of 7,407 km² in the East Arm of Great Slave Lake was set aside to represent this region in the national parks system by a Federal Order-in-Council. Shortly thereafter, the Snowdrift Indian Band (now referred to as the Lutsel K'e Dene First Nation) requested, and was granted, a 5-year moratorium on any park development activity in order to assess the effects of the proposed national park on their way of life.

Although the moratorium ended in 1975, little work to establish the proposed park proceeded until the mid 1980s when advances in the negotiation of the Dene/Métis Comprehensive Land Claim provided a context for dealing with the matter. As a result, in the latter half of the 1980s provisions for establishment of the park were negotiated as part of the draft claim agreement. During that period Parks Canada entered into consultations with affected Dene and Métis, government completed a Mineral and Energy Resource Assessment (MERA) of the proposed park area, Parks Canada and the Government of the Northwest Territories conducted national consultations on the park proposal, and Parks Canada proposed alternative boundaries for the park.

This progress was interrupted in 1990 when the Dene/Métis General Assembly rejected fundamental elements of the Dene/Métis Agreement and the government began a series of regional negotiations to settle the claims of the Dene and Métis of the Mackenzie Valley. Since 2001, however, work has resumed on the East Arm National Park proposal largely because of progress in negotiation of the Akaitcho/Treaty 8 Process, one of the regional, aboriginal claims that apply to the area proposed for a national park.

Similarly, in 2002, the Governments of Canada and the Northwest Territories signed an “Interim Measures Agreement” with the South Slave Métis Tribal Council (now called the Northwest Territory Métis Nation). This agreement, along with a subsequent Schedule on National Parks and Protected Areas, has provided a context for potentially affected Métis to become involved again in considering the national park proposal.

Other aboriginal groups such as the Athabasca Denesuline of Northern Saskatchewan may also become involved in the deliberations about the proposal for a national park in the East Arm of Great Slave Lake as they pursue negotiation of their claims in the Northwest Territories.

In 2005, the Lutsel k’e Dene First Nation delineated an area it calls ‘Thaydene Nene’, a part of its traditional territory that it proposes to protect through the establishment of a national park and other conservation measures. They also urged Parks Canada to reassess the boundaries of the 1970 East Arm National Park land withdrawal based upon the “National Parks System Plan” and ecological integrity criteria. In response to this request, the Parks Establishment Branch initiated a study to identify a preliminary ‘area of interest’ for a national park in the East Arm of Great Slave Lake. This Executive Summary outlines the findings of this study.

“Parks Canada Guiding Principles and Operational Policies (1994)” states that the primary objective of the national park system is “...to protect for all time representative natural areas of Canadian significance ...and to encourage public understanding, appreciation, and enjoyment of this natural heritage so as to leave it unimpaired for future generations”. In order to fulfill this mandate, Parks Canada strives to establish national parks that meet three fundamental objectives: (1) represents the region’s ecosystems across their natural range of variation, (2) sustains their ecological integrity by maintaining viable populations of native species and the ecological processes that they depend upon, and (3) provides for the understanding, appreciation and enjoyment of park resources by all Canadians.

A five-step procedure was followed to identify a preliminary ‘area of interest’ for a national park in the East Arm of Great Slave Lake that met these three fundamental objectives. First, park goals and objectives for representation, ecological integrity and visitor use were outlined for the future park. ‘Conservation targets’ were then defined for each objective (Step 2). These are the specific features that planners seek to protect within the proposed park, guiding park boundary delineation towards a desired condition and serving as a baseline for measuring successes and failures. The

distribution of each target was then mapped in a Geographic Information System (GIS) using the best available information (Step 3). These maps were subsequently standardized to a common scale, assigned factor weights and combined in the GIS to show the area's suitability for representation, ecological integrity (wildlife and processes) and visitor use (Step 4). In the last step, the suitability maps were overlaid to determine where the areas of highest conservation value occurred (i.e., those areas with the highest combined representation, ecological integrity and visitor use scores), and a boundary was circumscribed around them using catchments as the principle decision rule. This boundary, which is shown on the attached map, demarcates Parks Canada's preliminary 'area of interest' for a national park in the East Arm of Great Slave Lake.

The preliminary 'area of interest' covers total surface area of 33,525 km². Of this, approximately 29,560 km² is land and 3,965 km² is comprised of the waters of the East Arm of Great Slave Lake.

