

TLA Collaborates with Community Groups to Plan New Future for OLD GROWTH FORESTS

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The story of Temagami's old growth forests actually began thousands of years ago when the massive glaciers that covered much of North America started to withdraw, leaving behind large areas of bare rock devoid of any vegetation. While there were no trees at that time, over time, an ecosystem gradually developed and sustained itself, fostering in time the growth of what is now known as an old growth forest characterized by many old trees reaching skyward.

Today, many of these trees are more than 200 years old with girths that can surpass a meter in diameter. The two nearby old growth forests on Temagami Island and the White Bear Forest east of the town have always attracted hikers, campers and naturalists despite their lack of easy access, well-defined, clear trails, user-friendly maps, and annual maintenance.

Earlier this year, the Temagami Community Foundation (TCF) approached the TLA, the Friends of Temagami (FOT), Nastawgan Trails, Inc., the Temagami Chamber of Commerce, along with the Municipality of Temagami and the Temagami First Nation (TFN) with a proposal to develop a 10-year partnership plan for the old growth trails in the two forests. The aim is to highlight the trails in Temagami so that when people think of Old Growth and Temagami, they know they can walk the trails and experience, enjoy and learn what is so special about Temagami's Old Growth.

The immediate impetus for the project was a 2013 effort by the FOT, Nastawgan Trails and the TLA to clean out the Blue trail on Temagami Island. Much remains to be done, however, on the Orange, White and Yellow interpretative trails, the Red north access trail and additional remedial work on the Blue trail. Over the winter, the coalition members developed a plan to ensure that the trails are continuously maintained, that signage is standardized, paper and digital maps are accurate and available, infra-structure needs (docks, bridges, kiosks, for instance) are identified, marketing and promotion programmes are developed and, finally, that a funding plan exists for a 10-year period.

With a buy-in from the Ministry of Natural Resources (which has responsibility for the Conservation Reserves), the Temagami First Nation and the Municipality, work started in late May on Temagami Island. The FOT is leading this stage of the project with support from the TLA and TCF.

The first order of business will be to raise funds to build a new dock to replace the old North Access dock to enable trail visitors to park their boats in a safe location. Over the long-term, a 10-year-long project as envisioned would easily cost \$50,000, a lot of time and money to be sure, but not as impressive and unique as the two old growth forests, and the benefits – increased eco-tourism, for example – that would accrue to the community.

The Temagami Island dock will be located at the trail head on the east side of the island. The TLA has indicated it will contribute some of the money towards its cost; for its part, the TCF intends to promote the project on a web-based crowd-funding site, in addition to reaching out to specific supporters and donors.

The south tip of Temagami Island near Camp Wabikon was a summer settlement area for the Teme-Augama Anishnabai while the north tip had a maple stand used for producing maple syrup. The 126-hectare (311 acres) Conservation Reserve (CR) features stands of “provincially significant” old growth red and white pine between 220-230 years old and covering approximately 90 percent of the area. Some parts of the island trails are in good shape with very little brush growth, but the Orange, White and Yellow trails will need significant repeated efforts to get the brush under control.

The TLA in 2011 had requested a work permit to build a dock, but it was stymied because of Provincial regulations concerning structures on CRs. Accordingly, a new permit request, with the support of the MNR, calls for an underwater crib to hold a floating dock with a gangway that simply rests on the CR shoreline, allowing it to be removed at the end of the season. Meanwhile, an assessment by coalition members needs to be done on the White Bear Forest trails, which need more work than those on Temagami Island. Over the years, Doug Adams, whose Northland Paradise Lodge on the outskirts of town has long assisted hikers, has been the informal “keeper” of the White Bear Forest. The assessment will cover such factors as the cost of maintenance, infrastructure, signage, promotion and marketing to determine the level of funding required. The TCF, in turn, has committed to raise funds to cover some of the cost involved. The White Bear Forest CR is a 1,242-hectare parcel (3,069 acres), just east of the town, also featuring old growth red and white pine, mixed wood forest, significant plant communities and wetlands. The White Bear forest is named for Chief Francois White Bear of the Teme-Augama Anishnabai who resided in an early forest settlement; since the late 19th century, he and his family used the forest as part of their hunting and trapping grounds. With TFN involvement, the material created by the coalition will include historical and cultural information as a means of educating the general public about the Teme-Augama Anishnabai as the original inhabitants of the land.

The White Bear forest is the sixth largest remaining stand of old growth white pine forest currently known. It’s also unique in that it is perhaps one of the most easily accessible of the remaining stands of old-growth pine.



Katie and Sarah Knox demonstrate the girth of a tree on one of Temagami's Old Growth Trails. Photo by E. Gunnell.