



Wabakimi Provincial Park – Legacy Debris Project



Report for Friends of Wabakimi – October 1st, 2021

Background

Wabakimi Provincial Park encompasses a landscape with over 10,000 lakes and 2,000 kilometers of paddling routes. This wilderness area is significant for its contribution to the protection of natural and cultural features in Northwestern Ontario.

Friends of Wabakimi is a volunteer organization that is committed to working closely with Wabakimi Provincial Park to protect and promote this resource as a world class canoeing destination for the benefit of future generations as well as the local economy.

In 2020, board members from the Friends of Wabakimi approached Wabakimi Provincial Park staff with an idea to raise funds to help support stewardship activities. It was agreed at this time that the two parties would collaborate on a new initiative created to fundraise to support programs that protect, restore and enhance the ecosystems within Wabakimi Provincial Park. The initiative will help Wabakimi meet the following Ontario Parks objectives:

1. [Protection of natural and cultural features](#),
2. [Provision of ecologically sustainable outdoor recreation](#),
3. [Natural and cultural heritage education](#) and
4. [Fostering research](#).

2021 Stewardship Project - Planes, Paddles and Portages – Legacy Debris Removal in Wabakimi Provincial Park

Wabakimi Provincial Park supports a wide array of backcountry tripping, fishing and other wilderness opportunities. Park rangers maintain canoe routes in the park and have worked diligently to clear portages and are active in other duties related to inventory and monitoring in the park. Over the years these crews have documented debris which had been left on the landscape from a variety of recreational activities in the park. Abandoned items such as damaged equipment or boats that have accumulated on portages and lakeside areas are unsightly and can have a negative impact on the environment or on visitor experience. However, since these crews are travelling by canoe, they have been limited to documenting these sites because removal was not an option at the time. The park has maintained a database which documents more than 100 items and 44 locations where items have been flagged for removal. Other acceptable items will remain in the park and include those that are used for traditional use by indigenous communities.

In November and December of 2020, the FOW fundraised to initiate the removal of debris on 4 lakes in the park (Surprise Lake, Cache Lake, Burntrock Lake and Grayson Lake – see map below). The money would be contributed to chartering a Bush Plane with cargo space required to fly large debris out from the park. The goal was to restore the natural settings at these sites and improve the wilderness experience for future visitors passing through these areas.

Timeline/Milestones

Date	Event
November 2020	Fundraising begins with goal of raising \$7300 for the project
December 2020	Fundraising goal for project achieved and funds transferred to Ontario Parks
June – July 2021	Canoe Rangers from Wabakimi completed two trips in the park to prepare and stage debris for removal. June site visit to Surprise and Cache Lakes resulted in 13 abandoned, burnt and damaged items removed from portages and moved to an accessible area. In July, items along the Grayson River heading towards Whitewater Lake were staged for removal.
September 2021	Turbo Beaver hired from Aviation, Forest Fire and Emergency Services (AFFES) in Dryden. The plane was a specialized 'amphibious' vehicle that has floats with wheels. This allowed it to be staged out of the Armstrong airport and allow for easy landing/unloading of material. All items from Surprise and Cache Lakes were removed within one day of flying (4 flights) spanning over 13 hours.
June 2022	Due to low water levels, the flight to remove debris from the Grayson Lake area had to be deferred till the Spring of 2022

Results

- Four park staff contributed time to the project over three separate field excursions to the park
- All materials from the southern sites in the park (Surprise and Cache Lake) was successfully removed and all scrap recycled
- The northern sites in the Grayson area are prepped, and a plan is in place to follow through with the removal in the spring of 2022 when water levels are higher

Challenges

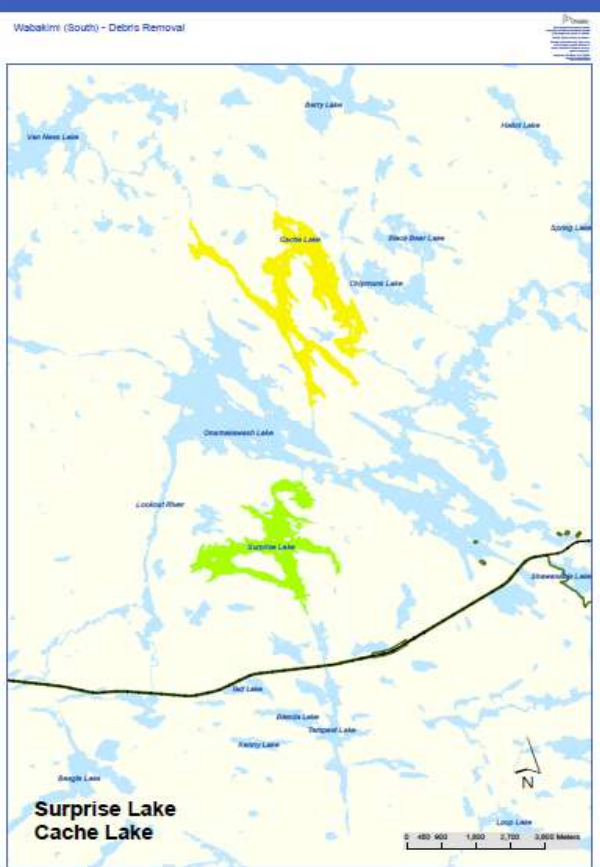
- During the winter of 2020/2021 our main flight carrier for Wabakimi Provincial Park was sold. Due to COVID-19 and other challenges the carrier was not able to get an inspection/certification to fly Ontario government staff. This limited our ability to book a local carrier through the summer.
- The 2021 fire season was the busiest in northwestern Ontario in the past decade. AFFES planes were allocated to assisting with the busy fire season and were not available to book till later in September
- Low water levels prevented the movement of boats in the Grayson area to an accessible position for bush plane access

Conclusion

The park staff are very appreciative of the support FOW has provided for this project! The removal of materials from the various sites in the park, some of which predates the creation of the park by several decades, is a great example of the environmental stewardship that is vital to protect and preserve Wabakimi Provincial Park for future generations. Returning the sites to a clean, natural condition is a benefit both to the 'wilderness experience' of those travelling through, but also to the vegetation which can now reclaim and regenerate in these sites that were once covered by debris. In addition, the experience and collaborations that evolved from this project are extremely valuable and will be applied to future stewardship efforts within the park moving forward.

Appendices

1. Site Maps





2. Site Preparation

<p>Cache Lake</p>	
<p>Debris cut into smaller sections</p>	

Relocating material to an accessible point in preparation for plane pickup later in the summer



Surprise Lake



Grinder used to prepare material for removal



Material being moved to accessible site



Grayson River



Work in progress



Staged and ready to go in Spring 2022



3. Boat Removal Flights

Amphibious Turbo Beaver arrives at Armstrong airport after shuttle over from Dryden



Preparing material for removal involved use of a generator in assembly with a grinder and Sawzall.



Plane was able to nose into the point where materials were shuttled to earlier in the summer.



Larry taking a break as we near the end of a long day.....



Approaching the Armstrong airstrip where materials were unloaded.



Debris from park that has been removed as we approach the end of the day.



All material loaded and transported to Thunder Bay.



4. Pre/Post removal



Grayson River – pre-removal



Post-removal



Surprise Lake – pre-removal



Post-removal

5. Budget

Item	Cost	Balance
AFFES flight from Armstrong airport. Four return trips to remove boats from the park. Relocation fee from Dryden Regional Airport.	*Awaiting final invoice. Estimate \$5500.	TBD

Field Staff

Cory Card (Pilot AFFES)	
Larry Kitchikeesic (Canoe Ranger – Wabakimi)	

Evan McCaul (Assistant Superintendent – Wabakimi)



Jonathon Spade (Canoe Ranger – Wabakimi)



Taylor Trapp (Resource Field Crew – Ontario Parks Northwest Zone Office)

