



# NEWSLETTER

Winter 2019



Hank Ostwald (center) on the Greenmantle River, Ray Tallent and Dan Otto.

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Friends of Wabakimi members are outdoor enthusiasts who cherish every day spent in the wilderness. They demonstrate support for our volunteer conservation initiatives with their gifts, donations and membership subscriptions. These initiatives include, promote the Wabakimi Area as a world-class outdoor recreation destination; produce printed and electronic materials to further public awareness, understanding and appreciation of the Wabakimi Area; participate in land management planning process to advocate sustainable use of the natural, cultural and historical resources of the Wabakimi Area; maintain, document and preserve canoe routes and other outdoor recreational opportunities within the Wabakimi Area; and assist visitors to safely plan and successfully execute self-propelled recreational activities within the Wabakimi Area.

Friends of Wabakimi

[www.friendsofwabakimi.org](http://www.friendsofwabakimi.org).

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# President's Report

Vern Fish

The summer has come and gone and hopefully all of you got a chance to float a canoe somewhere in Wabakimi Area. Ray Tallent, board member, paddled the Greenmantle River through the remote northwest corner of Wabakimi in June. Ray has filed a trip report which appears in this newsletter. I will be presenting a program entitled, Greenmantle River, a Wabakimi Gem at Canoecopia in Madison, Wisconsin.



Greenmantle River

## Canoecopia

The Friends of Wabakimi (FOW) plan to have a big presence at 2020 Canoecopia in Madison, Wisconsin on March 13, 14 or 15, 2020. Our Annual Meeting will be held on Sunday, March 15 from 9:00-10:00 AM in the Voyageur Room in the Clarion Hotel. You will receive a formal agenda for this meeting sometime in early February.

## Membership

You have to be a member of the FOW as of January 28, 2020 (per Ontario law) to cast a vote at the annual meeting. Members current as of November 1<sup>st</sup> are eligible as well any other new members. In 2020, we're striving to add more members!

## By-Laws Change

One of the agenda items for the annual meeting will include a by-laws change. The Board of Directors have voted to increase size of the board from 10 to 15. The FOW does not have any staff so we are a "working" board. The Board felt that we need more board members to accomplish our mission. You will be asked to ratify this change at the annual meeting. The board also feels that it is important to increase the number of women and Canadians on the board. Let us know if you interested in serving on the Board of Directors. Send us an email at [friendsofwabakimi@gmail.com](mailto:friendsofwabakimi@gmail.com) to ask questions and to get a nomination form.

## Display

The FOW will have a display in the lobby of the Alliant Energy Center for all three days of Canoecopia. Amy Funk, Board Member, has agreed to help organize the volunteers to staff our booth. If you are interested in helping staff the booth, contact Amy at [amy.funk1012@gmail.com](mailto:amy.funk1012@gmail.com) and ask her how you can help.

## Canoe Guide

Our booth will display a draft copy of the Canoe Guide to the Rivers & Lakes of Wabakimi, Vol 1. Laurence Mills of Callander, Ontario has been working with a FOW committee to compile a guide to some of the many canoe routes that criss-cross the Wabakimi Area. We encourage you to stop by and leaf through the first draft of this publication and give us your thoughts. Feel free to nominate a route to be included this issue. The final version of this publication is scheduled to be completed and be ready for sale at Canoecopia in 2021. The goal of the guide is:

"To provide the information necessary for a first time visitor with expedition paddling experience to plan and safely execute a canoe trip into the Wabakimi Area. The guide (Volume 1) will provide examples of trips (5-10) that cater to variety of interests and skills and offers a range of time lines, costs and modes of entry and exit."

### Reconnaissance Expeditions

Canoe Guide Committee would LOVE to have people paddle the routes to be listed in Volume 1 in the summer of 2020. Your job would be to follow the route and provide a current summary of the condition of the portages, campsites and other features. It is possible that some of your quotes and photos could be incorporated into the canoe guide. At this point we have identified the following routes for inclusion in Volume 1:

- Kopka River from Alanwater Bridge to Hwy 527
- Allanwater Bridge and River to Little Caribou
  - Option 1 via Whitewater Lake
  - Option 2 via Lower Wabakimi Lake
- Flindt River to Little Caribou
  - Option 1 via Whitewater Lake
  - Option 2 via Lower Wabakimi Lake
- Brightsand River loop from Alanwater Bridge via Kawaweogama Lake and Seseganaga Lake
- Pashkokogan Lake loop from Hwy 599, with option for a loop to include part of the Palisade River, Redman and Rockcliff Lakes
- Vale Creek from Trail Lake Road to Hwy 527

If you are interested in paddling one of these routes, please let me know. I will send you a form to complete and list you as trip leader. Your stories and photos may also be listed in future newsletters. I can be reached at [vernfish@aol.com](mailto:vernfish@aol.com)

### Vote with Your Paddle

If the first issue of the Canoe Guide to the Rivers & Lakes of Wabakimi is successful, we will want to publish a second volume. You can play a role in helping us select the next batch of routes by nominating a route that you feel meets the goals of the guide. For your favorite route to be selected, you must have paddled the route within the last two years and filed a trip report on our form about the current condition of the route. Please let me ([vernfish@aol.com](mailto:vernfish@aol.com)) know if you are considering route to nominate for Volume 2.

### Website Update

Chuck Clise, board member and webmaster, has been working with a Kirsten Keeton of kjkDesign to update and modernize our website. Chuck hopes to launch the new website sometime before Canoecopia in March. At some point you will get an email asking you to check out the new site. This website will be displayed at our booth at Canoecopia. A big thank you goes out to Bill McCarvell who was the webmaster for the Wabakimi Project for many years!

### Our Vision

**"The Wabakimi Area shall be an exceptional destination for the wilderness recreation activities for the benefit of present and future generation of visitors."**

Please share our vision for Wabakimi by forwarding this newsletter to your paddling friends, renew your membership, and joining us at Canoecopia. If you have a great Wabakimi story to share, please submit an article or a photo to Ken Babinchak our Communication Officer ([mrtigger54@gmail.com](mailto:mrtigger54@gmail.com)). Ken may be able to use your story in a future newsletter. Help us make Wabakimi an exceptional wilderness destination!

Stay in Touch! Our FOW email address is: [friendsofwabakimi@gmail.com](mailto:friendsofwabakimi@gmail.com).

## Interview with Shannon Lawr, Wabakimi Park Superintendent



Recently FOW board chair Dave McTeague talked with Shannon Lawr to gain insights into Ontario Parks' management of Wabakimi Provincial Park. Shannon has been Park Superintendent since 2014 and has been with Ontario Parks for 15 years. He previously worked as a canoe and kayak guide in the Killarney area and has training in park management and eco-tourism.

**FOW:** What are the park superintendent and other staff duties/functions?

**Shannon:** Every day seems to be different. My responsibility lies with delivering operational objectives for protected areas, supervisor/manager for our park staff, operational safety of our staff, and balancing our budget. Our staff consists of an Assistant Superintendent (42 weeks); biologist (42 weeks); and operations technicians. Our biologist does long term monitoring such as

our lichen sample study plots to better understand forest age and structure, monitors our wildlife cameras and conducts environmental assessment for work permits required for any structural work for outposts/lodges.

**FOW:** What areas do you oversee?

**Shannon:** Wabakimi is just one of many parks I manage in my cluster. While Wabakimi is our anchor park, I manage 16 other protected areas in the Wabakimi area, north to the Winisk River the Kopka River and Brightsand in the South. (He also distinguished operating parks like Wabakimi that have fees, from non-operating parks.) We used to be part of the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry, but no longer. As of June of last year we are now part of the Ministry of Environment, Conservation and Parks. With this change, we're now also managing conservation reserves like the Attwood and Ogoki.

(In Shannon's cluster: **Provincial Parks:** Wabakimi, Brightsand River, Kopka River, Whitesand River, Windigo Bay, Gull River, Kaiashk nature reserve, Obonga-Ottertooth River, Pantagruel Creek, Albany River, Little Current River, MacLeod, Nakina Moraine, Ogoki River, Otokwin-Attawapiskat River, Sedgman Lake, Winisk River. **Conservation Reserves:** Nakina Northeast Waterway, Kagianagami Lake, Mojikit Lake, Attwood River, Ottertooth, Garden Pakashkan)

**FOW:** How does management of the conservation reserves differ from the provincial parks?

**Shannon:** The legislation (Provincial Parks and Conservation Reserves Act) that guides management of provincial parks also applies to conservation reserves. There's a bit of difference in permitted activities. In a provincial park, depending on the type, there may be limitations to motorized access or tenure for tourism and hunting. Conservation reserves are not managed that way, they're not broken down into zones, and the level of protection is not as complex.

**FOW:** Having just been on the Attwood, it is a beautiful wild area with portages that are infrequently traveled. One would hope it would stay that way.

**Shannon:** Conservation reserves are not part of forest management planning, not available to be logged.

**FOW:** How often do you get out into the field?

**Shannon:** Not often enough. Coming from a guiding world, I love paddling. My role is 80 to 90% administrative. I get into the park a couple times a year, never long enough.

**FOW:** What are your primary summer activities?

**Shannon:** Planning our biology work, operations work, which portages we're going to clear, which campsites we want to target for improvement; checking in with commercial tourism operators, reviewing property boundaries, and clean up of old abandoned sites. We also gather data related to historical or cultural sites, looking for signs of disturbance; and we assess impacts of any forest fires.

**FOW:** What is your policy regarding fires in the park and surrounding areas?

**Shannon:** Many of the areas we manage are long linear non operating waterway parks where any firefighting decision would rest with the MNRF AFFES (Aviation Forest Fire Emergency Services). When the boundary is so narrow, unless a local community is threatened, the fire may be allowed to let it burn its natural course, based on fire management direction and policies.

One of the reasons Wabakimi Provincial Park was expanded is to have a park big enough to support woodland caribou habitat, but also big enough to support natural environmental functions. So we have the flexibility to look at where the fire started, how it started, and consider if we let it burn its natural course, working closely with the fire folks.

Our (fire) map of the park has three colored areas. The areas we don't want to burn are marked Red, high value infrastructure like the CN rail line. Areas marked Orange have a more flexible response where it could burn naturally or some other modified response. Areas marked Green are less risk which we may allow to burn naturally, much of that is north of Whitewater Lake.

**FOW:** Is fire common in Wabakimi compared with Woodland Caribou which burns a lot?

**Shannon:** Fire in Wabakimi is drastically different from Woodland Caribou. We have far less fire which doesn't tend to flare up and burn as fast. Part of it is Woodland Caribou is suffering from a forest die off from an invasive beetle. This year Wabakimi didn't have a single fire of significance. Last year there was a fire just north of Wabakimi Lake that burned approx. 15,000 hectares. Boreal fire is very mosaic in how it burns. A lot of Wabakimi fires are renewable fires. In 2011 there were some very hot fires in the Palisade River area in the NW area near Burntrock Lake.

**FOW:** Where are we at in the management plan process?

**Shannon:** Every Ontario park has to have a management plan, most of them do. A management plan provides an operational guide for staff and the public to understand how it operates and what is permitted and not permitted. In relative terms Wabakimi is very new. The original park was created in 1983 and expanded in 1997, whereas Quetico has been around for 110 years. We have to consider our stakeholders (tourism operators, groups like FOW), also the First Nation communities and territories within the surrounding area and species at risk such as the caribou.

We are working to build understanding about what the park is and isn't. We're at a point where we need to get it rolling. Park planning has eight stages. We're on stage two, the broad strokes background/document stage which talks about what's in the park, who's using it, when are they using it, everything we know about Wabakimi. It's not a decision document. It is available for public comment when completed, hopefully by late winter or early spring (2020).

(Stage one is the Terms of Reference document. The Wabakimi document is dated February 2013.)

Stages three to four are the issues and options stages for how to define areas of the park. Each provincial park has a classification, such as wilderness, natural environment, waterway or recreational parks. To compare, Quetico is a wilderness park and Sleeping Giant is a natural environment park. Within each park we also have zones, which could be access, waterway, nature

reserves, cultural heritage, wilderness or development. Each zone has criteria to define what can and can't happen. This is where public comment will be really important.

**FOW:** What are your current Goals and Objectives?

**Shannon:** Increasing visitation is one of our goals, welcoming more people. This has to be well managed to provide a safe, rewarding place to visit and mitigate any impacts. We have marketing plans and we track our demographics to see who is visiting from where. It's challenging to get information to visitors that we're not Quetico 2.0 with the same level of service. (well developed campsites etc.) For us it's celebrating our remoteness and uniqueness.

**FOW:** Do you have park permit statistics?

**Shannon:** We track camper (paddler) nights, one person per night. Our three year average is about 4500 camper nights within Wabakimi Provincial Park. The average trip is five to six nights. In contrast, Quetico has roughly 50 to 60,000 camper nights a year. Camper nights do not include outpost or lodge stays. Those are not tracked at all, that's one of our challenges. Crown land camping permits are not tracked in our camper night count.

Paddlers in non-operating parks like Albany River require crown land camping permits. However, Ontario residents are not required to get permits to paddle non-operating parks. (eg. Albany River) Park staff can assist with clarification of permit requirements.

**FOW:** Tell us about your canoe route maintenance?

**Shannon:** We try to cover half the park every summer. We have a partnership with First Nation communities for two, two-person crews.

The park map canoe routes are based on the Nipigon Canoe Country maps, covering a majority of the pre-expansion Wabakimi Provincial Park, though not so much north of the Whitewater area. The route info is from the 60s. That's when the provincial government had more funding and maintained a lot of canoe routes all over the province. Part of the reason we've stuck with those routes without drastic changes is because the park management plan is not done yet. In order to create a route, even if it was there in the 1940s or earlier Hudson Bay Company era, if it wasn't maintained by the MNR after or through the 1960s, an environmental assessment would need to be done in order to better understand if there are cultural heritage values or other connections to indigenous communities.

**FOW:** How do we get Ontario provincial government to see the economic value of parks and outdoors wilderness activities to generate support for resource protection?

**Shannon:** Ontario Parks has an initiative called Healthy Parks, Healthy People ([ontarioparks.com/hphp](http://ontarioparks.com/hphp)); connecting the importance of spending time outdoors with improving health. We are getting buy-in from health professionals. Some doctors are prescribing outdoors and wilderness activities.

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## Canoeopia Presentation!

Vern Fish will talk about the

### Greenmantle River, a Wabakimi Gem

This will be a one hour presentation at Canoeopia, which is March 13-15. The exact time not yet announced. This wild little river may lack girth and length but it is long on adventure and isolation. Hidden in the far northwest corner of Wabakimi Provincial Park, the Greenmantle River provides access to a huge swath of protected wilderness. The reward is an opportunity to explore a remote boreal forest and possibly catch an elusive brook trout.



## Conservation Committee, Join the Discussion!

A newly formed Conservation Committee met by Skype on December 1<sup>st</sup> attended by Ray Tallent (FOW Conservation Director), Shawn Bell, Randy Trudeau, Chuck Clise and Dave McTeague. To join our next Skype call on January 12<sup>th</sup>, send us an email to [friendsofwabakimi@gmail.com](mailto:friendsofwabakimi@gmail.com). You'll need a (free) Skype account so we can add you into the meeting.



Photo by John Holmes, Caribou Lake, 2015

Much of the discussion was about Ontario Forest Planning and access to the planning maps. One important document is Phil Cotton's treatise on Crown Lands Canoe Routes. This makes for some fascinating reading and appreciation for Phil's deep knowledge of this subject.

[http://wabakimi.org/park/files/E-Ontario\\_Crown\\_Land\\_Canoe\\_Routes.pdf](http://wabakimi.org/park/files/E-Ontario_Crown_Land_Canoe_Routes.pdf)

The good news is that on Crown Lands, the canoe routes are well represented, including a few that are not in the FOW map volumes or the FOW planning map. This could be the result of the Wabakimi Project submissions, but also likely reflects that the old Ontario MNR many years ago maintained and promoted an extensive system of canoe routes.

There are different maps with lots of detail about tourism, cultural, and forestry operations. We do need to know more about how the Ontario MNR (Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry) uses these planning documents. There are significant forest harvest management areas to the east, west and south of the provincial park. These can be found by going to [ontario.ca/forestplans](http://ontario.ca/forestplans).

In Feb. 2018, Phil Cotton was appointed to Armstrong Area advisory committee of the Nipigon Forest area. We're following up to let MNR know FOW is still interested in participating as regards these important Crown lands and their canoe routes.

The Provincial Park Management Plan process was also discussed, as well as the woodland caribou. The committee is discussing further our focus; how focused on canoe routes, or whether to address broader issues affecting wildlife and the landscape? Like everywhere, development pressures are great, and local economies, particularly First Nations, need to grow employment opportunities.

To join our next Skype call on January 12<sup>th</sup>, send an email to [friendsofwabakimi@gmail.com](mailto:friendsofwabakimi@gmail.com). You'll need a (free) Skype account so we can add you into the meeting. The way it works is we have to know you're online and it helps if you are in our Skype contact list.

# Trip Report

## Mountain Lake to Nameiben Lake via scenic Vale Creek

August 5 to 12, 2019

Dave McTeague with daughter  
Brianna McTeague



**Prologue:** Having been on four previous Wabakimi Project trips, I've touched this route so to speak twice before and then heard and read reports, so my curiosity was aroused. In 2016, our group traveled down Trail Lake Road (Clem Quenville's shuttle), then portaged down through Rocky Island Lake to Tunnel Lake (and through the tunnel) to a base camp. The next day, we scouted and flagged the portage to Mountain Lake. The following week Bill & Kris Pyle completed that portage with Bill catching a lake trout in Mountain Lake. In 2017, our group base camped on Rushbay Lake and then worked the ponds to the east culminating in the 641 meter portage to the Vale Creek section north of Altar Lake.

This route is a future Guidebook candidate as a shorter and accessible Crown Land canoe route near Armstrong, Ontario and Mattice Lake. Although we indulged in a Beaver flight to Mountain Lake, this route could be accessed by Trail Lake Road (starting at either Rocky Island or Tunnel Lakes) from the North with two possible road takeouts near Hwy 527 to the South. Fortunately, Ray Tallent kindly shared his Wabakimi Project work reports from 2016. Now that we're in the post Project era, our trip also served to assess the condition of the portages, that have seen little, if any use since.

**Day 1.** After staying one night at the Mattice Outfitters McKenzie Lake cabin, Brianna and I boarded their Beaver for the short flight into Mountain Lake. The pilot Dave, flew us down to our end point on Nameiben Lake, and followed our route back up to Mountain Lake. (video to follow) We could see how scenic this route was, even though we could see the results of past logging near this route. (more logging is occurring in this general area). The Beaver dropped us off and we easily located the one campsite on the SE side of this



lovely lake. A good landing and a fabulous fire ring with an awesome capstone greeted us along with alders growing near the remaining sitting log, certainly appearing the site had no recent use whatsoever.



We explored north to find the portage into Tunnel Lake. We saw one stashed boat astride a beaver house with some blue plastic nearby. No evidence of recent use. After following a beguiling moose trail, we located the actual portage which proved to be choked with alders, so no further exploration was done. On the way back to camp, a downpour soaked us, which Brianna much enjoyed! (A veteran of BWCA & Quetico trips, Brianna has extensive training in biology/genetics & works for a major PNW timber company in their tree improvement program).



Portage landing at Vale Lake

**Day two.** We first paddled to Mountain Lake's SW bay and after following several animal trails (where the map said the portage would be) we found the portage in the far corner of the bay behind some beaver runs. A clear blaze was obscured by branches. We scouted the "Mountain Portage" up and over, down the hill, into the creek bed (with a recent moose droppings), and most of the way down the hill. We were thankful for the blue ribbons left by the folks who rehabilitated this portage. There was No evidence of recent use and much overgrowth. We then fished various bays with no success, but following a line down the middle of this modest size lake with silver spoons, we caught several lake trout for a fabulous dinner. Our camp had a nice swimming area that we both enjoyed! Blueberries aplenty.

**Day three.** Nice weather, we again fished and caught more lake trout! Desiring to improve her wilderness skills, Brianna deftly cleaned them all! We found an ephemeral stream & beaver dam off a south bay and explored up a dry creek bed with many animal tracks. Crashing into the bush, she found some gnawed antler remains, and later we climbed a small hill nearby to find a secluded pond.

**Day four.** We broke camp and down the 485 meter Mountain Portage to the Vale Creek landing, where a Project group had camped and worked on the portages going North to Alter and Rushbay ponds. There were some steep sections where I took the canoe off and slid it down, as well as some difficult (for me anyway) step downs. A challenging portage, but not the worst. We canoed south and began our passage through several scenic ponds with impressive rock walls.

Finding the 212 meter portage river left was difficult, after fruitlessly exploring around the peninsula, we finally followed the left (or east) channel, pulled over a small beaver obstruction (which did have a cut log), then through a rock garden, and there at the very end of the bay was the post with the survey marker. The next 482 meter portage to Vale Lake was on river left (called the Rock Portage on the outdated park map) was much more challenging; with blow down and overgrowth. Ray Tallent reported their 2016 work on this, "...we had to wing it a bit to get to Vale, using old log cuts for clues, but also compass and GPS..." Luckily for us the crew left a series of blue ribbons marking the way, as I'm sure, we were the first to travel through since 2016. The Vale Lake end is marked with a blaze and ribbons (we added to those) amidst a lot of blown down jack pines.

We canoed across Vale Lake to the one known campsite. I thought I saw something black moving on that site from a long distance...but maybe it was my imagination. A nice campsite with a gravelly

beach and a stunning view awaited. An old Lund boat is cached there..no sign of recent use, and the fish cleaning table mentioned in Ray's report suffered from a collapsed jack pine.

**Day five.** As happened with the portage crew, we were winded in for one of those scenic relaxing days. Evening came and a short paddle produced a nice northern and good sized lake trout, both caught by Brianna. Vale Lake is fairly good sized and invites further exploration, which alas we didn't do. It was apparently, a destination for at least one group of determined paddlers coming up Vale Creek.



**Day six.** The 164 meter portage out of Vale Lake starts on river right and goes around some large blown down cedar roots at the start. We found a fishing rod and a few new log cuts indicating some recent use. A second short 43 meter portage on river left skirts the creek where we had lunch, is not indicated on the FOW map. Then there's a longer stretch of pools with some nice rock outcrops. Two good potential campsites were mapped in 2016. These sections include some wide and boulder areas...some really nice sections that call out to you. My planned YouTube video will include footage of these stretches. A river right 68 meter portage is followed by the last pool and the pleasant 178 meter portage into **Nameiben Lake** (and the Wabinosh River) starts in a grassy area on river left. We found the purported peninsula campsite indicated by a large rock cairn on the bluff; but no indication of any campsite use or fire ring. I chopped back vegetation while Brianna cut a trail from a mossy tent area down to the bluff and the sitting rock ledge that we used for stove cooking under our tarp.

**Day seven.** A beautiful sunny and windy day. First we paddled down through a rocky narrows and swift to find "Desperation Camp" (as Ray's group called it) on the south part of Nameiben Lake. We met up with two older fishermen in a Lund type motor boat on a fishing excursion. We learned they had driven up the 1.5 km logging road to the camp in their ATVs pulling the boat. We found the camp and checked this out as our extraction point for the following day. We paddled back to explore the scenic south arm of Nameiben Lake, catching one walleye. We found an old fire ring and possible camp on a rocky point mid way down the arm (west side) and stopped for lunch. We met a canoe couple from Thunder Bay who proceeded to land a nice lake trout in front of us. Their luck was much better, as they also had three walleyes and a pike as they went by on their way out. The couple also shared their conversation with the motor boat guys, who allowed, "It's sure getting crowded on this lake!" after meeting up with just two canoes.

**Day eight.** We made our way to Desperation Camp and called Mattice Lake Outfitters on the SAT phone. We portaged our gear up the 20 meters of rocky spur road to the logging road. An hour later Don Elliott (and his huge dog Otis) arrived in his Old pickup after terming this, "a shitty road." The road was passable; but the overhanging alder made it a slow noisy ride out to Hwy 527. Had I known how "shitty" this road was, I would've taken the two more portages (53 & 216 meters with some swifts) down to more accessible Wabinosh River landing on the east side of Hwy 527.

**Epilogue.** This was one of my best trips ever; with my favorite paddling partner. Great fishing, inviting scenery, and two (out of three) nice camps. It's an adventure exploring a scenic route that gets almost no use. Also this was my first Wabakimi trip without the benefit of others showing the

way. Mountain and Vale Lakes are nice destinations all their own. Nameiben Lake is accessible as a great day trip, if you don't mind a few scratches on your car. The Mountain to Vale Lake portages were passable but in need of some TLC, especially the one into Vale Lake. They are modestly better after we went through. Is this route adequately recognized and protected by the Ontario MNR? That's my question as a FOW Board member. I can recommend this route as a good introduction to the Wabakimi area.

**FOW Canoe Route Maps, Volume 5; Map 3, "Tunnel Lake to Waweig Lake via Vale Creek" provides detail for this route. Map 4 also shows the Rocky Island Lake section. Map 5 shows the Rushbay Lake to Mountain Portage route. Order form: [http://wabakimi.org/maps/files/wabakimi\\_order\\_form\\_v8.pdf](http://wabakimi.org/maps/files/wabakimi_order_form_v8.pdf)**

**Acknowledgements:** *Inspired and directed by the late "Uncle" Phil Cotton, Wabakimi Project crews cleared these portages and surrounding Crown Land canoe routes in 2016. Participants included Barry Simon, Ray Tallent, John Sinclair, Cary Kellar, Amy Funk, Larry Power, Craig Charles, Debbie Doyle, Ken Babinchak, Bill and Kris Pyle. Also, John Holmes, Randy Trudeau and yours truly worked on the Rushbay Lake to Vale Creek portages.*

## Boreal Carpet: The Feather Mosses

Ray Tallent, Conservation Director

The canoe country of the Wabakimi area contains numerous stands of relatively mature jack pine / spruce forest. The trees may not be very large in diameter (Danny Otto counted 53 rings on the cut trunk of a downed spruce that was probably only 5 inches across), but they can be tall. The ground in these stands is usually carpeted by several species of mosses, interspersed with fruticose (bushy) lichens that become more prominent in sunnier spots. These mosses and lichens effectively form the soil cover in much of the forest, intercepting the rainfall and runoff and allowing that water to infiltrate the soil. Especially in older stands, the mosses may provide conditions for nitrogen-fixing bacteria and reduce seedling success of some conifers (jack pine). It is well known that the jack pine / spruce forest is cyclical with fire, which thins the canopy and clears the forest floor at the same time it stimulates cone opening and seed release on the jack pines. The feather mosses return under the shade of canopy.



The carpet of mosses in the pine / spruce forest is comprised of a number of species of tufted and feather mosses. Both kinds have tiny stems and leaves. The tufted mosses have erect stems clothed in tiny leaves, and the stems have only sparse branching. The feather mosses have arching or horizontal stems with frequent branching that gives them a more feathery appearance. The actual leaves are tiny and often cloth the stems. Diana Horton, an Iowa bryologist originally from Alberta, told me that there are four species of feather mosses especially well-represented across the boreal forest: red-stemmed moss (*Pleurozium schreberi*), stair step moss (*Hylocomium splendens*), ostrich plume moss (*Ptilium crista-castrensis*), and shaggy moss (*Rhytidiadelphus triquetris*). With a bit of practice, these are not difficult to recognize and distinguish. Here are a few things to look for....

Perhaps the most common feather moss in the boreal carpet of the Wabakimi area is red-stemmed moss (Figure 1). Look closely at the main stems and you will see the reddish coloration. The side-branches are often well-spaced and not consistently opposite each other. You will often find this moss to predominate over large areas under the forest canopy. Some of the following species may also have reddish stems but can be distinguished by their other unique aspects.



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Stair step moss (also called mountain feather moss) is distinctive in the way that it grows (best seen if you pull up a sprig for closer examination; Figure 2). The branches are all flattened in one plane and, each year, a new stem arises near the tip of the old one and arches up for the new growth, giving the appearance of stair steps.

Perhaps the most feather-like of all is the ostrich plume moss (Figure 3). This one has tightly spaced side branches that curl under at the tips. The individual pale-green leaves are also curled under. In good growing conditions, the “plumes” are fairly upright.

Shaggy moss lives up to its name, as the relatively large leaves point in various directions, giving a kind of unkempt aspect (Figure 4, from [www.lnhq.org.uk/species-of-feb-2019.htm](http://www.lnhq.org.uk/species-of-feb-2019.htm)).

The above four species are fairly common, but there are many other species of mosses in the forest (also related plants known as liverworts). Moisture, light, and substrate (organic soil or rock or tree bark) are important clues, as the different species have their preferences with respect to these factors. A hand lens is always useful for a close look at the lichens and mosses, and a great pocket reference to the mosses is Janice Glime’s *The Elfin World of Mosses and Liverworts of Michigan’s Upper Peninsula and Isle Royale* (1993, Isle Royale Natural History Association).

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## Trip Report

# Greenmantle River

Ray Tallent

In the second half of June, 2019, I was able to join a 10-day trip from Greenmantle Lake down the Greenmantle and Shabuskwia Rivers to the Albany and on to Miminiska Lake, with Vern Fish (trip organizer), Hank Ostwald, and Danny Otto. Most of the route is within northern Wabakimi Provincial Park, though the end section is in Albany River Provincial Park. This is not presently a Park-recognized canoe route, though park management did tell us that it traverses an area of important traditional (First Nations) use. Phil Cotton had been convinced that this was a traditional canoe route



that also connected to the Misehkow River on the west, and we found evidence of this in old blazes, trail tread, old campsites, etc., though overgrown in many places, especially on the early upstream sections. This provided for some fun scouting and “brush crashing.” We had Royalex canoes and used spray skirts for running rapids on the lower Greenmantle and Shabuskwia rivers. It was a delight to experience the change of the flow and various riparian habitats from a humble brook coming out of Greenmantle Lake to a bona fide run by the time you are below the confluence with the Shabuskwia.



On a cool Tuesday morning our Otter flight out of Mattice Lake Outfitters took us to Greenmantle Lake. This remote lake is fairly shallow and weedy in spots, a pike lake. We tied up our canoes at an old piece of dock, remnants of what appeared to be a moose camp at one time. Back up from shore: cached canoes – one with lichens growing on the hull – and a falling-down camp. This camp looked to not have been used for a good while. We explored the lake – seeing eagle, osprey, and trumpeter swans – before setting up camp on the northeast end not far from the outflow of the Greenmantle River.

Over the next two days we worked our way down to Suzanne Lake. This first involved scouting and using several old trails (river left) where the river flows out of Greenmantle through cedar swamp and blowdowns. Farther down, we could walk the canoe through small drops, cutting the occasional snag out of the way. After maybe a mile of valley below Greenmantle Lake the river runs mainly through boggy wetlands, really more of a winding, intimate creek with dragonflies in formation feeding up and down the flow. We saw moose and, around one turn, surprised a bear down by the water. The first night on the river, we camped up a rise on river right among spruce. The silence

here was the kind where you can hear a light ringing in your ears, occasionally broken by the breeze in the trees and the song of a thrush, then later in the night by loons on a small nearby lake. The second day down to Suzanne Lake involved more rapids walking and portaging/ lifting over or running over logjams (this last not advised for Kevlar). The river level looked neither high nor low; at any rate, it was very paddleable, ranging from maybe 12 to 30 feet wide and a few feet deep to deeper pools as one gets close to Suzanne. We saw more moose in the pretty alder runs, and Danny said it was his favorite kind of paddling, with current and lots of twisty turns. Once on Suzanne Lake we did not thoroughly explore the northwest arm but paddled up the northeast to find another moose camp near the outlet of the Greenmantle. This camp looked to have more recent use, with wood framing for tarping and supplies cached in the bush. We pitched our tents around this spot.

The next day was a layover day, to take advantage of some fishing at the Greenmantle outflow (rapids) from Suzanne (clear portage path on river left). We caught walleye, pike, and brook trout (speckles) around the rapids; kept three walleye and a couple trout for a fish fry/ bake. There was a large dragonfly hatch along the shore, and both walleye and trout were full of the nymphs. Again, the wonderful quiet in the evening – the sky still bright in the west at 10 pm – broken only by the song of a single white-throated sparrow.

Another two days saw us down to the confluence of the Greenmantle and Shabuskwia rivers at a fairly leisurely pace. The Greenmantle below Suzanne is at first a bit bigger – but still intimate – with spruce/ jack pine forest closer to or on the banks. There were a number of rapids along this stretch that we walked, lined or – mostly – ran. At different times we were pushing mergansers or a swan downriver; we took pains to give them an avenue back up, especially as the trumpeters appear to be molting. Where the Greenmantle comes close to the western boundary of the park, it is also close to the Misehkw River. Along here, Danny spotted a very large, old jack pine with an ancient blaze. Here was discernible tread: the eastern end of a traditional portage between the two river systems. We followed this to the first pond on the connecting route but did not explore that further (Vern and Hank had found the western end blazes on the Misehkw in 2016, but they had not found good trail further inland). At the end of the first day on this stretch we camped on a mossy bank of spruce and jack pine between two short rapids. This was the first time we set up Vern's yellow tundra tarp for some respite from black flies and mosquitoes. The next day we put on the spray skirts, as the water was getting a bit bigger. We came down another 8 or 10 miles of river with flow and some rapids, most of which we ran. There were some challenges, but not pushy enough for "pucker factor," as the river runs through spruce woods and alder alleys.

At the confluence of the Greenmantle and Shabuskwia rivers there is a traditional camp on river right, the largest clear area we encountered on the river. Here we set up and took another layover day the next day, relaxing in the tents or tundra tarp, as it rained pretty much all day. We had some dry wood under a tarp and made a fire and did some baking. As well, Hank read to us from *Alone Against the North*, about a solo explorer up at Hudson Bay.

From the confluence on down to Patte Lake on the Albany River (maybe 7 miles) we kept the spray skirts on the canoes. This not only kept water out on the rapids but also helped keep some warmth, as it was a chilly, overcast day. We ran all the fast water in this stretch, which is a bit more volume and pushier; the Wabakimi Project in the past mapped and cleared the old portages for travelers headed upstream. The last stretch out to Patte Lake was through lowlands with lots of waterfowl. Off to the northwest is a moraine that marks the northern elbow of the Albany in this area.

After taking lunch at the sandy site on Patte (a picnic table gradually disappearing into the sand), we paddled out to the Albany proper and on down to Upper Eskakwa Falls. At the end of the portage (river right) there are some nice tent spots above the tailwaters. Here we camped, admiring the Albany in its splendor, with clouds scudding above and the sun trying to peek through. Two more leisurely days of paddling, with portages around Eskakwa Falls and Snake Falls, had us down to Miminiska Lake for our flight out and back to Mattice Lake. Good paddling, great company, beautiful boreal landscapes, a variety of weather... all the gifts of Wabakimi country.



Eskakwa Falls, Albany River

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## Meet the Board!

Vern Fish, President  
Doug Blount, Vice-President  
John Holmes, Sec. Treas.  
Dave McTeague, Board Chair  
Ken Babinchak, Communications  
Chuck Clise, Membership  
Ray Tallent, Conservation  
Barry Sinclair, our map maker  
Mary Jean Blaisdell (new!)

Amy Funk (returning!)  
Randy Trudeau (new!)

Not on the Board, but we couldn't live without her:  
Debbie Doyle Sargent, Fiscal Agent

Prospective Board members:  
Shawn Bell  
Tetcy Deboer

Meet the Board continued next page...

**Vern Fish, FOW President**

Vern Fish is the former Executive Director of the Black Hawk County Conservation Board in Waterloo, Iowa. He currently serves on the board of directors of the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation Board and the Conservation Corps of Iowa/Minnesota. He is the president of the Black Hawk Creek Water & Soil Coalition and the Friends of Wabakimi Provincial Park. As an advocate for clean water, he also serves as the chair of the Cedar River Watershed Coalition and as an assistant commissioner for the Black Hawk County Soil and Water Conservation District. A passionate paddler he has run wild rivers from the Mexican border to Hudson Bay and north to the Arctic Circle.



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**Barry Simon**, B.S. (Engineering), first joined The Wabakimi Project in 2005. Since then, he has participated in six other reconnaissance expeditions--three as trip leader--and has been responsible for design and production of the [Wabakimi Canoe Route Maps](#) booklets. Barry has canoed in Algonquin, Quetico and Woodland Caribou in Ontario as well as the Sylvania Wilderness in the Michigan UP. In 2009, he paddled 264km on the Seal River to Hudson Bay and crossed Quetico on the occasion of the park's 100th anniversary. In 2015, he paddled 644km of the Noatak River during his expedition as a crew member in Alaska.



**John Holmes** is a Mechanical Engineer from Waterloo, Ontario who has done many canoe trips in Northern and Northwestern Ontario parks, including 28 weeks on The Wabakimi Project trips. An avid hiker, he and his wife have trekked in South America, Europe, Africa, Iceland, Greenland, the Canadian Rockies and New Zealand. John designs and builds bicycle frames in his spare time and is a keen road and MTB cyclist. Proper trip planning and safety, along with a good balance between trail work and fishing, photography, or relaxation time are a part of John's trips.



**Douglass Blount** - A 1957 Quetico trip with his father introduced Doug to wilderness canoeing. He got back into serious wilderness canoeing in the 1999 with another Quetico trip with his son. Wilderness tripping became a passion which now includes 16 weeks with "Uncle" Phil and The Wabakimi Project. As a trip leader in 2008, his group made a west-to-east crossing of Wabakimi Park from Davies Lake to the Ogoki Reservoir. In 1969, upon completion of a 4-year stint in the US Navy serving on a destroyer and a net layer, he began a real estate career in which he is still active, operating a small brokerage firm. He is an avid skier, hot air balloon pilot and sailor.

**Ken Babinchak**

Ken Babinchak is a happily retired school teacher. He has been canoeing for 29 summers. Ken participated in fifteen Wabakimi Project trips, six as a trip leader. He has extensive knowledge of The Wabakimi Area having covered over 475 kms of routes from the western reaches of Savant Lake, across the Albany River to the eastern edge at Abazotikichuan Lake and south to the Vale Lake area, as well as trips in the park interior. He currently co-ordinates and produces the FOW





newsletters, manages the FOW Facebook page and will be co-managing the FOW webpage as the Communications Director. He lives in Toronto with his wife Elaine and canoe buddy Labrador retriever, Sherman.

### **Mary Jean Blaisdell**

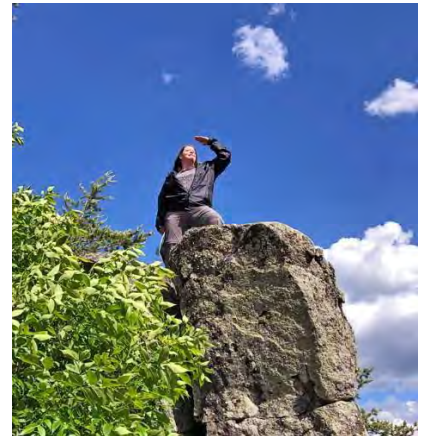
Mary Jean Blaisdell lives in Independence, Iowa. She is a retired elementary principal who loves wilderness paddling and camping. As a principal, she did annual presentations to young students about her trips in order to encourage them to seek outdoor activities and the wilderness. She currently serves on her local Buchanan County Conservation Board.

She has sea kayaked with a group to the Apostle Islands, gone on some local river paddling outings with others, has been on over 15 trips to the BW/Quetico areas, participated on 3 Wabakimi Project trips and has done 3 solo trips to the Boundary Waters.



### **Amy Funk**

Amy Funk teaches Mental Health Nursing and Community Health Nursing at Illinois Wesleyan University. She loves to canoe, solo hike, geocache, camp, and travel internationally. A wanderer at heart, she prefers living out of a pack or a suitcase. She self-studies on the topic of survival skills. Some of her favorite places to explore are rural Illinois, the Pacific Northwest, Wabakimi, Banff, Kauai, and the Sonoran Desert. She is on several committees devoted to conservation, preservation of land, social justice and health care for the homeless.



### **Randy Trudeau**

I live in London Ontario. I am a retired high school science teacher. My interest in the outdoors began during my 'Scouting Days' as a youth. This interest was rekindled when I became a parent. I'm proud to say that annual family canoe trips encouraged my children to appreciate our pristine landscapes. Mike, who lives in Calgary, spends his weekends hiking and fly fishing in the alpine valleys of the Rockies. Niki has been involved with a variety of polar experiences, and is currently guiding adventure cruises in Antarctica. Now, I share their outdoor activities!

I completed a trip along the West Coast Trail with Niki and recently hiked the Chilkoot Trail with Mike.

My other interest - cycling - has more recently taken



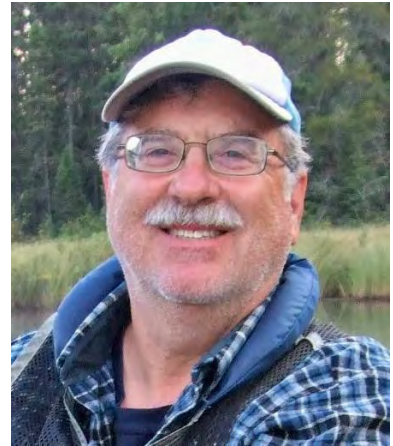
precedence. In my retirement, I have cycled Southern Ontario, Quebec, the Maritimes, B.C., and Oregon. My most memorable tours were a Cross Canada Ride in 2010 and a ride from Whitehorse, Yukon to Tuktoyaktuk, NWT in 2018. It was amazing pitching my tent beside the Arctic Ocean.

I have spent three consecutive summers working with the Wabakimi Project crews.

I am excited to join 'The Friends of Wabakimi' team. Wabakimi Provincial Park is not well known in Southwestern Ontario. Serving on the FOW board will give me the opportunity to make Ontarians more aware of this Natural Heritage gem.

### **Dave McTeague**

Dave McTeague is a former Oregon State Representative and retired small state agency administrator (chiropractic licensing board). Born in Minneapolis, he canoed the Boundary Waters in his youth; and has made numerous canoe trips to the BWCA, Quetico, Woodland Caribou, British Columbia and then four trips with the Wabakimi Project. Dave has worked on fishery and habitat restoration issues as a legislator and **conservation activist. He's keenly interested in the preservation of the wildlife and beauty of the northern boreal forests. His favorite book is Jack London's "Call of the Wild."** Dave lives in Milwaukie, Oregon with his wife Naomi. He's chronicled his canoe adventures in his Oregon Dave YouTube channel.



### **Ray Tallent**

Ray Tallent manages a university greenhouse and teaches botany courses in Iowa City, Iowa. He has canoe-tripped in the Boundary Waters and Quetico since he was a teenager. Since meeting "Uncle Phil" Cotton in 2011 he has served on twelve weeks of Wabakimi Project trips. In 2018, he was able to join Vern Fish on a farther north trip to Nueltin Lake and the Thlewiaza River. All these experiences have served to foster a love for Canada's boreal country and, of course, always the desire to paddle new waters.



### **Chuck Clise, Membership**



Chuck Clise lives in Alma, Michigan.

His outdoor interests are backpacking and canoeing. Chuck's favorite Michigan river is the Au Sable and his favorite trail is the Benton MacKaye in Tennessee. His interest in Wabakimi is the preservation of wilderness canoe routes.

**Continued on next page:**

**Shawn Bell and Tetcy Deboer are two prospective board members that will be voted on at the Jan. 19<sup>th</sup> FOW board meeting.**

**Shawn Bell**

Shawn is a lawyer who lives in Thunder Bay, Ontario. Most of his time in a canoe is spent fishing the lakes between Thunder Bay and Armstrong. He has taken the train into Wabakimi a couple of times and cannot think of any sound more beautiful than the train rumbling away down the tracks. This past fall he woke up to the first snow of the year while midway through an October canoe trip in Quetico. He now thinks September might be a better time for a trip.

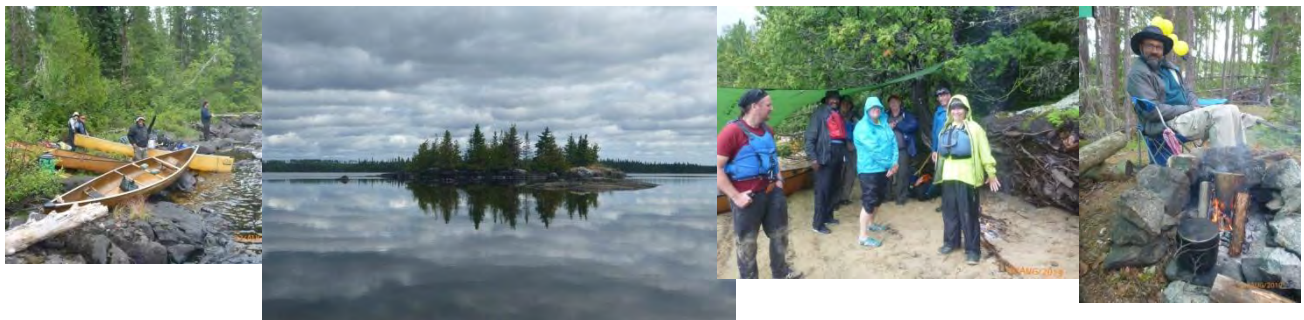


**Tetcy Deboer**

Tetcy De Boer grew up in PEI and currently lives in Strathroy, Ontario (Canada). She works at her local community credit union and loves getting out on the water as often as she can. One of her first canoe trips was with the Wabakimi Project in the area of Granite Lake and she was hooked. She has spent the last 10 years tripping in various Provincial Parks including Algonquin, the Kawartha Highlands, The French River, and her favorite, Killarney. She enjoys exploring local breweries, conservation areas and watersheds and has paddled long lengths of the Thames, Sydenham, Grand, Ausable and Saugeen Rivers with her husband Ray. She loves the paddling community and culture, and attending Canoecopia! Find me on Instagram: tetcyd

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**Great Expectations vs. the Attwood River, August 2019**

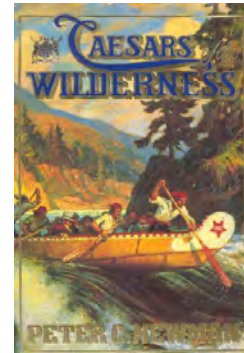
A planned trip of 100 miles in 10 days comes up against the reality of aging joints, rugged portages, high water, rain, and wind. We managed to do 45 miles in 9 days (we left a day early due to incoming weather) and we had a great time. Good team management and informed decisions helped us overcome our dreamy expectations. Six Wabakimi veterans and two first timers. [More pictures and story on our Facebook page.](#) Thanks to Chuck Clise for putting this together!



## Book Review

By Dave McTeague

### Company of Adventurers, Vol. 1 Caesars of the Wilderness, Vol. 2 Peter C. Newman



In our long canoe country discussions, Uncle Phil recommended two books by Canadian historian Peter C Newman, as essential reading especially for those south of the boarder. Phil said these would illustrate how exploration and the fur trade introduced us to the historic Canadian canoe routes. While a history of the Hudson Bay Company, these illustrate how this enterprise and their competitors shaped Canada as opposed to their neighbor to the south. Canoes and waterways are an essential part of this story.

**Vol. 1, Company of Adventurers**, chronicles the earliest European explorers (Messrs Radisson & Groseilliers), the search for the NW Passage, the French vs. English battles for Hudson Bay, the beginnings of the fur trade, explorations of Samuel Hearne- first to reach the Arctic Ocean overland; and the intense 1779 to 1821 competition between the Hudson Bay Company (HBC) and the Montreal Based Northwest Company. The fur traders were all about collecting and transporting the beaver and other furs back to Europe where the resulting goods were all the rage. It was the indigenous peoples who did the actual trapping and curing in exchange for such things as sewing needles, bronze cookpots, weapons and quantities of alcohol.

**Vol. 2, Caesars of the Wilderness**, continues the saga highlighting dominant personalities like Hudson's Bay man Alexander Mackenzie, the Scottish explorer-trader who followed an unknown river, later named after him, to the Arctic Ocean. The fur trade also provided an impetus for exploration of the Canadian North and established a transportation network that abetted later settlement. Newman views the hierarchical Company, as much as the British Empire, as a primary definer of Canadian territory and--with its emphasis on stamina, survival, and deference to authority--a shaping influence on national character.

These books deepen an appreciation for the dynamics that produced the Canada we know today, the impacts of European enterprise and competition on indigenous peoples, and the vastness of this landscape. Used copies are easily obtained online for a very reasonable price.

“I’ve now read both books. It gave me, a non-Canadian, a much deeper understanding of Canadian history. It also helped me better understand the significance of the canoe routes that criss-cross the Canadian wilderness. These routes helped hold the far flung provinces of Canada together. It also helped me better understand the need to find and preserve these old routes that cross through the Wabakimi Area. Reading and understanding this history gave me a better appreciation for the work that FOW is doing in the Wabakimi Area.” **Vern Fish**