



**To:** Leona Tarini, District Manager (acting)  
Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry  
435 James Street South Thunder Bay, Ontario,  
P7E 6S7  
Attention: Vishnu Kowlessar RPF

**Fr:** Friends of Wabakimi

**Re:** Response to Wabadowgang Noopming 2021-2023 Contingency Plan  
& 2023-2033 Forest Management Plan  
Stage 2 Review of Proposed Long-Term Management Direction Summary

**Date:** July 21, 2020

### **Background**

The Friends of Wabakimi (FOW) was created by Thunder Bay conservationist Phil Cotton in 2014. Our vision is that the Wabakimi Area *shall continue as an exceptional world class destination for wilderness activities to benefit present and future generations of visitors.* To this end, the FOW explored and mapped historic canoe routes throughout Crown Land in and around the Armstrong Forest from 2014 to 2018. The result was our canoe route Map Volume 5, Lake Nipigon Northern Tributaries (Wabinosh River to Little Jackfish River). Map Volume 5 can be found at <https://www.wabakimi.org/wabakimi-maps.html#vol5>.

This effort indicates that there is strong interest in the paddling community to explore, fish and enjoy these canoe routes. The Armstrong, or Wabadowgang Noopming Forest is adjacent to Wabakimi Provincial Park and nearby to other provincial parks and conservation reserves. Most all of these canoe routes are indicated on the Resource Based Tourism Value Maps found for the Lake Nipigon Forest (815) at: <https://www.efmp.lrc.gov.on.ca/eFMP/home.do?currentFmu=&language=en>

The Friends of Wabakimi mission *is to participate in planning processes and to advocate for the protection and preservation of the diverse natural, cultural and historical resources of the Wabakimi Area.* The FOW currently has two representatives serving on the Armstrong Local Conservation Committee, Shawn Bell of Thunder Bay, Ontario and Vern Fish of Waterloo, Iowa. These two representatives serve as our liaisons with the Armstrong LCC. The following response to the Long Term Management Plan for the Armstrong Forest is a sincere effort to maintain that line of communication, and we hope our Comments and Recommendations add some positive ideas and bring in another perspective to the process.

### **Comments**

The Friends of Wabakimi do not have the benefit of comparison with other MNRF managed forests. What we do know is that woodland caribou habitat has declined overall in Ontario and other provinces over the preceding

decades. Road building, harvest and other intrusive activities have contributed to this decline. On top of this we are only beginning to appreciate the long term impacts of climate change, though the commitment of the FMPM to an adaptive management cycle -- including with respect to climate change -- is wise.

The planning team has gone to great lengths to model and predict the impact of future forest management activities on caribou and forest stand composition. The FOW believes that proposed LTMD has done the best it can to balance the habitat needs of these species with other economic and social needs.

However, the LTMD Summary provides only a brief mention on page 20 of the impacts on recreation and tourism, *“Impacts.... recreation and tourism, are **not** [our emphasis] dependent on the harvest level but rather how the integration and/or accommodation of the specific activity/value has been addressed. Some values benefit from increased access to previously un-accessed areas whereas others (e.g., Resource-Based Tourism) that rely on remoteness can be negatively impacted.”*

Section 5.2 on page 19 includes a short discussion on the social & economic impacts. This narrative does not include discussion of the economic impacts of wilderness canoeing tourism on the local community. The singular focus on harvest doesn't recognize the current or future possibilities of increased recreational canoeing and related outdoors activities which complement the existing fishing/hunting lodges and outposts. The proximity to Wabakimi Provincial Park and the other parks/conservation reserves is a factor worth considering.

The proposed Dalton Road extension and improvements to Trail Lake Roads have the potential to provide road access for canoeists to known canoe routes across Crown Land. In addition these routes within the Armstrong forest can provide access to the Wabakimi Park canoe routes. However, this access is limited by existing road management rules which do not allow recreational access to these primary roads.

### **Recommendations**

The Friends of Wabakimi appreciates the work of the Armstrong Forest planning committee and the recommendations of the Armstrong LCC. The Dalton Road extension seems to be the favored option for accessing block AB-3. If this is the case, closing the McKinley Road north of the Whitesand River would be indicated.

The FOW does recommend that additional thought be given to allowing recreational access to primary roads within the Armstrong Forest. If recreational paddlers could use the Big Lake/Dalton road to access the south end of Big Lake this would create paddling access to a web of lakes north of the Whitesand Provincial Park. Access to the Trail Lake primary road would provide access to Wabakimi Provincial Park and web of beautiful little lakes south of the railroad.

Being mindful of minimal impact and caribou habitat, we are not suggesting the construction of formal parking lots. The idea would be to identify access points and plan enough room for a vehicle to pull over and unload. Providing more vehicle access could have a positive economic impact on the Armstrong business community.

We would like to emphasize that the proposed Dalton Road extension crosses four mapped historic canoe routes (as indicated in Map Volume 5, noted above, and the Values map). Proceeding north along Caribou and then west over Kellar Bay, these would be: Caribou Lake to Michell Lake, Kellar Bay to Cumaway Lake, Kellar Bay to Linklater Lake, and Kellar Bay to Hollingsworth Lake. We expect that best practices would be followed to avoid obliterating these canoe routes/ portages.

The Friends of Wabakimi is also willing to support and cooperate with the MNRF in any manner deemed acceptable in maintaining these Crown Land canoe routes and associated portages.

## Contact Information

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