CANADIAN RIVER RECREATION PLANNING

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Canada is rallying forces to protect and develop its water resources for recreation primarily through two major programs. One is directed toward the establishment of wild river areas within its national park system. The other is a massive planning and development program to convert century-old canals of Ontario into recreation waterways. In a country looked upon as a major world source of potential energy, these two efforts face many obstacles. Yet, they are worthy examples of trying to bring the forces of tourism, recreation and conservation more closely together.

WILD RIVERS

Rapid increase in visits has been the rule in Canadian national parks in recent years. In the decade from 1962 to 1972, visits grew from five million to fifteen million. And, of great importance to planning, the visits to historic sites grew much more rapidly—doubled in four years (Byways: n.d., 43).

Government and public reaction has been very positive by supporting park expansion programs. In four years, 11 new National Parks and 20 National Historic Parks and Sites have been established, making the Canadian national park system one of the largest in the world.

However, planners recognized the imbalance of geographic distribution and lack of protection of certain resources. They concluded that expansion in four directions was needed: canal systems, national marine parks, national landmarks, and wild rivers. To accomplish this goal the Byways and Special Places program within Parks Canada was established. In order to facilitate greater cooperation with the provinces, the program has been renamed, the Agreement for Recreation and Conservation.

Federal-Provincial Conflict

Conservationists cite several obstacles in the wild river program. Contrary to the states of the U.S., the provinces of Canada are very jealous of their public land ownership rights. At the moment, the provincial desire to develop its water resources for economic gain conflicts with the federal park agency's desire to protect the water resources. According to Canada's equivalent of a constitution, the British North America Act of 1867, the provinces have the right and responsibility to develop their energy resources as they see fit. The federal government cannot dictate to the provinces except by means of certain financial incentives. Another obstacle, much more subtle but cited often by Canadian conservationists, is the popular belief that Canada's resources are boundless. Political and economic decision-makers
frequently see no need for constraint in a country so large and abundant in resource assets.

James Bay Proposal

A typical water resource case is that of Quebec and the huge and controversial energy proposal at James Bay. (Glooschenko: 1972). The proposal certainly has its energy proponents but the opponents, including recreation and conservation interests, are speaking up:

When the last switches are thrown sometime in 1986, and the massive James Bay hydroelectric power project is finally producing its full capacity of 10.3 million kilowatts the province of Quebec will have come of age in the 20th century. That is the essential fact to be kept in mind when it comes time to assess the total cost of the controversial undertaking. For the real cost will be far beyond the $12 billion anticipated according to today's inflationary trends. Thousands of square miles of the most fragile terrain in Canada will have been flooded to depths of hundreds of feet. The lifestyle of some 6,000 Cree Indians will have been drastically altered and possibly destroyed. Wildlife habitats, including vital staging grounds for flocks of wild geese and ducks, will be threatened. (Aitken: 1975).

Since the Wild Rivers Survey was completed in 1973, six proposals for hydroelectric developments within these river areas have been made and two are now under construction. The question remains, will the demands for energy outweigh the value of Canadian wild rivers for resource protection and recreation purposes? It would seem that the lessons of Yosemite and the threat of the Hetch Hetchy dam over sixty years ago must be learned all over again. It was then that John Muir said:

That anyone would try to destroy such a place seems incredible; but said experience shows that there are people good enough and bad enough for anything. The proponents of the dam scheme bring forward a lot of bad arguments to prove that the only righteous thing to do with the people's parks is to destroy them bit by bit as they are able. (Muir: 1912, 201).

Provincial Effort

Encouraging is the recent action by the Division of Parks, Ministry of Natural Resources, Province of Ontario (Administrative Policies: 1975). Released this summer is a set of preliminary administrative policies directed toward provincial waterways as well as wilderness areas, nature reserves, recreation parks, and natural environment parks in Ontario. The waterways policy statement includes three classes: recreational rivers, wild rivers, and historic rivers. Because of the great size and political power of Ontario,
its policies are bound to have strong influence on resource development of rivers throughout Canada.

Recreational rivers are "to provide river-related day use opportunities; to provide river-related opportunities for a variety of extensive recreational activities; and to contribute to the economy of Ontario and its related industries." (Administrative Policies: 1975, 6).

Wild rivers are intended "to provide opportunities for wilderness experiences; and to conserve representative elements of our natural landscapes for scientific and research purposes." (Administrative Policies: 1975, 3).

The category of historic rivers is designed "to protect and maintain significant historical rivers; to provide opportunities for research and education related to historical resources; and to provide outdoor recreation opportunities compatible with the use and enjoyment of our historical heritage." (Administrative Policies: 1975, 4).

The terms of reference call for completion of major waterway planning and management guidelines for the province of Ontario by the end of March, 1976. Included are: philosophical basis, objectives, systems design framework, user needs, demands, criteria for selection of areas, refinement and elaboration of management policies and a preliminary list of candidate waterways to begin the program. (Provincial Waterways: 1975).

Definition Conflict

A major issue before the Federal-Provincial Parks Conference is that of wild river definitions. The provincial emphasis above is clearly that of recreational use. However, this is in obvious conflict with a wilderness environmental emphasis for resource protection as desired by Parks Canada.

If a system of free-flowing rivers through a linear wilderness park is accepted, severe restrictions on power craft and controls on all areas affected by the river would be required. As soon as any road crosses the river, the principle would be violated. This may be the issue that will not allow a national system of wild rivers. Recreational wild rivers, developed by the provinces, may be the only solution.

THE RIDEAU-TRENT-SEVERN-QUINTE WATERWAY

The second part of the current Canadian water drama is that of recreational redevelopment of the old canals that played such an important part in the commercial development and settlement of Canada. Currently under joint study and action programs by the provincial government of Ontario and the Parks Canada Branch of the federal government are a total of 425 miles of old waterways.

The first is the Trent-Severn-Waterway, an old shipping canal, stretching 240 miles from Trenton on Lake Ontario to Port Severn on Georgian Bay. The second is the Rideau Canal, running 125 miles from Kingston on Lake Ontario to the capital of Canada, Ottawa. The third is called the Bay of Quinte segment and runs through bays and Lake Ontario waters, connecting Kingston with Trenton, a distance of about 60 miles. This ties the Trent-Severn segment to the Rideau.

These abandoned commercial shipping canals, developed to avoid Indian and American conflict in the early 1800's, now offer a recreational potential
of great diversity and interest. Historic sites, historic buildings, dense forests, rocky gorges, open farm land and very boatable waters characterize the recreational interest of these waterways. Thus both the amateur and experienced boater has ample opportunity to explore a new recreational world, unknown to the highway traveler.

Characteristics of the Waterways

Of special interest to the boater are the 92 locks, linking 33 lakes and 6 major rivers. Many of the locks are still hand-operated, just as they were from the beginning. Visitor surveys have shown that the users prefer these to the modernized electrically controlled locks. (Wyatt: 1974).

At Peterborough is located the highest hydraulic lift lock in the world. Two chambers, 33 by 140 feet, actually lift and lower the boater in the water a height of 65 feet to the next level of the canal. A similar but lower lift lock is located at Kirkfield. Near Georgian Bay a marine railway rather than a lock is used to move boats up a grade to prevent sea lamprey from entering Lake Simcoe, a major resort lake on the Trent-Severn System.

A clue to the difficulty of planning these water corridors is the complexity of existing development. The waterway corridor has a population of over 800,000; includes 6 cities, 6 towns and 19 villages; and includes portions of 104 local municipalities, 2 regional governments and 9 counties. The federal government has control of the water and lock-site lands but other public lands remain with the Crown in the right of Ontario. In 1969 on the Trent-Severn alone, there were 25,000 cottages en route and an additional 12,000 cottages on adjacent reservoirs. In order to maintain navigability, the federal government regulates drawdown which varies from 2.0 to 13.25 feet depending on the size of the reservoir. (Jaakson: 1973). Although they do not consider it a major problem, some cottage owners have extensive mud flats in front at the very peak of their vacation season.

In recent years, even before any formal government recognition of recreational use of the waterways occurred, popularity increased greatly. Now about 8,000 vessels use the Rideau and over 18,000 ply the waters of the Trent-Severn annually. While greatest use is by cruisers, launches and houseboats, many canoes and sailboats use the tributary streams and lakes. It is estimated that the boat use of the system could increase 300 percent before reaching full capacity. (Rideau-Trent-Severn: 1971).

To date, all costs of improvement, operation and maintenance have been borne by the government. Operating and maintenance costs of both canals is about $5.2 million (Davies: 1975). Capital improvements on the Trent-Severn will be $3.4 million and on the Rideau about $3 million this year. In 1973, the total cost was about 12.9 million. This year, for the first time, lockage user fees are being charged. It is estimated that these revenues will reduce government costs by about 7 percent. Evidence of federal commitment to the recreational use and development of these waterways is a $44 million budget over the next four years. (Maslin: 1975).

Joint Planning Study

As a result of growing interest in recreational use of these old commercial shipping lanes, the federal Minister of Transport and the Ontario
Minister of Tourism and Information announced in 1967 that the governments of Canada and Ontario would jointly study and plan for the future development of these corridors. (Rideau-Trent-Severn: 1971). Much of the stimulus for considering regional scale planning of these water corridors came from a graduate thesis on the topic of recreation land classification, based on the Rideau Waterway. General interest in protecting certain landscape and historic values gave impetus to a major planning program. An umbrella agency representing about 15 agencies in both segments of government named members to the CORTS (Canada-Ontario Rideau-Trent-Severn) Committee.

While detailed study and research was led by a three-man team of land planners, a great many others participated in the initial study. Elected members of local constituencies, citizen groups and members of many related agencies participated. The purpose of the study project was to analyze the existing situation along the complete three-segment corridor and develop planning guidelines entirely apart from issues of jurisdiction, costs and implementation. The study, completed in 1971, resulted in two major public documents that have been given widespread circulation.

The study made recommendations in 6 major interest areas. On the topic of pollution, items concerning sewage treatment, nutrient waste disposal, industrial discharge, boat waste and cottage sanitation were discussed. Open Space recommendations included zoning and protecting scenic areas.

Because of the rich heritage throughout the waterways a number of important recommendations were made to preserve and restore old locks, buildings and to develop museums. Increased parks, picnic sites, scenic routes, canoe routes, docks and other public areas were recommended. Topics concerning commercial development such as tourist centers and cruise ship tours were discussed. Recommendations for cottage development, safety, water levels and publications were also included.

Management

In spite of the thoroughness of preparation and widespread dissemination of the reports for planning the Rideau-Trent-Severn-Bay of Quinte Waterways, implementation has not been as rapid as some might desire. On the other hand, considering the multiplicity of individual and corporate owners and decision-makers involved, it is understandable that such a monumental task would take time. Furthermore, there were (intentionally) no specific implementation recommendations included in the planning studies. This was left to the administrative units involved. As a result, both the provincial and federal governments have kept a low profile for a few years for the populace and local units to fully digest the recommendations and their implications. Now, action is being renewed.

On February 20, 1975, another major step was taken. A CORTS signing ceremony launched an action program involving many interests. Using the recommendations of the original CORTS Committee, the new agreement created two key groups to coordinate intergovernmental activities on future management of this important corridor. One was the CORTS Advisory Committee composed of private citizens. The other is the CORTS Agreement Board, consisting of federal and provincial civil servants. (CORTS: 1975, 23).

The objectives include both further study and immediate action. Studies, designed to translate the recommendations of the reports in a major plan and
action program, will be performed. Furthermore, three specific efforts will be initiated: identification of lands requiring special controls; identification of lands to be acquired and setting up mechanisms for water quality control. Rather than supporting projects with matching funding, Canada and Ontario will fund their programs separately but through coordinated effort.

A CORTS headquarters has been established at Peterborough and staff is being hired. Parks Canada, Ontario regional office, has begun base-line studies, inventorying characteristics of their lock sites along the Rideau. Interpretive programs and exhibits have been established at several lock sites. The provincial government of Ontario is initiating its program of provincial waterways.

CONCLUSIONS

These examples in Canada demonstrate gradual but significant change in the relationship between tourism, recreation and conservation. For many years, there was little concerted action toward resource protection. Natural resources were abundant—therefore economic development was not only possible but was national policy. Tourism and recreation developed independently and for many years the relationship was that of coexistence.

As tourism, recreation and conservation interests grew and as these became more competitive for the same resources, conflicts increased. Much development today is at this stage.

However, analysis of the functions of tourism, recreation and conservation showed a great amount of interdependency. This mutual benefit could be termed symbiosis. Such symbiosis is stimulating joint programs between Canadian federal, provincial and private enterprise interests.

If one considers both the social and environmental values of tourism, recreation and conservation, it could be argued that the mix provides an amalgam far different and of greater impact than each taken separately. Perhaps we are developing con-tour-rec (conservation, tourism, recreation) areas that represent an entirely new synergism—developments with components influenced by each force but expressed in quite a new form.
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