

Our Home on Native Land

Many other Canadians caught in the middle of First Nations land-claim settlements fear losing access to natural resources – or worse.



JOHN KERR
Editor-in-Chief

The Algonquin Land Claim (pg. 36) outlines what's at stake in one of the largest claims in the province. Yet, according to the Ontario government's Web site www.aboriginalaffairs.gov.on.ca, it's only one of 64. Some are asking for expanded reserves, others for land and resources elsewhere over wider areas, as with the Algonquin claim.

Besides the 1.4 million non-aboriginal residents in that claim area, many others across the province also want to know how they will be affected. Yet, the details are often vague, as pointed out in this issue.

There's no disputing that these land claims need to be resolved once and for all. After hundreds of years of settlement by new Canadians of many ethnic backgrounds, governments have often done a bad job of dealing fairly with the First Nations who came before them from Eurasia some 11,000 years ago. But, the lack of transparency from negotiators can cause more concerns for society in general than if it was more involved and informed in the first place.

A Reality Check

Things have changed, especially in the case of angling and hunting. The courts are declaring that First Nations get first dibs on fish and wildlife.

The Sparrow decision of 1990 was a turning point. The Supreme Court of Canada held that aboriginal rights, such as fishing, that were in existence in 1982 are protected under the Constitution of Canada and cannot be infringed upon without justification. Yes, we're not all playing by the same rules.

As Ontario, indeed all of Canada, becomes more urbanized, natural resources dwindle. When you add to this a growing population wanting

access to what's left, co-operation and sharing fairly, not to mention scientific resource management, become even more important.

Truth is, First Nations populations are increasing. During the last Canadian census period from 1996 to 2006, their numbers grew by 45%, compared with 8% for the general population, according to Statistics Canada (the next census takes place this May). Increasingly, First Nations are in need of more land to live on and continue their heritage hunting and fishing lifestyles. But, so do other Canadians.

How do we accomplish further sharing of resources? There are examples to consider, such as the current aboriginal-only deer culls in some provincial parks. In the case here, there's already been exclusive access to moose in Algonquin Provincial Park since 1991. Non-aboriginal hunters might view this negatively. But, since the general population is not permitted to hunt in many parks, often for no good reason, granting aboriginal access can mean leaving hunting opportunities elsewhere to share.

Let's keep an open mind on such things and on how anglers and hunters, no matter their origins, can work together to ensure we all have sustainable fish and wildlife populations and access to them in the future. Being more open about exactly what's involved in the Algonquin claim, before an agreement-in-principle is signed, would go a long way towards this goal.

Share your thoughts:
john.kerr@oodmag.com

5 Things I've Learned in this Issue

- 1 Properly discard used soft-plastic baits, pg. 22.
- 2 Two rivers run through it, pg. 30.
- 3 Winter is a deadly time for deer, pg. 44.
- 4 ATVs are more high-tech than ever, pg. 48.
- 5 I need a holiday, pg. 60.

On My Radar

Bundle up the kids, grab the ice-fishing gear, and head out for a hard-water adventure during this winter's Ontario Family Fishing Weekend (OFFW), February 19-21. Also consider introducing someone new to ice fishing.

They can angle without a licence from 12:01 a.m. Saturday, February 19, to 11:59 p.m. on the Monday (also Family Day). Lower Conservation Licence limits of fish apply, though.

Take in the open air or, if the weather's a bit too nippy, consider renting a cosy ice hut. In most cases, heated transportation on and off the ice is also supplied. Rental options were listed in our Winter issue and are posted on www.ontariooutdoors.com.

There might even be a free organized ice-fishing event in your area, but as I write this, the Bridgenorth Winter Panfish Festival, February 19, on Lake Chemung in the Kawarthas is the only one registered for the special weekend. To keep current, go to www.ofah.org and visit the OFFW events page or call the OFFW organizer at 705-748-6324.

Oh, just in case ice fishing isn't your game, Ontario Family Fishing Week takes place July 2-10. Think warm thoughts and get ready for it.

What's Ahead

Our 2011 Fishing Annual

- » Complete coverage:
- » bass, carp, channel cats,
- » lakers, panfish, pike,
- » walleye, and more
- » Tracking tackle trends