



Canoeists' Environmental Position Paper

by Jim Wood — 1991

Background

Long before recorded history, a unique form of watercraft was plying Ontario's lakes and rivers. This simple vehicle, constructed of natural materials by native ingenuity, with the passage of hundreds of generations has undergone a complete metamorphosis. This boat, now composed of space-age materials and born of computer assisted design technology wedded to advanced engineering principles, has retained those characteristics which made it so valuable to prehistoric people — light but strong, flexible yet durable, beautiful and practical.

In its many manifestations, it has admirably served the needs of native peoples, explorers and map makers, fur, timber and mineral seekers, recreationists, academics, poets and artists. It has been so much a part of Canada's past that some say it is the vehicle which, like the cry of the loon among bird calls, evokes that element of our inner self which defines us as a Northern People.

To the canoeists of Ontario, it is the craft that affords intimate contact with nature, an afternoon escape from urban cares, an exploration of lands and waters few have visited, and unlimited opportunity for physical challenge, human fellowship, and spiritual reawakening. Indeed canoeing pursuits are so varied and widespread, so personal and sensory, that it is doubtful if any other group of recreationists has accumulated within its collective membership the vast store of personal knowledge of and intimate feeling for the environment which surrounds our waterways. It is in this realm of environmental contact that canoeists enjoy a moral luxury in comparison with most modern outdoor pursuits. The act of canoeing doesn't pollute, desecrate, nor use up its resource base. In this age of concern for the environment it is therefore only right and proper for the canoeist, as the user of longest ethical standing, to set forth environmental goals and responsible courses of action in this regard.

Position

It is incumbent upon ORCA, as the official body recognized by the Government of Ontario to represent the viewpoint of the canoeists of Ontario, to set forth its environmental beliefs, goals, concerns, and courses of action.

Our goals are a reflection of our concerns which have arisen as a result of our members' experiences of recent years. Essentially we aim for safe unobstructed waterways, the elimination of people-made pollutants in water, unrestricted public access to waterways, the preservation in an undisturbed state of the naturally occurring ecological systems surrounding waterways, the protection from development and preservation of historically significant water routes the preservation of tracts of land for research and benign recreation purposes in wilderness areas.

Beliefs

1. We believe that canoeists have acquired — through intimate contact over countless years — a unique knowledge of the water resources of Ontario, and are prepared to share these insights with other responsible interested parties.
2. We believe that the public of Ontario has the right of unrestricted access to the waterways of the province.
3. We believe that no industry, commercial enterprise, or private endeavour should divert, add substances to, pollute, or in any manner alter the quantity or quality of water in the waterways of Ontario.
4. We believe that no obstruction should be placed in a waterway so as to create a hazard to the human users of that waterway or to the other life forms dependent upon that resource.
5. We believe it is the responsibility of the Government of Ontario to provide varying canoeing environments in Ontario so as to meet the recreation and tourism needs of canoeists in urban, rural, natural, and wilderness settings.
6. We believe that a systematic survey of Ontario waterways needs to be carried out so as to inventory recreational values, define goals, and set forth desired ends. This to be accomplished in cooperation with existing recreational and tourism user groups such as canoeists.

Actions

1. We will ally ourselves with other responsible interested parties, which share our beliefs, in order to achieve our goals.
2. We will undertake such educational, training, and advertising ventures as are monetarily feasible, in order to achieve our goals.
3. We will participate to the limit of our financial and human power resources in public and environmental hearings, and in those advisory capacities to government and industry which are deemed necessary to achieve our goals.
4. Our preferred course of action in relation to other groups and parties shall be consultation, communication, cooperation, conflict resolution, and lastly confrontation in a legal and moral sense.

It is our purpose to give the canoeists of Ontario a clear and creditable voice in decision-making processes regarding the canoeing environment.

The canoeing environment is defined as the sum of the physical, aesthetic, historical, cultural, spiritual, and recreational elements which compose the waterways used by canoes, kayaks, and related watercraft.