

## What is the fencing for along Highway 60?



Anyone driving Highway 60 in the Park will notice the black drift-fencing that has been installed in various places. This fencing is an intended to keep Snapping and Painted Turtles off of the roadway

in an attempt to reduce their mortality. These turtles are attracted to the soft ditches and banks of roads for nesting but road mortality can seriously harm the population.



Painted Turtle – note the brilliant colours when viewed from both the top and underside.



Snapping Turtle – be careful to avoid its jaws as it will feel threatened and may snap! Turtle photos © Peter Mills



Scan for more information about Ontario Turtles at Risk in Algonquin Park

### Help Protect Us!

*If you see a turtle on the road, slow down. If possible, you may want to try to assist the turtle by moving it in the direction it was heading.*



**Be careful with Snapping Turtles — you should not try to pick one up! Avoid its jaws as it will feel threatened and may snap! And, always remember, watch out for other traffic!**



The Visitor Centre now offers free WiFi internet access... and while there, don't forget to check out The Friends of Algonquin Park bookstore, or enjoy a light snack or meal at the Sunday Creek Café.

## Being “bugged”?

This can be a challenging time to be outdoors with both blackflies and mosquitoes being present. Here are some tips to help you cope:

- **Wear light-coloured clothing** (white, tan, khaki, etc.)—blackflies are attracted to dark colours.
- **Cover up.** Wear long-sleeved shirts with cuffs and collars that can be buttoned tight, as well as long pants with elastic cuffs (or tuck your pants into your socks).
- **Use insect repellent** when outdoors—something with DEET works best. The concentration of DEET should be

no greater than 30% for adults and no greater than 10% for children.

- If you cannot, or prefer not to, use insect repellent, try some type of netting (**a bug hat or bug jacket**), available at most outdoor stores. When camping, you can try a bug tarp shelter to avoid biting insects.



Blackfly biting (L) and mosquito feeding (R)  
Photo (blackfly): Steve Marshall

## Going for a hike?

Be aware that we are just opening our hiking, biking and backpacking trails for the season—you may come across downed trees, mud or flooded sections. With hundreds of kilometres of trails in Algonquin, it takes our dedicated staff

several weeks to clean the trails after the long winter.

If you are going on a day-hike, know the length and difficulty of the trail and give yourself enough time to be back to your vehicle before dark.



## Tips When Viewing Wildlife

*Highway 60 can be an excellent place to view wildlife, especially Moose.*

- Early morning or late evening can be the best time.
- Keep well off the travelled portion of the highway if you pull over to view wildlife.
- Keep a safe and respectful distance from wildlife.
- NEVER feed or attract wildlife.



*The Raven is available online and a limited number of complete sets of the previous year's Raven are available at the Visitor Centre and the main gates along Highway 60.*

[www.algonquinpark.on.ca](http://www.algonquinpark.on.ca)

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One of two small blocks in the area of Mew Lake Campground that were burned by Algonquin Park and Ministry of Natural Resources staff in April 2012.  
Photo: Justin Peter

## A “New Look” to the Old Airfield

Many of you who visit the Highway 60 Corridor will have had occasion to visit the Old Airfield – Algonquin's only historic airstrip – perhaps while camping at Mew Lake Campground, or while biking along the Old Railway Bike Trail. You would be correct in thinking that parts of the area look a little different this year. In fact, two small blocks of the Airfield were subject to a prescribed burn this past April. The larger of the two plots abuts the bike trail, and the other lies close to the Mew Lake comfort station. This marks the first time in over twenty years that any areas of Algonquin Park have been

deliberately burned. In this case, the purpose of conducting the burns was to maintain the area as open space. We are very interested in noting the response of the vegetation and other wildlife to the burn, and encourage you to visit the site as well. Interpretive panels have been installed to allow you to better appreciate the site and its features. In the spirit of fire we are – here and now – offering you a classic article from a past Raven, which was written following what were, at the time, thought to be devastating wild fires in Yellowstone National Park. Please enjoy!





Smoke rises from a fire line, during the fires of 1988 at Yellowstone National Park.

## Why Fire is Like Rain

By Dan Strickland

Originally printed in Vol. 31, No. 9 of *The Raven*, August 16, 1990.

Two years ago a horrified public watched as half the forests of Yellowstone National Park in the U.S. were consumed by fires so mighty that only the arrival of winter finally put them out. Last summer, devastating fires swept across northern Manitoba forcing the evacuation of over 20,000 people and sending hazy smoke as far as Europe. Faced with such awesomely destructive rampages, a panic-stricken press speculated about the greenhouse effect, global warming and the disastrous consequences for North America's forests and wildlife. In the case of Yellowstone they mourned the severe degradation or even loss of the world's first national park and crucified the policy makers and managers who, it turned out, had at first deliberately allowed some of the fires to burn unchecked. Now, we daresay that if half of Algonquin Park went up in smoke one summer the reaction here would be very similar. In the popular mind it would be hard to imagine a worse calamity. The thought of centuries-old trees being destroyed in a few seconds and thousands of birds and animals supposedly choking to death or being burned alive is just too horrible for many people to contemplate. Anyone who values the natural environment, so

goes the usual thinking, would be truly aghast.

And yet, quite obviously by now, here we are hinting that we don't agree with this commonly accepted view of fire. Are we seriously suggesting that forest fires are nothing to get excited about? Well, in a word and up to a point—yes! More specifically, we contend that fire in a forest is about as normal and natural as rain. Now, to say that fire is like rain may seem downright preposterous. If anything, they appear to be complete opposites. Fire, after all burns and sears, while rain refreshes. Fire destroys life while rain makes it possible. We admit this is true but we still aren't going to back down from our statement. Please allow us to explain.

First let us consider why we say that fire is a normal part of the environment. This notion might seem hard to prove. On the one hand our modern records don't go back very far and on the other hand we humans now mask the normal situation. We do this both by starting many fires ourselves but also by putting out almost all fires, including natural ones, long before they have burned their natural course. There are ways around this difficulty, however, and investigations carried out around the world leave no doubt whatsoever that fires were

a common and regular occurrence in many environments long before man's influence began to be felt. This is particularly true in more flammable forests of pine or spruce and a study carried out on Algonquin's mainly coniferous east side provides a good example. Two records of the past fire history of that part of the Park were available. One was found in, of all places, the mud at the bottom of Greenleaf Lake. This lake is unusual in being so deep that the water does not circulate all the way to the bottom. Any oxygen originally down there was used up long ago and no organisms can live in, and stir up, the bottom mud. This means that summer and winter layers of detritus drifting down from above are preserved in a year by year record that goes right back to Greenleaf's formation following the departure of the last glacier 11,000 years ago. By taking a core of the bottom mud and examining the contents of the annual layers, researchers have been able to determine what kinds of trees have grown around the lake over the years (by identifying the kinds of pollen in each layer) and also how often fires occurred. Forest fires cause the deposition of minute fragments of charcoal and increased amounts of aluminum (because of greater soil erosion after a fire). Their presence in the sediment layer was proof that a fire had burned in the Greenleaf Lake basin in the year corresponding to the layer and permitted the reconstruction of the local fire history far back into the past. In addition, it was possible to get independent confirmation, at least for the last several hundred years, by examining the scars left by fires in the trunks of still living Red Pine trees scattered around Barron township (in which Greenleaf Lake is located). As everyone knows, trees put on visible growth rings every year and by taking a sample from the trunks of these trees it was possible to see how often in their lives they had been singed by fire and precisely when—right down to the exact years.

Both these approaches indicated that, on average, there was a major fire in Barron township at least once every 45 years and that every part of the township could expect to be burned once every 70 years. (Of course, some

particular areas might escape for much longer than that but then other areas would be burned even more frequently than once every 70 years.)

No matter how you look at these figures they indicate that fire was indeed a normal and common part of the east side Algonquin environment. In a way, we should not be surprised. All we have to do is look at the way many plants live in order to realize that fire must always have been a normal, even necessary, part of their environment. Why do Jack Pine trees have cones that open only after exposure to great heat if it isn't to ensure that the seeds are released precisely when they have a chance to succeed—after a fire has prepared a mineral



These cones of Jack Pine generally open and release their seeds only if they are subjected to intense heat.

soil seed bed and killed the shade-casting parent trees? Why do aspen trees sucker profusely after a fire and grow only in direct sunlight if it isn't to take advantage of the frequent and normal destruction of old trees by forest fires? Even in Algonquin's west side forests of Sugar Maple, where fire is much less of a factor, there is evidence that at least one tree species, the Yellow Birch, depended on ground fires to burn off the dead maple leaves and prepare a seedbed suitable for its tiny seedlings. All these trees and in turn the plants and animals associated with them depended on fire for their prosperity if not their very existence. It is hard to imagine how such a situation could ever have evolved if fire weren't a normal part of their environment.

Another way of realizing the importance of a

certain, natural frequency of fire is provided by looking at what happens when that frequency is disturbed. We know from records left by the men who surveyed what is now Algonquin Park in the 1880's, for example, that virtually the entire watershed of the Petawawa River on the east side burned in the preceding decade or two. We know of course that fires were always part of that environment but this indicated an enormous increase in their extent and frequency. Most people think that the White Pine loggers were unintentionally responsible, both for starting more fires in the first place and then for providing more fuel for them (in the form of pine slash).

Whatever their exact origin, the extra fires made much more than a trivial difference to the park area. Not only were the forests themselves greatly affected (any stands of old growth White Pine still remaining after logging were consumed) but so also was the Park's wildlife. Burned areas were soon taken over by new growth and White-tailed Deer, formerly excluded from the Park area by the combination of little food and deep winter snow, now found conditions much more suitable. Within decades they went from being rare or altogether absent to super abundance. Some estimates had them as high as 100,000 in the Park area and these numbers had their own secondary consequences on the environment. For years there was almost no regeneration of cedar or Yellow Birch in Algonquin—because both were preferred food items of deer. And, although the link was not recognized at the time, the advent of the deer was mostly, if not completely, responsible for the local extinction of caribou and for moose becoming rare. (Both animals are highly vulnerable to a parasitic brainworm carried by deer.)

All these drastic changes in the Park environment were caused not by something new but merely by an increase in the occurrence of the fires that had always been a normal part of the scene. Today, of course, we almost have the opposite situation. Thanks to our modern equipment and highly trained crews we have made fire almost extinct as an influence on the

Algonquin and many other environments where it formerly played an important role. Since the 1930's Algonquin has been "deprived" of more than 600 natural fires that, without our fire suppression, would have burned varying areas of forest. As a result and for quite some time now the "deer bubble" has burst and moose have returned. In that sense the present, almost-no-fire situation in Algonquin has recreated an environment more like the one that existed before the White Pine loggers arrived.

Still, we should not forget all those tree species and their dependent wildlife like beaver, deer, moose, and bear that depended on forest fires for their prosperity. There is plenty of reason to believe that the fortunes of these plants and animals will be much different if fire is suppressed than they would be under truly natural conditions. This was explicitly recognized in Algonquin's 1974 Master Plan which calls for a let-burn policy in the Park's wilderness and watershed nature reserve zones. The policy has never been implemented here because of certain obvious difficulties. If the object is to restore the natural fire regime, for example, how do you compensate for the effect of fires starting outside those zones that would have burned into them if we hadn't put them out? How do you stop a fire starting within the zone when it reaches the zone boundaries? Are we really ready to see valuable campsites in the affected areas incinerated?

As long as we as a society aren't ready to tackle these questions we will have to settle for a perhaps ironic situation in which our wilderness zones are ecologically less natural than the surrounding zones—areas where logging partly compensates for the absence of fire.

Resolution of these difficult problems will have to wait for another day. For now we hope to wait for another day. For now we hope that we have made some progress in our self-appointed task of convincing you that fire is indeed like rain. Both are perfectly natural parts of the environment that have shaped our living world. And, although knowing where to draw the line is difficult, rain and fire are both things we can have too much of — but also too little.