



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO
Official Record of Debate
(Hansard)

ACCESS TO PUBLIC LANDS

DECEMBER 8, 2010

Mr. Michael A. Brown: I have a question for the Minister of Natural Resources. There have been some concerns expressed lately on the topic of crown land access restrictions in the north. Yesterday, an example was brought up in the Legislature where northerners are now being subject to access restrictions when attempting to enter certain provincial parks using roads that they traditionally travelled upon.

I know that many people in the riding and across the north would be grateful for an answer regarding this situation. Would the minister please tell the House what the government's reason is for restricting local access points to specific Ontario parks?

Hon. Linda Jeffrey: I want to thank the member from Algoma–Manitoulin for the question.

I have to say that it was with good reason that the specific access point to Fushimi Lake Provincial Park was subject to an unauthorized motorized vehicle restriction. Had the member from Timmins–James Bay brought this particular case to my attention two weeks ago when I had originally asked, instead of waiting for question period, I would have been able to tell him that the restriction was a matter of public safety. There were concerns regarding snowmobilers entering the park through unauthorized access points, particularly over frozen creeks. I'm certain that people in the House would agree that public safety and liability should be treated with the utmost seriousness.

That said, snowmobile access is allowed to continue through the authorized access point at the main gate to the park.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary.

Mr. Michael A. Brown: I appreciate the minister providing some clarity on the issue.

Northerners, particularly people in my riding of Algoma–Manitoulin, take the right to access to traditional lands very seriously. Living in northern Ontario, we grow up enjoying a wide variety of outdoor recreational activities and

become accustomed to a certain way of life. While northerners realize the remote tourism industry brings jobs to northern Ontario and contributes to the area's overall economy, there is a fear that we are moving too far in favour of one side.

Furthermore, northerners heard the allegations recently made by a member of the Legislature against MNR employees who were said to be in conflicts of interest with their roles and planning authorities.

Would the Minister tell the House about what you have to say to individuals concerned about what they have heard lately regarding access to crown land?

Hon. Linda Jeffrey: Thanks again to the honourable member. Northern residents continue to enjoy unrestricted access to a vast majority of Ontario's crown land.

We always work to balance the public's access to recreational opportunities with the need to protect and preserve our wilderness and enhance remote area experiences.

To the allegations about MNR officials benefiting from planning decisions: I've had staff look into the matter and we have yet to confirm a specific case of any conflict-of-interest violation. However, if anyone in this House knows of a specific case, I would encourage them to bring it to my attention.

MNR staff do an outstanding job protecting Ontario's natural resources. They're often active members of the communities in which they live and work.

It's important to note that access decisions are made through forest management and land use planning, both of which require public consultation.

I encourage anyone interested in resource management to be involved in our public consultation process