

Mack Abbot
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Politics of Natural Resource Management

Algonquin Provincial Park

I decided to take this first paper as an opportunity to explain why this course, Politics of Natural Resources Management, has sparked my interest. From a young age my parents always encouraged me to spend time in the outdoors, from canoeing to hiking; they even took me on a World Wildlife Federation trip to Hawaii! After going on that trip as a young boy it was nearly impossible for me to not grow up to love nature. This trend progressed when, at age 10, I decided to go to a wilderness canoe tripping camp in Northern Canada. As I packed my bags and got on a plane in New York City, I had no clue what I was getting into: the all-boys camp was located on an island about four hours north of Toronto; it had no electricity or running water and there was no way to telephone my parents. To my ten-year-old mind it first seemed as if I would die on this island – alone and miserable. Then I realized that I adored the place, but it wasn't because of the great staff or fun games, it was because of my surroundings.

The camp was situated in the southern part of Algonquin Provincial Park, Canada's oldest provincial park encompassing 7630 square kilometers of virtually untouched wilderness. There were no video games, computers or even roads in this strange new land; there were only pristine waters, lush vegetation and billions of mosquitoes (they were the only aspect I would change about the place!). Eventually I spent eight summers of my adolescent life in Algonquin Park, which, pardon the cliché, changed my life. I could tell you dozens of stories ranging from running out of food on a thirty day canoe trip and having to hunt and scavenge for my meals to waking up

surrounded by a family of bears, but the point of this anecdote is that having been exposed to this provincial park changed my life.

Spending much of my youth on this government land, I learnt about the struggles between the Park Rangers and the poachers, loggers, and waste-dumping that endangered the park. I saw the struggles between the Canadian government and citizens who, generations ago, leased land from the government and built family homes within the park, only to find out that the government wanted their land back. For the first time I saw live mink running amongst the brush, instead of on a coat. I caught and ate fish from relatively mercury-free water, instead of buying them at the market.

As I grew older and read National Geographic Magazines from cover-to-cover, I came to realize that my experiences were not necessarily unique, but that they were definitely in danger of being stolen from future generations. I now realize that there will be very few areas in New England where I will be able to take my son to fish without first checking the mercury levels of the water and even fewer areas where he will ever be able to see bears first hand, much less be surrounded by them.

These past experiences of mine and my recent declaration to be a government major made me realize that there is an entire body of law that exists to address these problems and that I knew nothing of it. Beyond this body of law there is an entire political process surrounding natural resource management, of which I know very little. So as I enter this class, I have no knowledge of the politics of natural resources management, but I do have first-hand knowledge of its effects.