

Springwater Provincial Park Management Plan

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Ministry of
Natural
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Ontario



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APPROVAL STATEMENT

I am pleased to approve the *Springwater Provincial Park Management Plan*, as official policy for the management and development of this park. The plan reflects this Ministry's intent to protect the natural and cultural features of Springwater and maintain and develop high quality opportunities for outdoor recreation and heritage appreciation for both residents of Ontario and visitors to the Province.

Gail Beggs
A/Regional Director
Southern Region

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Springwater Provincial Park is a 47 hectare day use park located nine kilometres northwest of Barrie (population 61,000) on Provincial Highway 26 (Figure 1). The park is unique within the Ontario Provincial Parks System because the main attraction is a display of live mammals, waterfowl, birds of prey (raptors) and upland game birds exhibited in a natural setting. The day use activities include picnicking, wildlife viewing, hiking and cross-country skiing.

Historically, the park was closely associated with the former Midhurst Forest Tree Nursery. The park was part of the original 400 hectares purchased for the nursery by the Province of Ontario and the County of Simcoe in 1922. In the late 1800's much of the Midhurst area had become a wasteland of pine stumps and windblown sand due to the clearing of the forests and farming of light soils. The springs for which the park was named were the main reason this area was chosen for the nursery, as a dependable water supply was essential to such an operation.

Initially, park facilities were developed and maintained as part of the nursery operations. The park first opened in 1927. Cleared lands were planted with Scot's, red and jack pine seedlings produced in the nursery. During the 1930's, park roads, a large picnic pavilion, bird and animal enclosures, floral displays and rock gardens were constructed. Funding was through government sponsored "make work" programs designed to ease the economic crisis of the Great Depression.

In 1958 the area officially became a provincial park providing day use facilities. Responsibility for the park's management shifted from the nursery to the parks branch of the Department of Lands and Forests (now the Ministry of Natural Resources).

The park is located within the Georgian

2.2 Park Expansion

In 1992, a decision was made by the Ministry of Natural Resources to phase out the operation of

Lakelands Tourist Region, which provides a wide variety of recreational opportunities for both residents and non-residents. There are many tourist attractions close to Springwater Provincial Park such as the Simcoe County Museum just east of the park, and Wasaga Beach Provincial Park which Incorporates Nancy Island Historic Site. At Midland, there is Ste. Marie among the Hurons, Wye Marsh Wildlife Interpretation Centre and Discovery Harbour. Another area attraction Is Tiny Marsh Provincial Wildlife Area near Elmvale.

Park visitation is increasing. In 1983, Just under 40,000 visitors used the park while in 1993 the number of visitors exceeded 65,000. In part, this may be attributed to the growth In the City of Barrie and Simcoe County over the same period. The heaviest period of park use in 1993 was June through September with nearly 50,000 visitors. By comparison, about 5,000 visitors used the park for winter recreation In December through March. About half of the total park visitation is group use including family picnics and senior citizen outings. A further 20 percent of the total park visitation is school children, primarily from elementary schools in Simcoe County.

2.0 SUMMARY OF SIGNIFICANT

ISSUES

2.1 Wildlife Displays

The wildlife displays have been closely associated with the park since the 1930's. A decision in 1981 to either upgrade or remove the wildlife displays met with strong public support for long term improvements to these facilities. This, combined with their popularity, provides sufficient justification for maintaining and upgrading the displays. A sport fish display may also be developed In the future.

the Midhurst Forest Tree Nursery. Springwater Provincial Park will be expanded to include approximately 145 hectares of the adjacent nursery lands south of Provincial Highway 26.

3.0 CLASSIFICATION

Springwater Provincial Park is classified as a Recreation Park according to the Ontario Provincial Parks Planning and Management Policies. The park provides a wide variety of day use recreation activities on a year round basis, in attractive surroundings. The geological, biological and cultural resources within the provincial park are considered to be of local significance.

4.0 GOAL

The goal for Springwater Provincial Park is to provide a variety of day use outdoor recreation opportunities for large numbers of people in attractive surroundings, with an emphasis on wildlife viewing and interpretation.

5.0 OBJECTIVES

There are four established objectives of the Provincial Parks System: recreation, heritage appreciation, tourism and protection.

5.1 B~[M1IQO

To provide opportunities on a year round basis for a wide variety of day use recreation activities including wildlife viewing, picnicking, walking and cross-country skiing.

The park currently provides six picnic shelters and 675 picnic tables which represent 162,000 picnicking opportunities annually. Limited increases in the recreational facilities are proposed.

5.2 Heritage Appreciation

To provide opportunities for interpretation and appreciation of the various wildlife species on display in the park, the history of the park's development and management, and its past link to the Midhurst Forest Tree Nursery.

This objective will be accomplished through self-use Information, displays and interpretive programs.

5.3 **Tourism**

To contribute to the tourism and the economy of the Georgian Lakelands Tourist Region by providing residents and non-residents of Ontario with opportunities to explore the unique features of the area.

In terms of economic impact, direct expenditures by the park program and visitors in 1992 exceeded 2.6 million dollars.

5.4 Protection

To protect the natural resources of the park.

This objective will be accomplished by placing several of the spring and seepage areas into natural environment zones, and ensuring that the impacts of development and use are minimized in the park as a whole. The natural environment zones also include the remaining natural forests in the park, a conifer swamp, the forested central ravine and conifer plantations.

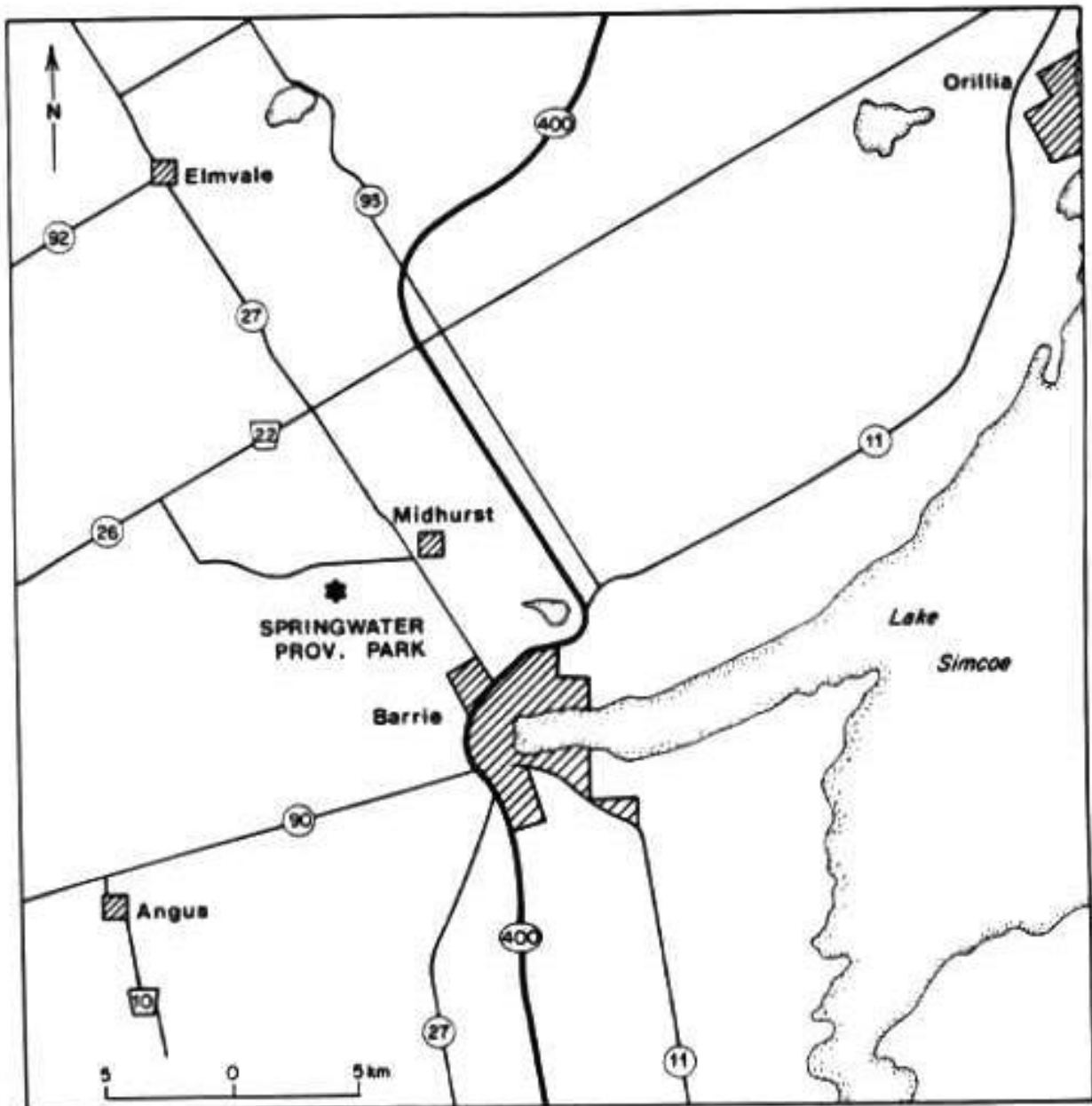
6.0 BOUNDARY

The present park boundary has remained unchanged since 1958. The park will be expanded to include approximately 145 hectares of adjacent Crown land (part of the former Midhurst Forest Tree Nursery).

Figure 1

REGIONAL CONTEXT

- ★ Springwater Provincial Park
- ▨ Urban Area



This addition would extend the park boundary to the Canadian Pacific Railway to the east and south, the Vespra Township 7th Concession Sideroad to the west, and Provincial Highway 26 to the north. Part of the unopened road allowances between Lots 10 and 11, Concession 6, and between Concessions 5 and 6, Lot 11, may be acquired from the township of Springwater (Figure 2).

The boundary extension encompasses extensive areas of conifer plantation, upland forest, cedar lowland and part of the core shelter area of the Minesing Swamp winter deer yard complex. Portions of a nature trail and cross-country ski trail will also be included within the expanded park boundary. These lands and facilities will further enhance the park's educational, recreational and aesthetic values.

7.0 ZONING

The park will contain both a natural environment zone and a development zone based on the Ontario Provincial Parks Planning and Management Policies. The zones differentiate the permissible degree of development, recreational uses and management practices.

The areas zoned in Figure 3 include the proposed additions to the park.

7.1 Natural Environment Zone (149 hectares) Description

This zone consists of relatively undisturbed natural forest and managed conifer plantations. The area also contains springs and seepage areas, which feed small tributary streams flowing through the park en route to the 4,000 hectare Minesing Swamp (a Class 1 wetland). The zone contains no facilities other than portions of a nature trail, cross-country ski trail and the Ganaraska Trail.

Zone Policies

The zone will provide for the protection of the area's natural features. Opportunities for low

intensity recreation activities such as hiking and cross-country skiing will be available on a year round basis. Facilities will be limited to trails and associated directional and interpretive signs and self-use interpretive displays.

7.2 Development Zone (53 hectare) Description

This zone contains the remainder of the park area. It Includes all existing park facilities including public and internal service roads, parking lots, administration and maintenance buildings, ponds, wildlife displays, picnic facilities, play field and comfort stations.

Zone Policies

The zone will provide opportunities for a wide variety of high intensity recreational activities on a year round basis as well as accommodating park maintenance and administrative functions. Development will be designed to limit the environmental impacts on the land. Some modifications to land and water may occur to increase carrying capacity.

8.0 RESOURCE STEWARDSHIP POLICIES

Future resource stewardship decisions may be facilitated by additional life and earth science inventories.

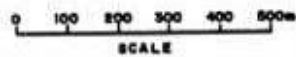
8.1 Landform and Water Resource

The park contains sandy and organic soils. The sandy soils are susceptible to erosion and organic soils are easily damaged by compaction. Most soils are adequately protected by vegetation and no serious erosion problems presently exist. Any development will be designed to limit erosion and compaction and all sensitive sites will be monitored, especially slopes, stream banks and hiking trails. Mitigation measures will be taken where necessary.

SPRINGWATER PROVINCIAL PARK

Figure 2

EXISTING FACILITIES



———— Provincial Park Boundary

- - - - Proposed Park Boundary

..... Nature Trail

..... Cross Country Ski

P Parking Lot

1 Entrance Control Office

2 Park Office and Administration

3 Pump House

4 Playground

5 Storage Building

6 Storage Building

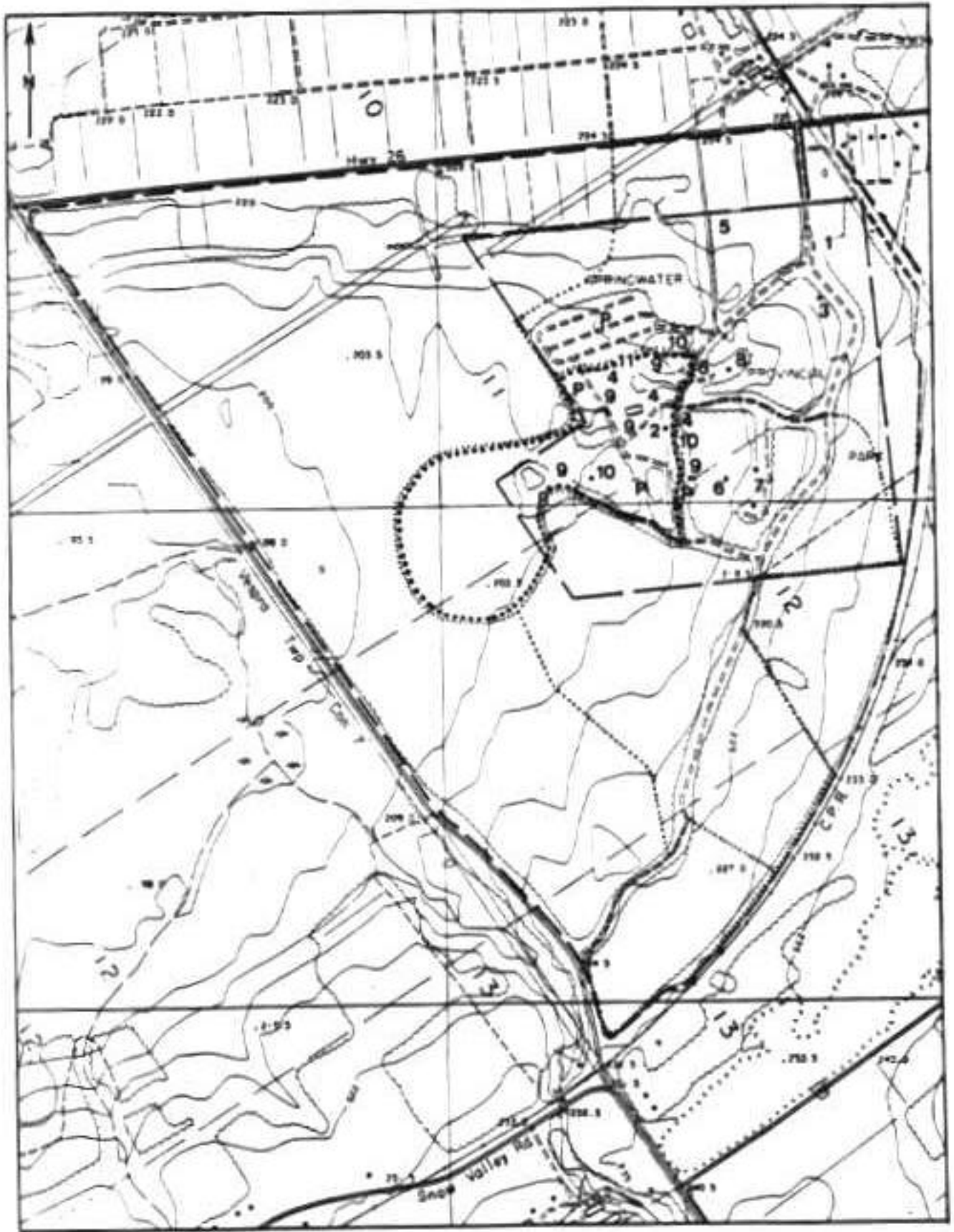
7 Waterfowl/Wildlife Display Area

8 Maintenance Building

9 Picnic Shelter

10 Washrooms

11 Playing Field



Part of the park is located within a selected sand and gravel resource area, of primary significance, consisting of glaciolacustrine beach deposits related to the abandoned shoreline of glacial Lake Algonquin. Aggregate extraction will not be permitted.

Numerous springs and seepages feed a series of streams and ponds in the park. The Midhurst Forest Tree Nursery used water from the largest of the park's springs to irrigate some of the nursery seedling beds. This had only a minor effect upon surface water flow through the park. Springs and seepage areas will be protected by controlling access to sensitive areas.

To help maintain the cold water nature of the water courses, the water control structures on the four largest ponds may be converted to bottom draw types.

8.2 Vegetation

The park contains an unusually large and diverse population of vegetation species given its small size. Approximately 90 percent of the vegetation has been directly affected by previous management activities including the planting and management of various coniferous tree species. The park development zone contains vegetation, which is intensively managed and must withstand high levels of impact from park users.

A vegetation stewardship plan may be prepared for the park. The plan should address the following objectives and guidelines:

- to restore and protect indigenous vegetation;
- to remove undesirable exotic tree species, such as Scot's pine, and reforest the areas with indigenous species;
- to improve local wildlife habitat;
- to control non-native and/or noxious weeds such as purple loosestrife;
- to continue a plantation management program

8.3.1 Wildlife and Waterfowl Exhibits

A number of wildlife and waterfowl exhibits representing species native to Southern Ontario

designed to promote red oak and shade tolerant hardwood forest communities;

- to remove vegetation which constitutes a safety hazard along trails, especially jack pine which is susceptible to blow down;
- to retain representative examples of coniferous plantations for educational, scientific and interpretive purposes;
- to Improve aesthetics throughout the park's development zone through implementation of planting and turf management programs;
- to protect vegetation from fire and serious insect infestations; chemical sprays will generally not be used to control forest insects unless the forest cover is substantially threatened.

8.3 Fisheries and Wildlife

Wildlife resources in the park are of local significance and are dominated by small mammals, herptiles and a representative population of songbirds. Portions of the park occur within the core shelter area of the Minesing Swamp winter deer yard complex. The park is also important as a migration corridor for white-tailed deer and a variety of other wildlife species. Park site planning and development should be sensitive to these situations.

At one time the ponds in the park were used for fish rearing as part of the provincial hatchery system. Other than for fish stocking in two of the artificial ponds, there are presently no significant fish populations in the park's water bodies due to the organic soils and lack of gravel for spawning areas. Rainbow and brown trout stocking may continue in the largest of the ponds to support fish viewing opportunities, however, fishing will not be permitted.

Hunting and commercial trapping activities will not be permitted. Control of nuisance animals may be carried out where deemed appropriate.

are a major feature of the Springwater Park. Interpretive kiosks with a series of panels provide information to park visitors.

Only orphaned, injured or imprinted wildlife will be accepted for park exhibits. The park does not seek a role as a rehabilitation centre and under most instances will redirect wildlife to other suitable facilities in the area. Healthy birds or animals will not be removed from the wild for display purposes, and breeding of captive specimens will generally not be used as a method of obtaining replacement stock.

Existing exhibits may be improved, upgraded or relocated as required. Relocation of the white-tailed deer display and development of a series of static sport fish exhibits are proposed.

Local First Nation communities may be permitted to collect naturally shed bird feathers and animal fur for ceremonial purposes (e.g. decoration of costumes).

8.4 Cultural Resources

A cultural resources inventory and study may be required to determine the full scope of the cultural resources of both Springwater Provincial Park and the former Midhurst Forest Tree Nursery. This information would benefit future interpretive planning and cultural resource protection.

9.0 OPERATIONS POLICIES

A park operating plan may be prepared to provide park staff with the necessary information required to operate the park on a day-to-day basis. In addition to addressing the operations policies which follow, the plan should include such topics as budget, staffing, maintenance schedules, enforcement and emergency services. The provisions of the plan should be consistent with the approved Ontario Provincial Parks Minimum Operating Standards. Park operations will be carried out in accordance with the approved park management plan subject to the availability of funding. If funding is not available then operations and services may

be curtailed as necessary with due regard for protection of park resources and facilities.

Community support will be sought for park operations and programs. Partnerships may be formed with local governments, other agencies, and non-government organizations and individuals to help operate and develop the park.

9.1 Natural Heritage Education

The goal of the natural heritage education program is to increase visitor awareness of Springwater's natural and man made resources, especially the unusual variety of vegetation and the displays of wildlife and fish. This will be achieved through interpretive and recreational experiences.

Emphasis will be on self-use facilities including a visitor orientation centre, walking/hiking trails, displays and interpretive panels that are particularly directed toward wildlife.

The three components of natural heritage education (information, interpretation and outdoor recreation) at Springwater will be carried out according to the following priorities and guidelines. A park natural heritage education plan has been developed for the park to address the program, its components and the guidelines in greater detail.

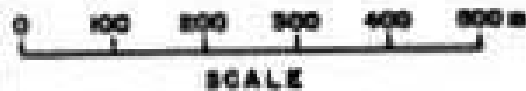
9.1.1 Information

This high priority component will serve to inform the visitor about facilities, services and activities at the park and the role of the park within the Ministry. In addition, recreational and interpretive opportunities in Barrie and the surrounding area may be identified. Publications, displays, signs, mass media and personal contact will be the elements most often used in the implementation of this service.

SPRINGWATER PROVINCIAL PARK

Figure 3

ZONING



————— Provincial Park Boundary

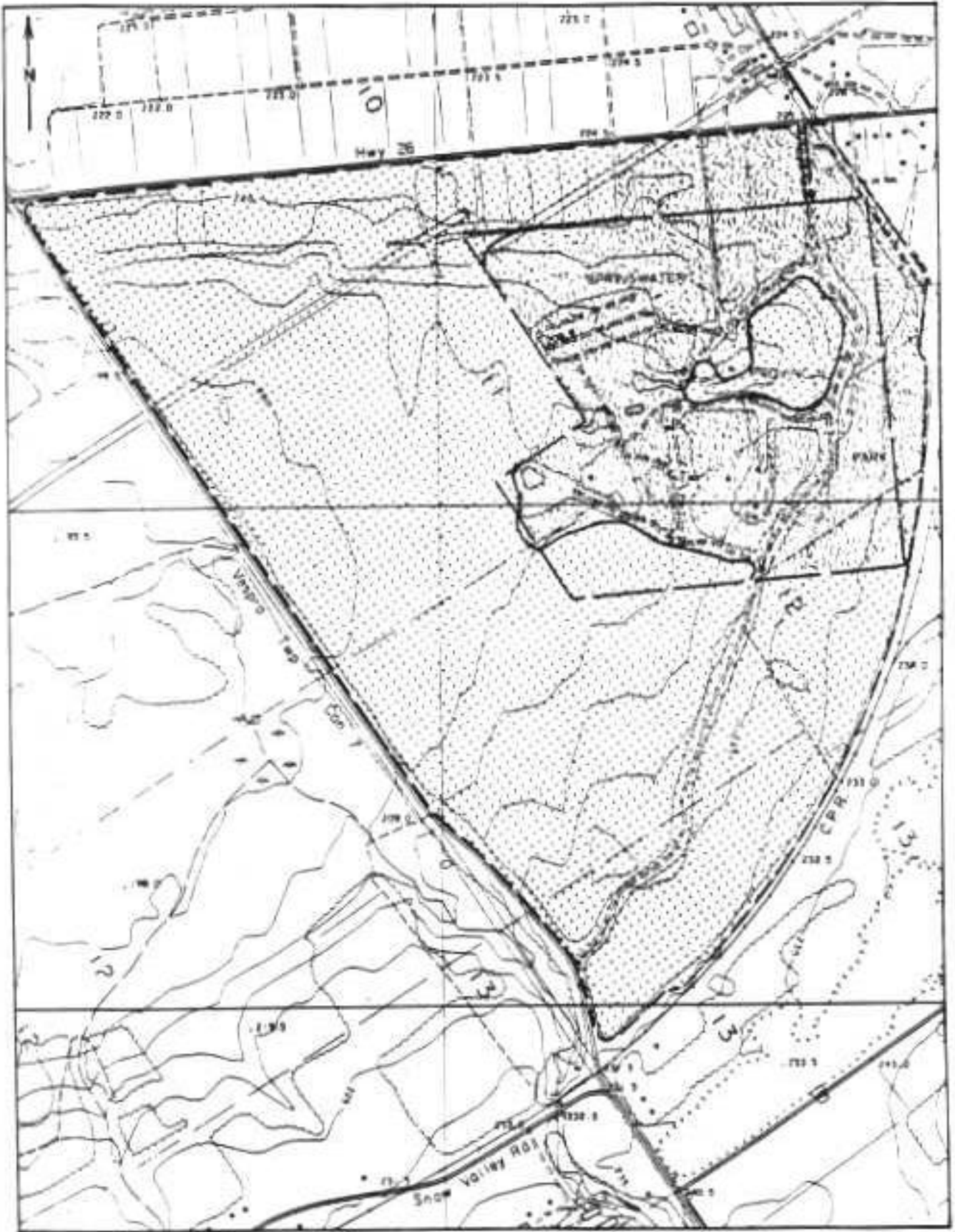
- - - - - Proposed Park Boundary



Development Zone



Natural Environment Zone



9.1.2 Interpretation

At Springwater this high priority component will provide for interpretation of one major theme and four minor themes.

Major Theme:

1. Wildlife of Southern Ontario and Ministry of Natural Resources wildlife management programs.

Minor Themes:

1. Reforestation and plantation management;
2. Vegetation abundance and diversity, in particular, the fern communities;
3. Historic evolution of the park and the former Midhurst Forest Tree Nursery;
4. Fish species in Southern Ontario.

Interpretive themes and messages will be presented through various activities and facilities. The wildlife displays, visitor centre and an interpretive walking trail will be the focal points. Interpretive facilities will be designed for self-use and may include a display for each species with kiosks containing information on management programs. Currently there are three kiosks containing information on waterfowl, upland game and raptors.

Springwater Provincial Park is recognized as one of the most popular and utilized outdoor education facilities in Simcoe County. Participants in outdoor education represent a significant proportion of park users. This component of the natural heritage education program will provide opportunities for groups to participate in interpretive and educational experiences. Staff assistance with outdoor education programs may be provided as time allows.

The existing park office may be converted to a visitor information centre.

9.2.3 Wildlife Viewing

9.1.3 Outdoor Recreation

This component has a somewhat lower priority at Springwater. The most popular recreational activities are picnicking, viewing wildlife displays, walking/hiking, cross-country skiing, structured and unstructured play and relaxing. Recreation equipment may be made available to the public through an equipment loan program. Play and sports fields may eventually be redesigned, upgraded and/or relocated.

9.2 Recreation Management

Springwater will provide opportunities on a year round basis for a variety of quality day use recreation activities. The capacity of the park at any one time is approximately 1900 persons based on parking for 545 cars and 3.5 persons per car. The following policies and guidelines will provide direction for the management of recreation activities and facilities. Limited upgrading and expansion of the recreational facilities is planned.

9.2.1 Picnicking

Group picnicking constitutes a significant portion of park use. Groups vary in size from small families to large company and special interest group picnics involving hundreds of visitors. This activity will centre around three large picnic pavilions and three smaller picnic shelters. The largest pavilion has two kitchens with running water and can accommodate up to 500 people. The two smaller pavilions are equipped with barbecues and can accommodate about 100 people each. Three other picnic shelters can handle approximately 25 picnickers each.

9.2.2 Winter Recreation

The park will provide facilities and access for winter recreation including cross-country skiing and snowshoeing trails, parking areas and kitchen facilities in the large pavilion. Cross-country ski trails may be groomed in order to provide a recreation experience for users of varying age and novice ability.

Wildlife viewing is a popular activity in the park. Visitors often combine the viewing of wildlife displays with other activities such as picnicking and cross-country skiing. The wildlife on display also serves as convenient subjects for both amateur and professional photographers and artists alike.

9.2.4 Hiking Trails

A self-guiding nature trail offers park visitors an opportunity to view a variety of forest environments. Hikers can also access the 400 kilometre Ganaraska Trail, which passes through the park.

9.3 Marketing

A marketing plan for Springwater may be prepared which would focus on the following items listed in order of priority:

- increased day use throughout the year by raising the park's profile both locally and regionally, including hosting special events, informing schools of the outdoor education opportunities, and encouraging group picnics; and
- increasing use of the park's cross-country ski trail system in the winter season.

Local marketing and promotion may consist of local news releases, information contained in tourist publications, distribution of park leaflets and articles in park tabloids throughout the local area. Marketing partnerships may also be explored and formed.

9.4 Research

All park research must be approved and conducted in accordance with policy.

Research such as provincial park day visitor surveys will be used to enhance the Ministry's effectiveness in managing the park. The assistance of local naturalist clubs may be

sought to conduct a reconnaissance level biological inventory on the Crown lands to be added to the park. Other appropriate research, such as a cultural resources inventory, may also be undertaken.

10.0 DEVELOPMENT POLICIES

While the park is intensively developed, a number of alterations, replacements and additions are required to improve both facilities and operations, and to complete the wildlife displays. The following are guidelines for this development.

10.1 Internal Access and Circulation

Some of the trails within the park have been upgraded to accommodate wheelchairs and those persons with physical disabilities. A playground and one of the existing washroom buildings have been retrofitted for barrier free access. As the park is used extensively by senior citizens, such improvements are a high priority. Further upgrading may occur as recommended by a physical demand analysis.

Overall vehicle and pedestrian circulation patterns will be reviewed and upgraded in conjunction with any other development projects to ensure public safety, ease of movement and protection of park resources.

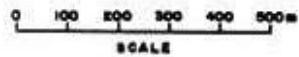
10.2 Administration Office

The administration office and gatehouse are presently located in two separate buildings. The existing gatehouse at the park entrance may be relocated and expanded, winterized and equipped for year round use. Park administration could then be moved into this building. Space could be provided for a visitor reception area, park clerk, gate staff, storage and superintendent's office. Additional parking for staff and visitors wishing to make inquiries could be provided beside the office.

SPRINGWATER PROVINCIAL PARK

Figure 4

PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT



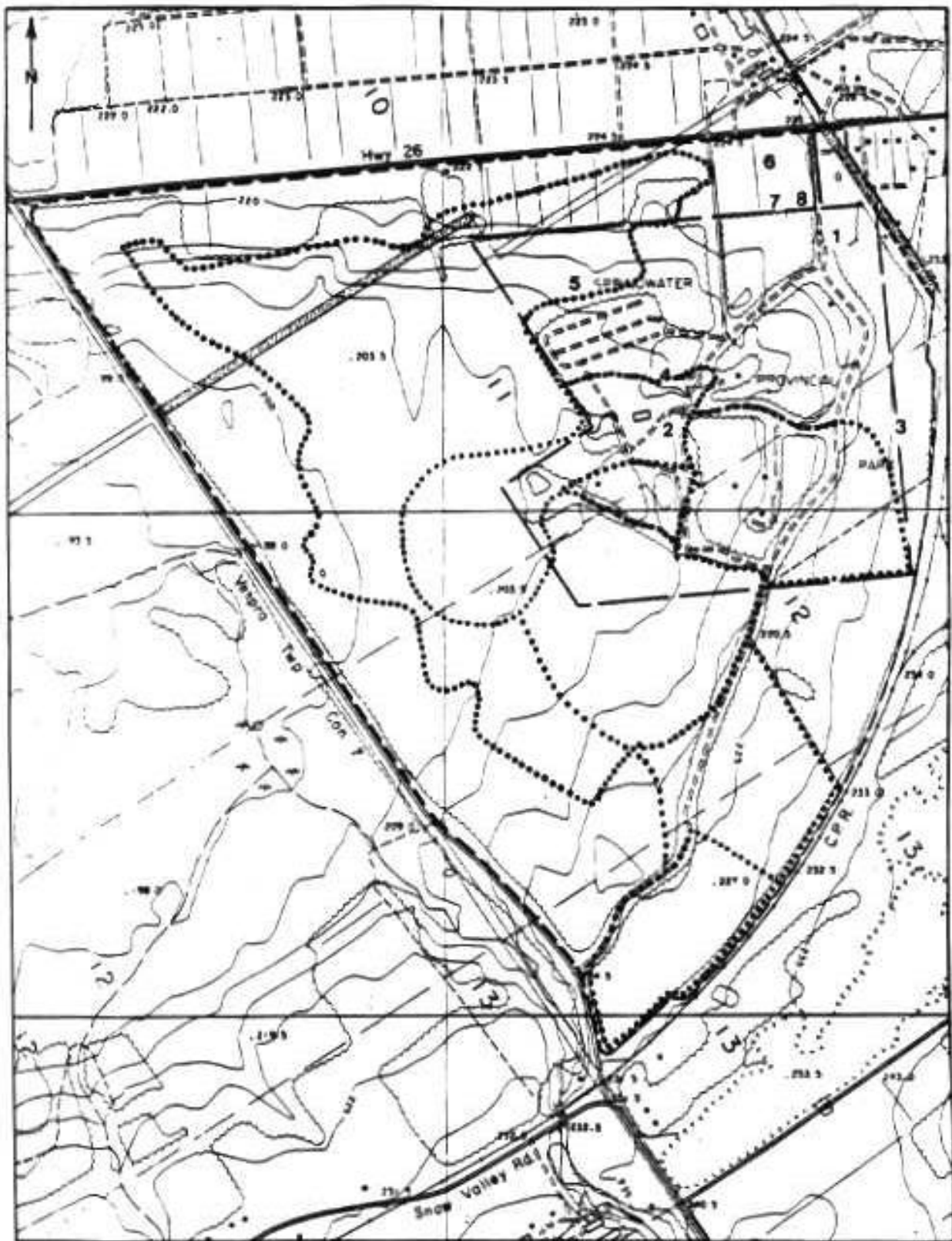
———— Provincial Park Boundary

- - - - - Proposed Park Boundary

 Proposed Acquisition Area

 Proposed Trail System

- 1 Entrance Control & Administration Office
- 2 Visitor Centre
- 3 White Tailed Deer Display
- 4 Sport Fish Display
- 5 Play Field
- 6 Sports Field
- 7 Parking
- 8 Washroom



10.3 Visitor Centre

The present administration office may be turned into a park visitor centre. It would include a display hall, theatre and assembly room, projection room, storage area and a small workshop. The theatre and assembly room would be of sufficient size to accommodate a group of 35 to 40 persons.

Displays in the visitor centre may eventually expand upon the park's major and minor interpretive themes and present information on the former Midhurst Forest Tree Nursery, other provincial parks and wildlife management within Midhurst District.

10.4 Fish and Wildlife Displays

Most of the wildlife displays have been repaired or rebuilt within the last few years. The following displays may be added or rebuilt to improve wildlife interpretation in the park. All Improvements will be done in compliance with both federal and provincial legislation and policy.

10.4.1 White-tailed Deer

The existing display is considered unsuitable due to the seepage of springs on the site. A new enclosure may be developed within the jack pine plantation as shown in Figure 4. Display location will take into consideration the sandy soils in this part of the park and slopes would be avoided.

This display would be the largest in the park. It would provide ample space for movement of deer and would be designed to recreate a natural habitat.

10.4.2 Sport Fish Display

A static sport fish display may be developed in the central portion of the park adjacent to the largest pond. The cold water species that would be considered for this display Include: rainbow trout, brook trout, brown trout, lake trout, Pacific and Atlantic salmon, and lake trout

Where possible, the Ministry will encourage public involvement and participation in capital development projects, such as the assistance of senior citizens from Simcoe County.

backcross.

10.5 Redevelopment of Ponds

The water control structures for many of the ponds are quite old. As they are replaced, bottom draw structures may be installed to Improve the cold water nature of the streams.

10.6 Play and Sports Fields

The existing play field is used for baseball, soccer and other activities. To reduce user conflicts and improve safety, the existing play field may be redesigned and/or relocated. Regulation size sports fields for baseball, soccer and other sports may be developed on open fields west of the park entrance.

11.0 IMPLEMENTATION PRIOR~ES

Implementation of this plan will be dependent upon the availability of funds for capital development. It is not possible to accurately determine when proposed development will occur. As funding becomes available, either internally or through partnerships, the plan will be implemented in a logical and cost efficient manner. The following priority list of projects will serve as a guide for development:

1. Improvements to the Internal sign system;
2. Continued improvements to park trails and access to buildings for the physically challenged;
3. Relocation of white-tailed deer enclosure;
4. Play field redesign/relocation;
5. Redevelopment of ponds;
6. Improvements to Internal access and circulation;
7. Sports field development;
8. Visitor centre development;
9. Sport fish display development;
10. Administration office development.

Necessary repair, upgrading and replacement of existing facilities may also be undertaken.

12.0 SUMMARY OF PUBUC CONSULTATION

In early summer of 1994, copies of the preliminary management plan and an Invitation to comment were sent out to neighbouring property owners, individuals, interest groups, local municipalities, and government ministries expected to have an interest in the planning process. Letters were also mailed out to all schools in Simcoe County and to known park user groups. Notification to the general public of the review period and availability of preliminary plan for review was accomplished through a news release and advertisements in local newspapers. An open house was held at Springwater Provincial Park in mid-summer to present the preliminary management plan and to receive feedback from the public.

The final park management plan reflects the input provided to the Ministry during public participation. Copies of the approved plan were distributed to stakeholders and those persons or groups who contributed to the management planning exercise.

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