

“A Frontier and a Homeland:” Ontario’s Far North  
and the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry, 1967-2017

The Far North of Ontario makes up 42 percent of Ontario's land mass, is home to over 24,000 people, and contains millions of hectares of undeveloped wilderness.<sup>1</sup> The Far North, which lies roughly north of the 50<sup>th</sup> parallel, is comprised of two distinct ecological regions. The Hudson Bay Lowlands form a band that runs parallel to James and Hudson Bays, and are home to wetlands that function as one of the "Earth's major carbon storehouses", sequestering a third of Ontario's annual carbon emissions. To the south lies the Boreal Forest Region, an area that stretches right across northern Ontario (and far beyond the province's borders) and is home to an abundance of wildlife, including more than 200 at-risk species such as woodland caribou, wolverines, and polar bears.<sup>2</sup> It is also home to 31 First Nations communities and two municipalities, and 90 percent of the Far North's population identifies as Indigenous people.<sup>3</sup> These remote communities are linked by air, rail, water, and winter roads, and are not connected to Ontario's main highway network system. People residing in Ontario's Far North "live as close to the land as anyone in North America, on landscapes that are unique and extraordinary."<sup>4</sup> Over the past 50 years the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry (MNR) has undertaken a number of important initiatives to protect and develop Ontario's Far North, ranging from establishing parks and reserves protecting its wilderness to working with local First Nations on developing ecologically sensitive and sustainable land use plans for the region. These initiatives, which reflect the MNR's interest in protecting Ontario's biodiversity while also promoting its economic development, have been remarkably successful over the decades.

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<sup>1</sup> Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources. "The Far North of Ontario Fact Sheet." Queen's Printer for Ontario, 2009.

<sup>2</sup> Riley, J. L. *Wetlands of the Hudson Bay Lowland: An Ontario Overview*. Toronto: Nature Conservancy of Canada, 2011. Pages 14-17.

<sup>3</sup> Government of Ontario. "Far North of Ontario." Queen's Printer for Ontario, 2012-17.  
<https://www.ontario.ca/rural-and-north/far-north-ontario>

<sup>4</sup> *Science for a Changing Far North: The Report of the Far North Advisory Panel*. South Porcupine, ON: Far North Branch, Ministry of Natural Resources, 2010. Page ii.

Ontario's Far North has been occupied by humans for at least 8,000 years, and it is the ancestral home to a number of First Nations groups and communities.<sup>5</sup> They historically resided along the region's many rivers and lakes, living a hunter-gatherer lifestyle as they moved from place to place in response to the changing seasons, the availability of food, and the demands of trade. When European explorers first arrived in Ontario's Far North in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, they made contact with groups belonging to the Ojibwe, Cree, and Oji-Cree First Nations. For the first few centuries, European settlement in the Far North was mostly limited to fur trading posts along the Hudson and James Bay coasts, while Indigenous lands and communities were spread throughout the region. The fur trade would be the central economic activity in the Far North for several hundred years, with enterprises such as the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) establishing a number of posts throughout the region. The HBC was granted exclusive trading rights by the English Crown to the area draining into Hudson Strait in 1670, and after holding title to it for two hundred years, the company sold it to the newly formed Canadian government. After several decades of legal disputes over land boundaries, the Ontario government eventually gained control over much of this territory as it expanded northward and westward after Confederation. In 1905, most First Nations in Ontario's Far North became signatories to Treaty #9. It surrendered Indigenous title to their lands in exchange for various forms of financial compensation, the creation of reserves, funding for education, and the protection of hunting and fishing rights. The treaty also opened up Ontario's Far North region "for settlement, immigration, trade, travel, mining, lumbering and other such purposes."<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Fahlgren, J. E. J., and Geoffrey J. Matthews. *North of 50°: An Atlas of Far Northern Ontario*. Toronto: Published for the Royal Commission on the Northern Environment on behalf of the Government of Ontario by University of Toronto Press, 1985.

<sup>6</sup> The Canadian Encyclopedia. "Treaty 9". <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/treaty-9/>

While the fur trade remained an integral part of life in Ontario's Far North during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the early 1900s also saw the Far North's economy begin to diversify as government and business began to exploit its potential for resource development. By the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the eyes of the Ontario government had been drawn northward, seeing the Far North as a new region it could explore and develop. In 1900, Crown Lands Commissioner E.J. Davis sent out ten expeditions to map and survey the lands between the Canadian Pacific Railway and James Bay in order to assess this region's potential for resource extraction and development.<sup>7</sup> In the early 1920s, Ontario's Department of Crown Lands and Forests commissioned another survey of the Far North region, and in 1931 the Department published a comprehensive report on Ontario's forests (the first – albeit rudimentary – “Forest Resource Inventory”), and it included the woodlands in the Far North.<sup>8</sup> Small scale settlements in Moosonee (est. 1903) and Pickle Lake (est. 1929) marked the farthest extent of non-Indigenous settlement in the Far North, the former established as a rival trading post to compete with the HBC's trading post in Moose Factory and the latter established as a mining camp after gold was discovered in the area in 1928. In 1931, Moosonee was chosen as the northern terminus of the Temiskaming and Northern Ontario Railway, and the rail link would be completed one year later.<sup>9</sup>

Over the next few decades the Ontario Department of Lands and Forests (DLF) had limited interaction with First Nations in Ontario's Far North, but beginning in the 1950s the DLF began to make efforts to improve their living conditions. The post war decades saw the provincial and federal governments enter into contracts, such as the Federal-Provincial Resource

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<sup>7</sup> Richard S. Lambert and Paul Pross, *Renewing Nature's Wealth: A Centennial History of the Public Management of Lands, Forests, and Wildlife in Ontario, 1763-1967* (Toronto: Ontario Department of Lands and Forests, 1967), 78.

<sup>8</sup> Armson, K. A. *Ontario Forests: An Historical Perspective*. Toronto: Fitzhenry & Whiteside, 2001. 137-138.

<sup>9</sup> The Canadian Encyclopedia. “Moosonee”. <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/moosonee/>

Development Agreement in 1962, whereby the provincial DLF and the federal Department of Indian Affairs coordinated their efforts to assist Indigenous peoples in Ontario's Far North on matters relating to fishing, trapping, forestry and forest protection.<sup>10</sup> This also included the DLF aiding in the provision of necessities such as housing and food, and assisting during emergencies. An example of the latter was the relief operation run by the DLF in 1966 to the First Nations settlement at Winisk on the coast of Hudson Bay after the location was hit by severe flooding.<sup>11</sup>

This period also saw the federal and provincial governments undertake new joint efforts to study the Far North's natural resources. Beginning in 1959 the DLF and the federal Indian Affairs Branch of the Department of Citizenship and Immigration jointly sponsored a study to determine the economic potential of Northern Ontario's fisheries resources; the aim of the exercise was to assess commercial fishing opportunities for First Nations communities.<sup>12</sup> A half dozen years later the federal and provincial governments began the joint "Northern Ontario Water Resources Studies" program, with the purpose of studying the "waters draining into James Bay and Hudson Bay in Ontario, to assess the quantity and quality of water resources for all purposes; to determine present and future requirements for such waters; and to assess alternative possibilities for the utilization of such waters locally or elsewhere through diversions."<sup>13</sup>

During the mid- to late 1970s, Indigenous leadership and advocacy in Ontario's Far North led to the creation of the Royal Commission on the Northern Environment, the first comprehensive government study of Ontario north of the 50<sup>th</sup> parallel as a whole. In September

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<sup>10</sup> Lambert and Pross, 546-547.

<sup>11</sup> Lambert and Pross, 548.

<sup>12</sup> Marshall, Terry R., and Nick Jones. *Aquatic Ecosystems of the Far North of Ontario : State of Knowledge*. Sault Ste. Marie, Ont.: Applied Research and Development Branch, Ministry of Natural Resources, 2011. P 8.

<sup>13</sup> Marshall, Terry R., and Nick Jones. *Aquatic Ecosystems of the Far North of Ontario : State of Knowledge*. Sault Ste. Marie, Ont.: Applied Research and Development Branch, Ministry of Natural Resources, 2011. P 10.

1976, Andrew Rickard, Grand Chief of the Grand Council Treaty #9, urged the government to begin an inquiry into a proposal by Reed Paper Limited to log over 30,000 square kilometres of uncut forest north of Red Lake.<sup>14</sup> Reed Paper Limited was the owner of the Dryden Paper Mill, a plant that had already been responsible for polluting the English/Wabigoon/Winnipeg River system with mercury, contamination that had caused serious health problems and the economic collapse of the local Indigenous community.<sup>15</sup> This action by the Grand Chief led to the establishment of an inquiry into the Reed proposal itself, but by 1977 the inquiry was expanded to include a study of resource development in the north as a whole. The Royal Commission on the Northern Environment would examine questions around resource development and its effects on the natural, social, economic and cultural environment of Ontario's Far North, and would offer proposals and recommendations based on its findings.<sup>16</sup> The commission made a large number of recommendations regarding the resource extraction industries, and concluded that, of all possible economic activities in the Far North, the industry with the greatest future potential was tourism. In response to these recommendations, the Ontario government established the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund to assist in developing tourism and infrastructure in the north. Going forward and in line with the commission's recommendations, the Ontario government also began to make a greater effort to include Indigenous communities in land planning policy in the Far North.

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<sup>14</sup> Ontario. "Final Report and Recommendations of the Royal Commission of the Northern Environment." Queen's Printer for Ontario, 1985. P. 1-11, 1-12.

<sup>15</sup> Dickason, Olive Patricia. *Canadas First Nations: A History of Founding Peoples From Earliest Times*. Don Mills: Oxford Univ. Press, 2007. Page 394.

<sup>16</sup> Ontario. "Final Report and Recommendations of the Royal Commission of the Northern Environment." Queen's Printer for Ontario, 1985. P. 1-11, 1-12.

In 1980, Ontario's Ministry of Natural Resources (the successor to the DLF) released draft versions of three Strategic Land Use Plans. They divided the province into three sections: the northwestern, northeastern, and southern regions.<sup>17</sup> Land use planning was the process by which the MNR would decide how best to manage the lands and the waters of the province. The MNR would do this by facilitating collaboration between Ministry experts and the general public in developing land use plans that would ensure that Ontario's resources would be used for the "greatest benefit of the people of Ontario."<sup>18</sup> From these Strategic Land Use Plans, local-level plans would then be produced, and they would focus on particular districts. One of these local plans was the West Patricia Land Use Plan, which was precipitated by Reed Paper's proposal in 1976 to acquire large tracts of land north of Dryden. Strong Indigenous opposition to the West Patricia plan halted forestry development in Ontario's Far North until 2000, when a new land use plan titled the "Northern Boreal Initiative" (NBI) was introduced by the Ontario government.<sup>19</sup> The NBI was established in response to First Nations' interest in engaging in commercial forestry in the Far North. Ultimately, the goal was to provide Indigenous people residing in the Far North with the opportunity to "take a leading role in land use planning and forest management" with the objective of "fostering sustainable economic opportunities in forestry and conservation."<sup>20</sup> The primary difference between this initiative and the Strategic Land Use Plans of the late 1970s and early 1980s was the emphasis on collaboration between First Nations and the MNR.

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<sup>17</sup> *Minister of Natural Resources: Annual Report* (1981): 27.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.* 27.

<sup>19</sup> Burlando, Catie. "Land Use Planning Policy in the Far North Region of Ontario: Conservation targets, politics of scale, and the role of civil society organizations in Aboriginal-state relations." PhD Thesis. University of Manitoba, 2012. Page 104.

<sup>20</sup> Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources. "Community Land Based Planning: Northern Boreal Initiative October 2002." MNR Field Services Division, 2002. Page 1.

The Northern Boreal Initiative would help lay the groundwork for further developments during the early 2000s. In July 2008, the establishment of the “Far North Initiative” (FNI) was announced. It would form the foundation for the 2010 Far North Act (FNA), and would aim to protect at least 225,000 square kilometres of Ontario’s Far North, roughly 50 percent of this region’s total land mass.<sup>21</sup> The Ontario government established two advisory groups to assist it in developing a framework for the FNI: The Far North Planning Advisory Council, which was made up of representatives from various stakeholders from industry and environmental groups, and the Far North Science Advisory Panel, which was comprised of university and government scientists. The former produced a report titled the “Consensus Advice to the Ontario Minister of Natural Resources” in 2009<sup>22</sup> and the latter published a scientific report titled “Science for a Changing North” in 2010.<sup>23</sup> The report by the Far North Planning Advisory council made a series of recommendations to the Ontario government. It highlighted the importance of giving people who live in the region an active role in decision-making in the planning process as it moved forward, establishing effective and significant environmental protections, and promoting economic prosperity for communities in the Far North.<sup>24</sup> The scientists with the Far North Science Advisory Panel reported that “new development in the Far North, one of the world’s most ecologically intact landscapes, must be planned and managed such that communities can achieve their planning objectives, including social and economic development, while protecting the integrity of broad-scale systems and processes even in a changing climate.” The two reports formed the foundation of the FNA (2010), and will shape Ontario’s Far North policy moving

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<sup>21</sup> Burlando, Catie. Page 127.

<sup>22</sup> Far North Planning Advisory Council. “Consensus Advice to the Ontario Minister of Natural Resources.” March 2009.

<sup>23</sup> Far North Science Advisory Panel. “Science for a Changing North.” Queen’s Printer for Ontario, 2010.

<sup>24</sup> Far North Planning Advisory Council. “Consensus Advice to the Ontario Minister of Natural Resources.” March 2009. Page 3.

forward into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It “sets out a joint (land use) planning process between the First Nations and Ontario” and also “supports the environmental, social and economic objectives for land use planning for the peoples of Ontario.” The FNA also ensures that land use planning is “done in a manner that is consistent with the recognition and affirmation of existing Aboriginal and treaty rights in section 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982, including the duty to consult.”<sup>25</sup>

With the introduction of legislation such as the FNA and initiatives such as the NBI, the Far North has seen an increase in new resource development projects in recent decades. Although Ontario’s Far North contains an abundance of natural resources, including timber and mineral resources, there has heretofore been relatively little development of them.<sup>26</sup> While resource extraction became a mainstay and central part of life in the portions of Northern Ontario accessible by road and rail, industries such as mining and forestry have historically been far less prevalent in Ontario’s Far North.

Resource development efforts in the Far North began in the late 1970s and 1980s; however, these were mostly unsuccessful. In 1980, mineral exploratory licences of occupation were issued to four companies to explore 1.4 million acres of land in the Hudson Bay lowlands. The companies were hoping to find lignite, a low-grade form of coal, and also expected to find minerals such as diamonds in the area.<sup>27</sup> These exploration efforts did not yield any major developments, however, and with the unsuccessful efforts of Reed Paper Limited to acquire vast tracts of land north of Red Lake for forest harvesting and the subsequent failure of the West

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<sup>25</sup> Government of Ontario. “The Far North Land Use Planning Initiative.” Queen's Printer for Ontario, 2012-17. <https://www.ontario.ca/page/far-north-land-use-planning-initiative>

<sup>26</sup> Carlson, Matt and Cheryl Chetkiewicz. “A Fork in the Road: Future Development in Ontario’s Far North.” Canadian Boreal Initiative/Wildlife Conservation Society Canada, 2013. Page 2.

<sup>27</sup> *Minister of Natural Resources: Annual Report* (1981): 30.

Patricia Land Use Plan, major resource extraction projects would come to a halt until the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

By that time, the success of initiatives such as the NBI and the passage of the FNA were helping open the Far North to resource development. As such, there are now a handful of mining and forestry operations that are active in the Far North. The common thread running through these developments has been the approach by the Ontario government that has, since the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century in particular, given special attention to working with First Nations communities when undertaking the development of new resources in the Far North. In order for these projects to move forward, under policies and legislation such as the Northern Boreal Initiative and the Far North Act, resource development groups have had to foster collaborative relationships with local communities.

Several developments in mining and forestry highlight the effects of these new collaborative laws, policies, and relationships in Ontario's Far North. In the case of mining, the international mining company De Beers signed an agreement with the Attawapiskat First Nation in 2005 to help exploit the nearby diamond deposit. The De Beers Victor Diamond Mine, which employs about 100 First Nations workers at any given time, was opened in 2008 about 90 km from the Attawapiskat First Nation.<sup>28</sup> It is worth noting that the company has announced its intention to shut down the mine in early 2019.<sup>29</sup> And in 2007-2008, the first commercial quantities of chromite and other minerals were discovered in the Ring of Fire region, an area some 5,000 square kilometres in size near a number of First Nation communities in

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<sup>28</sup> CBC News. "De Beers Eyes Expansion to Mine Project near Attawapiskat." CBC News. August 15<sup>th</sup>, 2013. <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/sudbury/de-beers-eyes-expansion-to-mine-project-near-attawapiskat-1.1397429>

<sup>29</sup> Bickis, Ian. "De Beers to Shut Down Victor Diamond Mine in 2019." Globe and Mail. November 1, 2017.

Northwestern Ontario.<sup>30</sup> The government announced in August 2017 that it would move ahead with an all-season road to the area after reaching agreements with local First Nations.<sup>31</sup> While both developments have generated a degree of controversy and come with their challenges, the companies involved in them are required to work with First Nations groups before, during, and after the developments take place to ensure that environmental and economic concerns are addressed.

Another major industrial initiative in Ontario's Far North has sprouted recently. It is the "Whitefeather Forestry Initiative", a project in Northwestern Ontario near the Pikangikum First Nation, and it is being driven by the First Nation community itself. In 1996, the Pikangikum First Nation wrote to the MNR requesting a dialogue on developing a community-based forestry strategy called the "Whitefeather Forest Initiative."<sup>32</sup> Although it took several decades of negotiations to move the endeavour forward, in 2013 the Pikangikum First Nation made history when it was issued a Sustainable Forest Licence by the MNR, the first time a First Nation had received such a licence in Ontario.<sup>33</sup>

In addition to economic development, protecting the environment has also formed a major part of the MNR's work in the Far North. One example of this approach was the new tack it took towards managing the polar bear population along the Hudson and James Bay coasts. In response to the over-hunting of this animal in the 1950s and 60s, the Canadian government

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<sup>30</sup> Chong, Jed. "Resource Development in Canada: A Case Study on the Ring of Fire." Library of Parliament, Ottawa, Canada, 2014. Page 1.

<sup>31</sup> Benzie, Robert. "Road to Ring of Fire mining development gets green light." Toronto Star. August 21, 2017

<sup>32</sup> Burlando, Catie. "Land Use Planning Policy in the Far North Region of Ontario: Conservation targets, politics of scale, and the role of civil society organizations in Aboriginal-state relations." PhD Thesis. University of Manitoba, 2012. Page 55.

<sup>33</sup> Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources, 2013. *Developing Ontario's Forestry Sector in the Far North*. <https://news.ontario.ca/mnr/en/2013/06/developing-ontarios-forestry-sector-in-the-far-north.html>

joined four other countries (Denmark, Norway, the United States of America, and the former Soviet Union) in condemning the practice. These countries would ultimately sign the 1973 International Agreement on the Conservation of Polar Bears, which included a pledge to improve the protection of its habitat.<sup>34</sup> Already by this time Ontario's Department of Lands and Forests had begun addressing this issue. In 1970 it had established Polar Bear Provincial Park, a 24,000 square kilometre wilderness-class park that many polar bears use during the ice-free season and that is home to about one-third of all polar bear maternity dens in Ontario.<sup>35</sup> The hunting of polar bears is currently limited to Inuit and First Nations groups, and in 1976 Ontario reached an informal agreement with the Hudson and James Bay communities of Fort Severn, Winisk, Attawapiskat, Kashechewan, and Fort Albany to limit the number of bears they killed each year. To monitor the situation and ensure compliance with the 1973 International Agreement on the Conservation of Polar Bears, the MNR has used aerial surveys and technologies such as radio tracking.<sup>36</sup> Since the mid-1980s the polar bear population has remained stable, numbering between 900 and 1,000 bears. However, the physical health and survival rate of polar bears has decreased yearly with the onset of problems related to climate change, which is the largest single threat to the survival of polar bears in the Far North.<sup>37</sup>

The MNR has also undertaken a number of important wildlife conservation efforts in its work to protect other wildlife, such as the woodland caribou. This animal lives throughout Ontario's Far North, and while it is difficult to ascertain accurately the number of caribou living

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<sup>34</sup> Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources. "State of Resources Reporting: Polar Bears in Ontario, December 2008." Queen's Printer for Ontario, 2008. Page 4.

<sup>35</sup> Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources. "State of Resources Reporting: Polar Bears in Ontario, December 2008." Queen's Printer for Ontario, 2008. Page 5.

<sup>36</sup> *Minister of Natural Resources: Annual Report* (1984): 18.

<sup>37</sup> Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources. "State of Resources Reporting: Polar Bears in Ontario, December 2008." Queen's Printer for Ontario, 2008. Page 4.

in the north due to their elusive and migratory nature, it is estimated there are at least several thousand across the region (according to rough estimates of the minimum annual count, which are not absolute population estimates but low-end estimates).<sup>38</sup> The range of caribou in Ontario has decreased by half since the mid-1800s, and this decline has been attributed to factors including “human settlement and land clearing, forest harvesting, landscape fragmentation, past overhunting, disease, and predation.”<sup>39</sup> Surveys on caribou herds were conducted as part of the West Patricia Land Use Planning process in the late 1970s, and in 1983 the Woodland Caribou Provincial Park was established in Northwestern Ontario.<sup>40</sup> In 1992 the “Northwestern Ontario MNR Woodland Caribou Technical Team” was established to work towards caribou conservation in northwestern Ontario, and a “Woodland Caribou Task Team” was established in the northeast in 1997. Then in the early 2000s, the Ontario government took further steps to protect this animal. As part of the Ontario government’s conservation efforts, the woodland caribou was designated as a species at risk and appended to the 2007 Ontario Endangered Species Act as a threatened species.<sup>41</sup> In 2008, the MNR began the implementation of the Far North Caribou Project (FNCP) with the goal of aiding land use planning in Ontario’s Far North using “caribou knowledge derived from aerial and ground surveys, remote monitoring through the use of caribou tracked by satellite collars, and aboriginal traditional knowledge.”<sup>42</sup> In 2009, the FNCP produced a report that provided a detailed and scientific outline of the lives and migration patterns of woodland caribou. The report is being used to inform Far North land use

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<sup>38</sup> Berglund et al. Page 59.

<sup>39</sup> Berglund et al. Page 3.

<sup>40</sup> Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry. “State of the Woodland Caribou Resource Report.” Queen’s Printer for Ontario, 2014. Page 19.

<sup>41</sup> Endangered Species Act, Statutes of Ontario 2007, c.6. <https://www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/07e06#BK68>

<sup>42</sup> Berglund, N.E., G.D. Racey, K.F. Abraham, G.S. Brown, B.A. Pond, and L.R. Walton. *Woodland caribou (Rangifer tarandus caribou) in the Far North of Ontario: Background Information in Support of Land Use Planning*. Ontario: Queen's Printer for Ontario, 2014. Page iii.

planning going forward and to assist ongoing caribou conservation and recovery efforts. Ontario also took steps towards developing a caribou population recovery process, and the MNR released the “Caribou Conservation Plan” (CCP) in 2009.<sup>43</sup> As of 2014, the MNRF had invested \$11 million towards the protection and recovery of caribou and by 2014 had developed the “Range Management Policy” to bring MNRF policy more fully in-line with conservation goals and efforts.

In addition to its work in protecting wildlife, the MNR has also undertaken important initiatives towards rehabilitating damaged lands and waters in the Far North. For example, working closely with First Nations groups, the MNR committed itself to cleaning and restoring the lands around the former Mid-Canada Radar Sites (MCRL). Built by the federal government in the 1950s in response to the perceived threat of aerial bombers and missiles from the Soviet Union attacking North America by flying over the North Pole, 17 known MCRL sites were created in Ontario.<sup>44</sup> By 1965, all had been shut down for strategic and economic reasons. The sites, however, were improperly decommissioned, and became sources of environmental contamination; one site became the focus of a joint contamination clean-up effort by the MNR, the federal Department of National Defense (DND), and the Ontario Ministry of the Environment in 1983-84. In 1997, representatives from the province of Ontario, the federal government, and local First Nations in Ontario’s Far North entered into a partnership with the goal of remediating and cleaning former MCRL sites in Ontario.<sup>45</sup> The first concrete steps in this

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<sup>43</sup> Ontario. Ministry of Natural Resources. “Ontario’s Woodland Caribou Conservation Plan.” Queen’s Printer for Ontario, 2009. <http://files.ontario.ca/environment-and-energy/species-at-risk/277783.pdf>

<sup>44</sup> Sistili, Brandy, Mike Metatawabin, Guy Iannucci, and Leonard J.s. Tsuji. "An Aboriginal Perspective on the Remediation of Mid-Canada Radar Line Sites in the Subarctic: A Partnership Evaluation." *Arctic* 59, no. 2 (2009). Page 142.

<sup>45</sup> Sistili, Brandy, Mike Metatawabin, Guy Iannucci, and Leonard J.s. Tsuji. "An Aboriginal Perspective on the Remediation of Mid-Canada Radar Line Sites in the Subarctic: A Partnership Evaluation." *Arctic* 59, no. 2 (2009). Page 143.

remediation project were undertaken in 2001, when the Fort Albany First Nation, the DND, and the MNR worked together to clean up and restore MCRL Site 050. In 2009, the Ontario government announced that the remaining sixteen MCRL sites would be cleaned up over the next six years at a cost of \$106 million.<sup>46</sup> By 2017, First Nations and the provincial and federal governments had worked together to clean up over: 6,520 drums (30,000 litres) of gas, oil and other toxic or harmful liquids; 126 cubic metres of asbestos and other hazardous materials; 1,640 litres of liquid PCBs; 3,970 tonnes of low-level PCB-contaminated soils; and 280 tonnes of PCB-hazardous soils and debris.<sup>47</sup> As a result, the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry was awarded the “ECO Recognition Award” by Ontario’s Commissioner of the Environment in early 2017. Projects such as the MCRL remediation plan attest to the MNR’s collaborative relations with First Nations and the Ministry’s significant efforts to protect the environment in Ontario’s Far North.

Since 1967, the MNR has worked with First Nations, scientists, industry, conservation groups, and other stakeholders in an effort to protect and manage the province’s Far North for the benefit of all Ontarians. This unique region requires a great deal of planning and protection as it is home to many endangered and vulnerable species, contains many valuable natural resources, and functions as one of the world’s largest sinks for carbon emissions. While the Far North is an environmentally sensitive area, the MNR has taken effective steps over the decades to protect this region by performing critical scientific research and implementing a number of important environmental protection policies in the area. Through initiatives such as the creation

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<sup>46</sup> Talaga, Tanya. “Cold War-era Radar Sites to get \$103 Million Cleanup.” *The Toronto Star*. June 22, 2009.

<sup>47</sup> Environmental Commissioner of Ontario. “Cleanup of Cold War Radar Site Earns Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry Award.” Office of the Environmental Commissioner of Ontario, 2017.  
<https://eco.on.ca/blog/cleanup-of-cold-war-radar-site-earns-ministry-of-natural-resources-and-forestry-award/>

of wildlife preserves (e.g., Polar Bear Provincial Park in 1970), the implementation of the Far North Act four decades later, and in 2010 the cleanup of the Mid-Canada Radar Line, the MNRF, in partnership with local communities, has taken a lead role in sustainably developing and protecting the Far North for generations to come. With the growth of the resource extraction industry and the increasing concerns about the effects of climate change, it is crucial that the MNRF continue its work in this area to protect the region's human and natural environment.