

June 11, 2004

Comments on:

***An Assessment for the Presence of High Conservation Values on the
Gordon Cousens Forest, Kapuskasing, Ontario, Canada Version 7.03***

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General

1. This document is intended to assess the status of the indicators, not to prescribe solutions. However, a considerable amount of text is devoted to describing mitigation measures etc., which I think is irrelevant and should be removed. I have tried to flag these in the digital copy of the report.
2. There is no mention of “focal species”. Caribou and marten could fit into this category.
3. I haven’t seen the appendices.
4. The document needs a summary table listing all the Items and whether or not they are HCV.
5. The document often departs from the Draft HCV Checklist.

HCV1

6. I was confused by the use of the terms “regionally rare” and “provincially rare”. Usually species ranked S1 to S3 are considered “provincially rare”. Need to clarify this and make sure the terms are used consistently.
7. pp. 5 – 8. Some Vulnerable, Threatened or Endangered bird species that nest in the GCF (according the *Breeding Bird Atlas of Ontario* website) are omitted. The are:
 - Bald Eagle (COSEWIC = NAR; OMNR = END)
 - Black Tern (COSEWIC = NAR; OMNR = VUL)
 - Great Gray Owl (COSEWIC = NAR; OMNR = VUL)
 - Short-eared Owl (COSEWIC = SC; OMNR = -)
8. p. 8. The peregrine falcon map is inaccurate. They nest on the east side of Lake Superior in Lake Superior Park
9. p. 8. Table 1.2. Use “predator avoidance” rather than “prey evasion”.
10. pp. 5 – 8. Are there any records of wolverine on the GCF?
11. p. 10. Has caribou range receded in the GCF? (p. 10). Range occupancy is the main variable that OMNR uses to monitor caribou populations.
12. p. 11- 12. It would be nice to have a landscape level assessment of caribou habitat (for example see Ontario Forest Analyst, contact Phil Elkie at Northwest Region Science and Information).
13. p. 11. Define “critical wintering area”.

14. pp. 14 – 15. Question 3: The nesting sites, moose mineral licks, etc. listed in Table 3.1 are more local values than regional hot spots. Need a line under *Assessment Results* to say so.
15. p. 16. Black ash, red pine and white pine are well within their mapped range (at least in the south part of the GCF). I'm not convinced that they really deserve discussion here.
16. p. 16. Drummond's Mountain Avens, on the other hand, is a disjunct population and should be mentioned.
17. pp. 20 – 22. Need more site-specific details on the status of Lake Sturgeon, Taiga Alpine, Purplish Copper, Macoun's Arctic, Weigand's Sedge on the GCF; where do they occur on the GCF, how many records, population trends, etc. (in many cases this will be "unknown").
18. p. 20. The NHIC species ranks in Table 5.2 need to be updated. I found several ranks that are out of date (Lake Sturgeon is G3G4, Spatulate Moonwort is G3, Weigand's Sedge is S1). The table should include the date of listing for each species (provided at the NHIC website).
19. pp. 19 – 24. The discussion under Question 5 is somewhat dismissive, suggesting that some of the species reported for the GCF are misidentified or otherwise false (e.g. p. 22: "...it is likely the species does not inhabit the GCF."). Unless there is evidence to the contrary, they should be treated as legitimate records.
20. pp 19 – 24. Correct spelling for Weigand's Sedge, *Zizia aptera*, Leiberg's Panic Grass
21. pp. 20 – 22. The records of *Zizia aptera* and *Panicum leibergii* are isolated occurrences in human disturbed habitats and may be introduced. They should not be considered HCV.
22. p. 20. Need to provide the date that the NHIC database was queried for rare species records.
23. p. 24. Question 6. Most of the text in this section describes marten and moose, but these species are not shown to be in decline, so the text is irrelevant.
24. p. 24. Several bird species inhabiting the GCF are declining in the boreal forest including Rusty Blackbird, Connecticut Warbler, and others. Refer to *Importance of Canada's Boreal Forest to Landbirds* (<http://www.bsc-eoc.org/borealbirdsprpt.html>). This is a high profile report, so it needs to be considered. p. 29.
25. Regulated parks within the GCF are not designated as HCV, but non-regulated sites are HCV. Is this what was intended?

HCV2

26. In general, this section fails to answer the questions listed on p. 36 because it doesn't compare GCF with the surrounding landscape. Need a table showing fragmentation stats, etc. for GCF vs. other forests in the ecoregion.
27. p. 32. Core areas etc. are said to be "quite low". Compared to what?
28. p. 40. Are the big unfragmented blocks (map 10.2) peatlands?
29. pp. 33 – 34. Figures 10.1 and 10.2 don't contribute anything. In fact, they contradict the point this section is trying to make.

30. Most of the text on pp. 32 – 35 fails to address the question and should be deleted.
31. pp. 36 – 37. Assessment Methodology. I don't understand how this was assessed. What was the threshold for deciding if an area was fragmented or not?
32. p. 36. "unfragmented landscapes" should refer clearly to roads and farmland rather than "permanent infrastructure".
33. p. 36. I was expecting an analysis of pattern of forest harvest and fire. This could be done using Marten Analyst software and FRI data (contact Phil Elkie at Northwest Region Science and Information).
34. p. 39. Figure 10.1. Quebec should be blank – not shaded as if it's all unfragmented.
35. p. 39. Seems to be using "mature" as a synonym for "old growth". Ontario has guidelines defining old growth by ecosite. If this document is using a different definition of old growth, it needs to be clearly defined. (or better yet, use a different expression).
36. p. 39. This section compares forest landscapes within the GCF, but makes no comparison with the surrounding ecoregions. It therefore fails to answer Question 12 (on p. 36).

HCV3

37. p. 42 – 43. Question 14. How can this section conclude that "forest ecosystem types on the GCF have remained relatively stable" given that the shortcomings of the data? (landbase changes, uncertainty about the status of red pine, white pine, black ash).
38. p. 43. Question 15. This section should include a list of rare ecosystems (G1 - G3) as ranked by Natureserve (<http://www.natureserve.org/>) and an assessment of their status in the GCF. For example *Pinus strobus* / *Acer spicatum* - *Corylus cornuta* Forest is ranked G3G4. This should be relatively easy since few of the forest communities are G1-G3 and the classification is cross-referenced to OMNR's Forest Ecosystem Classifications.
39. Should HCV3 include an assessment of old growth forest?

HCV4

40. This section fails to answer the questions listed in the HCV Checklist . It describes mitigation steps rather than an assessment of the values.
41. This section should focus on hydrological values. For example, the forest is the headwater for XX rivers, it includes XX ha of wetland, it supports XX cold water fisheries dependant on forest cover, it serves for groundwater recharge, it provides drinking water and flood protection for XX communities, See the *Northern Ontario Wetland Evaluation Manual* for some guidance.
42. Are there any provincially significant wetlands on the GCF?
43. p. 45. Most of the section on *Assessment Results* describes OMNR guidelines and is irrelevant.

HCV 5 and 6

44. This section fails to conclude if any of the four basic needs are HCV.

45. pp. 47 – 48. Cultural. Describes OMNR guidelines, etc., but doesn't assess if the forest is significant. The sections on Recreation and Forest Industry are similar.

Other

46. Citations should be in alphabetical order.
47. Missing citations for Bergeron et al (cited p. 38), Leach 1998 (cited p. 43), Gurd et al. 2001 (cited p. 37).