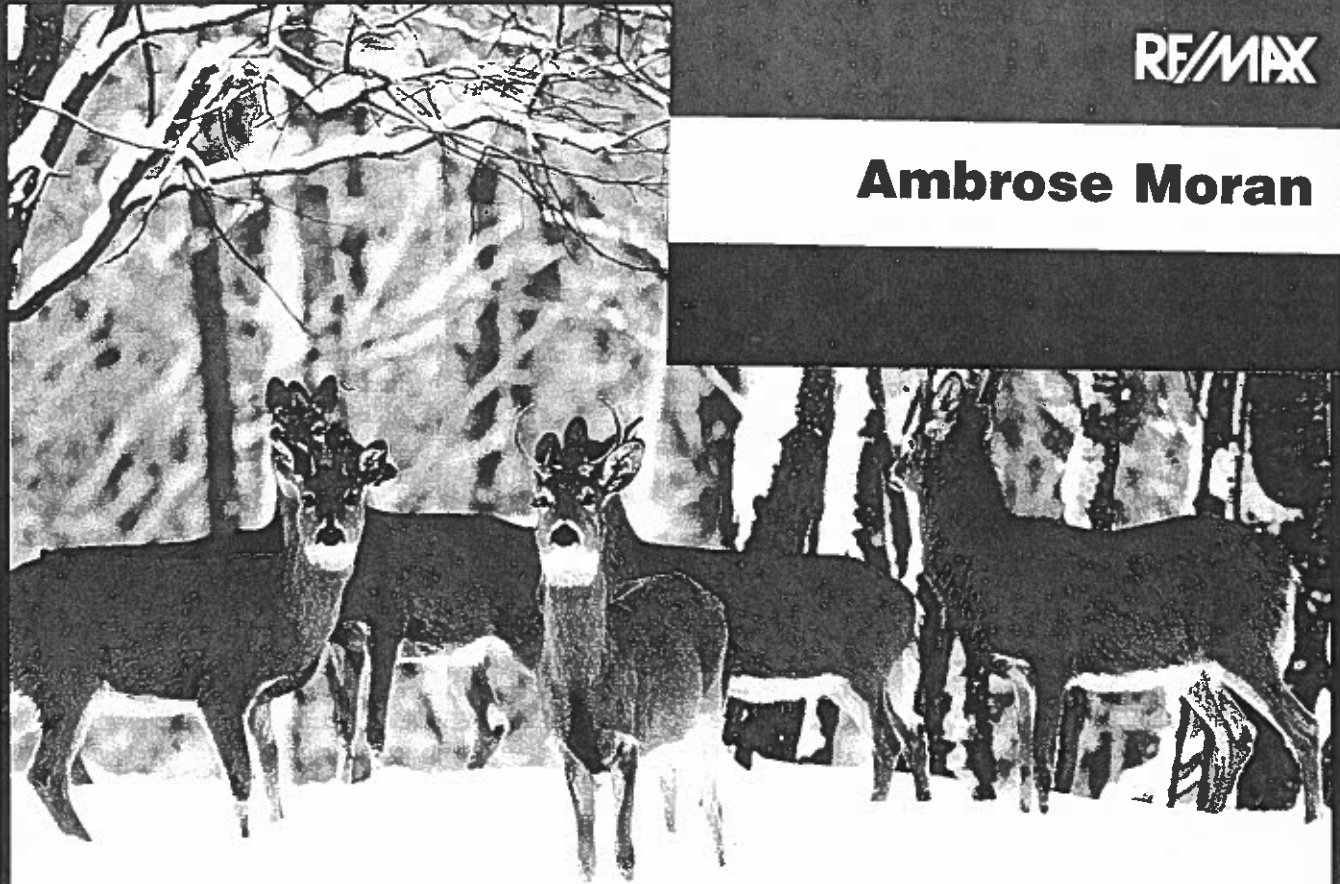


RE/MAX

Ambrose Moran



*DEER HUNT  
IN THE  
PETERBOROUGH*

*CROWN GAME  
PRESERVE*

BY BRIAN BACK

AMENDMENTS TO THE GROUND RULES GOVERNING THIS CONTROVERSIAL  
HUNT WILL MAKE A BIG DIFFERENCE TO THE TWO SIDES IN THE DISPUTE

# PETERBOROUGH CROWN GAME PRESERVE

Until last fall, it was an uneven match. On one side: the Ministry of Natural Resources, the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters, and other hunting groups, fighting since 1983 for an annual controlled deer hunt in the Peterborough Crown Game Preserve. The side had won the first hunt in 1985 and was gearing up for the second in November 1986. On the other side: the Jack Lake Cottagers' Association, the Peterborough Field Naturalists, and other local citizens opposing the hunt.

Ordinarily the odds would continue to favour the stronger team. But last October, the Ontario Environmental Assessment Advisory Committee helped to even the odds when, in its report on the proposed 1986 hunt, it in effect changed the ground rules of the match. Although the '86 hunt was allowed to proceed, the committee put a number of controls on future hunts. Whether they will be implemented in time for an '87 hunt is open to question.

The MNR first proposed the hunt in 1983, claiming that the resident and migratory herds totalling 2,000 deer (1974 MNR estimate) had exceeded the carrying capacity of their joint winter yard within the game sanctuary, which is located north of Peterborough, near Apsley. Predicting a mass starvation that would cause suffering to the deer, reduce deer-viewing opportunities in the preserve and reduce deer-hunting opportunities in neighbouring townships, the ministry decided to reduce the size of the resident herd with a public sport hunt.

What the ministry failed to appreciate was the determination of its opponents. The hunt proposal had stunned the cottagers of Jack Lake, whose properties lie within the Peterborough Crown Game Preserve (about 25% of the preserve is patented land). The cottagers considered the sanctuary a prime virtue of their property and integral to their appreciation of it. There had been no hunting in the preserve since its creation in 1927, and this had contributed toward the semi-tame condition of the deer. "No self-respecting hunter would hunt in a zoo,"

said Ambrose Moran, vice-president of the Jack Lake Cottagers' Association.

The MNR also underestimated how well informed much of the opposition would be. The ministry was challenged on its population studies, starvation estimates, habitat management, interpretation of habitat quality, and nearly every other piece of information it provided in support of the hunt. "The ministry's approach is open to question and incapable of providing accurate research data on which to plan future courses of action," said Morris Niblett of the Peterborough Field Naturalists.

With the two sides faced off and emotions rising, the issue often polarized along pro-sport-hunting and anti-sport-hunting lines. At times, the flurry of

## THERE HAD BEEN NO HUNTING IN THE PRESERVE SINCE ITS CREATION IN 1927

vociferous letters-to-the-editor in local newspapers even slipped into urban-versus-rural and cottagers-versus-locals attacks.

Although the MNR met with interest groups, it undermined the process by frequently amending its initial proposal without sufficient public consultation. The 100-deer harvest became a 200-deer harvest, and the bow hunt became a shotgun-only hunt, but local residents often learned of the amendments only by reading about them in the newspaper or hearing the news on the street in Apsley.

After two and a half years of controversy, the MNR held the first two-week controlled deer hunt in November 1985.

Hunt opponents decided to try to halt the 1986 hunt by seeking an environmental assessment. The Environmental Assessment Act requires the government to conduct formal assessments on the environmental and human impacts of its projects and programs. The assessments are intended to prevent environmental damage before it starts and to permit public

participation in the decision-making process.

One stumbling block stood in the way of securing an assessment for the hunt. The environment minister under the previous Conservative government, using the extremely broad discretionary powers given him under the act, had granted the MNR an exemption for its "wildlife population and habitat management activities." (The frequency with which these discretionary powers are used has inspired environmentalists to dub the act the "Environmental Exemption Act.")

However, the minister may require an activity to be subject to the act if it generates an unusual amount of public concern. Environment Minister James Bradley could not ignore deputations and a petition requesting an assessment on the controversial hunt. He directed the Environmental Assessment Advisory Committee, whose members are from outside government, to report on whether the hunt required an environmental assessment.

The committee held a public meeting in October 1986 in Apsley, near the preserve. In a standing-room-only, ten-hour meeting in the community centre, the committee received ten petitions and 151 submissions.

The MNR made some startling admissions. It was not certain of the size of the resident herd, which was the object of the hunt. Its claim of large-scale starvation over the winter of 1981-82 was based on having found seven dead deer. It attributed some of the overpopulation to its own management: deer-feeding programs; local trapping of the only natural predator, the wolf; and logging that opened up clearings and caused brush growth upon which the deer fed.

In its 19-page report on the proposed hunt, the Environmental Assessment Advisory Committee concluded that the MNR had not conducted proper planning and was "proceeding without accurate information," such as the size of the resident and migratory herds and their effect on the habitat. The report chastised the ministry (which was fully aware of the

public controversy surrounding the issue) for delaying the announcement of the hunt until September 2 and for not giving hunt opponents a public forum until October 17—two and a half weeks before the start of the hunt on November 3.

The committee recommended that:

1. cabinet rule on the use of the preserve—whether it is to provide deer hunting or wildlife viewing, or both.
2. hunts in the preserve not be permitted after 1986 until a public planning process for wildlife management activities is completed. Requirements for the planning process must be set out in a separate exemption order applying specifically to wildlife management in

this Crown game preserve. The process is to be monitored by MOE, and unresolved conflicts are to be referred to the minister of the environment, who may order an environmental assessment.

3. if the above conditions on future wildlife management were accepted, an environmental assessment would not be required for the 1986 hunt.

The ministries of the environment and natural resources accepted the recommendation for a long-term management plan, and the '86 hunt went ahead as proposed.

What is the likelihood of an '87 hunt? At the time of this writing (three months

after the committee delivered its report), the MNR does not seem to be moving very quickly on recommendation 2. Since the recommendation requires a lengthy public consultation process, it's doubtful that the MNR would be ready for a hunt this fall. With '87 likely to be an election year, the issue may remain low-profile this year, with a renewed push for a hunt in 1988.

With both sides still taking stock of the new ground rules, it's a little early to predict how this issue will be resolved. One thing is certain: neither side is ready to throw in the towel. □

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## ONTARIO'S CROWN GAME PRESERVES

With the advance of settlement in North America and the transformation of the land under the plough and the saw, populations of game and fur-bearers had gone into decline by the turn of the twentieth century. Hunting controls, the first tools of conservation, failed to stem the fall. The United States and Canada started to look for a cure in wildlife refuges or game preserves—sanctuaries closed to hunting and trapping.

The theory behind game preserves was that, by establishing a sanctuary to protect the breeding stock and breeding grounds of game and fur-bearers, species would multiply until population pressure within pushed the surplus wildlife into surrounding areas. This meant that surplus game would become available for hunting and surplus fur-bearers available for trapping. It was a straightforward leave-it-to-nature approach requiring no effort, except to set aside the land and enforce the hunting and trapping prohibitions.

Reacting to the earlier American adoption of a game-refuge policy, the Evans Commission on Ontario Game and Fish proposed, in 1910, a system of preserves. The Game and Fisheries Department established the first preserves in 1917. The action, however, merely rubber-

stamped two existing private waterfowl refuges at the request of their owners—the Peasemarth Farm Sanctuary in Grey County and Jack Miner's already-famous sanctuary near Kingsville.

Faced with the continuing decline in game and fur-bearers, Donald McDonald, deputy minister of the department and the architect of the province's Crown game preserve system, still had to overcome political resistance against preserves. It was not until 1923 that the strings were loosened and he was able to implement his blueprint for the system. McDonald also expanded the purpose of the preserves to "provide an attraction for the tourist."

The growth was staggering. By 1930, the department had created 56 preserves on 1.5 million hectares of private and Crown land, and by 1940, 121 preserves on 2.5 million hectares.

In 1933, conservationist Aldo Leopold published his book *Game Management*, which opened a new era in "the art of making land produce sustained annual crops of wild game for recreational use."

Leopold pointed out that, contrary to popular belief, some species simply did not range out of the preserves to stock surrounding areas. Other species contradicted the nature-can-do-it-alone principle; their populations would not expand

for optimum recreational use without human control of predators, food, cover and other limiting factors. For example, the opening of clearings in a deer yard was more effective in increasing the deer herd than the provision of a hunt-free preserve.

But the Game and Fisheries Department remained committed to preserves. It did not adopt the principles of game management until 1946, when it merged into the Department of Lands and Forests (forerunner of the MNR). Breeding-ground preserves began to be seen as an anachronism that unnecessarily reduced the land available for hunting. The number of preserves was cut back to 67 by 1960, to 53 by 1970, and to 15 by 1980.

Today, the MNR uses a few of the 15 remaining preserves, such as Chapleau, for research and as pools of surplus wildlife to transplant elsewhere. But the purpose of many of the other preserves has become unclear over the years. Each has its own history, and its present purpose as perceived by local users may not always be the same as its intended purpose. When the time comes to re-examine the Crown game preserve system in this province, the only proper way of proceeding will be to hold public consultation meetings for each preserve, rather than treating them as a class. □