



## STATE OF ONTARIO'S PROTECTED AREAS

Recreational Use and Traditional Outdoor Heritage Opportunities

2021

# State of Ontario's Natural Resources Indicator Report

## Recreational Use and Traditional Outdoor Heritage Opportunities

This Indicator summarizes the number of recreational opportunities and traditional outdoor heritage activities available to visitors to provincial parks and conservation reserves.

### Status



**Status:** Good



**Trend (Long-range):** Improving

### Why it's important

Objectives for providing opportunities for outdoor recreation and traditional outdoor heritage activities in provincial parks and conservation reserves in Ontario are provided in the *Provincial Parks and Conservation Reserves Act, 2006*:

- **Provincial Parks:** “To provide opportunities for ecologically sustainable outdoor recreation opportunities and encourage associated economic benefits.”
- **Conservation Reserves:** “To provide opportunities for ecologically sustainable land uses, including traditional outdoor heritage activities and associated economic benefits.”

It is important to track both the number of opportunities (e.g., campsites, trails, fishing opportunities) and, where possible, the number of visitors seeking to participate in those opportunities. As Ontario Parks has a dual mandate of protection and enjoyment, this measure will help us to understand the demand for recreational opportunities and the potential human use pressures on protected natural environments. Information from this measure will help to understand the provision of opportunities for recreation, tourism and outdoor heritage activities by Ontario Parks in a range of settings.

### How we monitor

We compile the number of opportunities available to visitors over the time series.

- **Recreational opportunities:** Though numerous opportunities are offered through the natural environment in provincial parks and conservation reserves (swimming, canoeing, hiking, etc.), this measure focuses on the built infrastructure of trails and overnight opportunities such as campsites and roofed accommodation.
  - **Overnight Opportunities** – We compile the number of campsites (car camping and interior camping) from the Park Statistics publication by the required spatial scales. The number of developed campsites is the number of car camping sites. These numbers were taken from the Park Statistics publication and spreadsheets. The number of interior campsites and roofed accommodations was taken from an internal Ontario Parks information database. Roofed accommodations include cabins, cottages, lodges, yurts, soft-sided shelters, and campsites equipped with trailers.
  - **Trails** – Length of trails is determined by calculating kilometres of official or authorized trail available to visitors.
- **Traditional Outdoor Heritage Activities:** We report on the number of provincial parks and conservation reserves that provide recreational hunting opportunities, contain water bodies that support recreational fishing opportunities, and in which commercial trapping is permitted.

We also compile visitation data at operating provincial parks and calculate means for each visitor type over the time series.

- **Number of visitors (car campers, day-visitors and interior users) at operating provincial parks:** We compile the total number of visitors, total number of day-use visitors, total

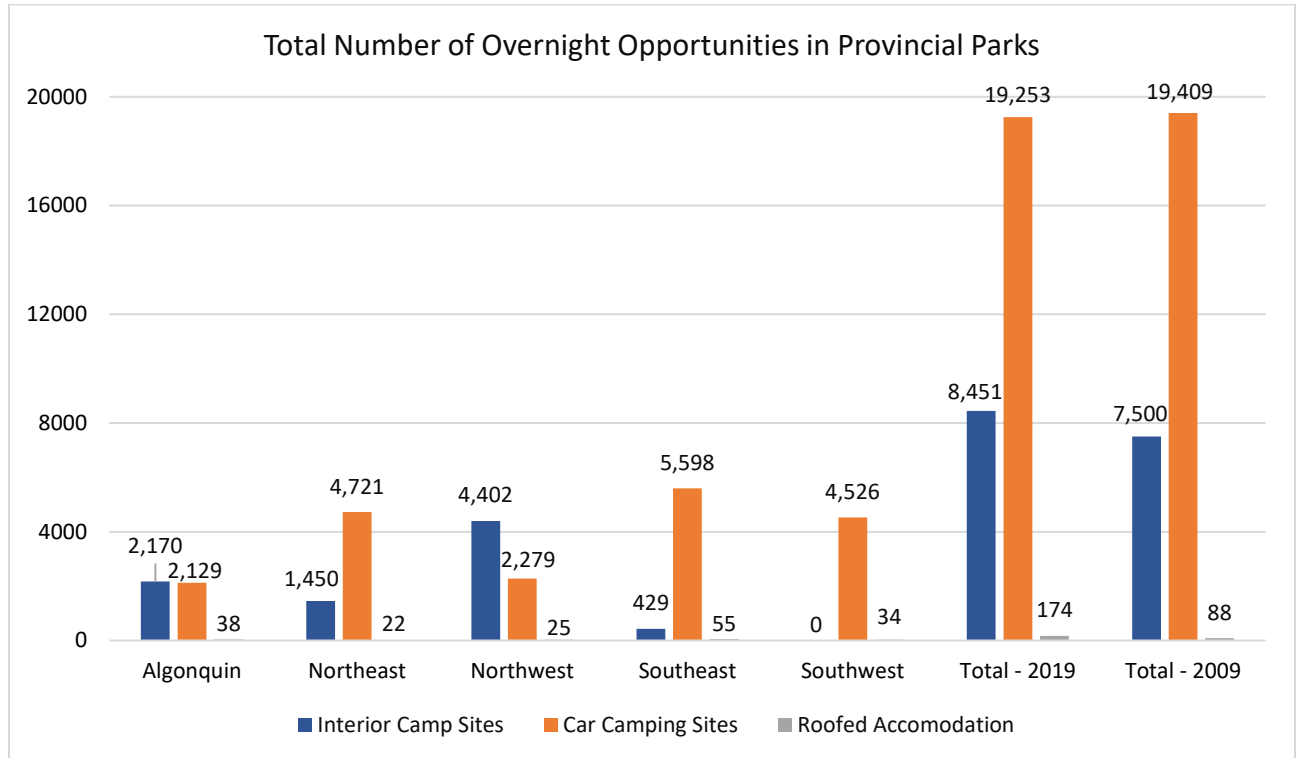
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number of daily vehicle permits, total number of seasonal vehicle permits, total number of bus permits, total number of campers, total number of camper nights, and total number of interior camper nights.

## Data

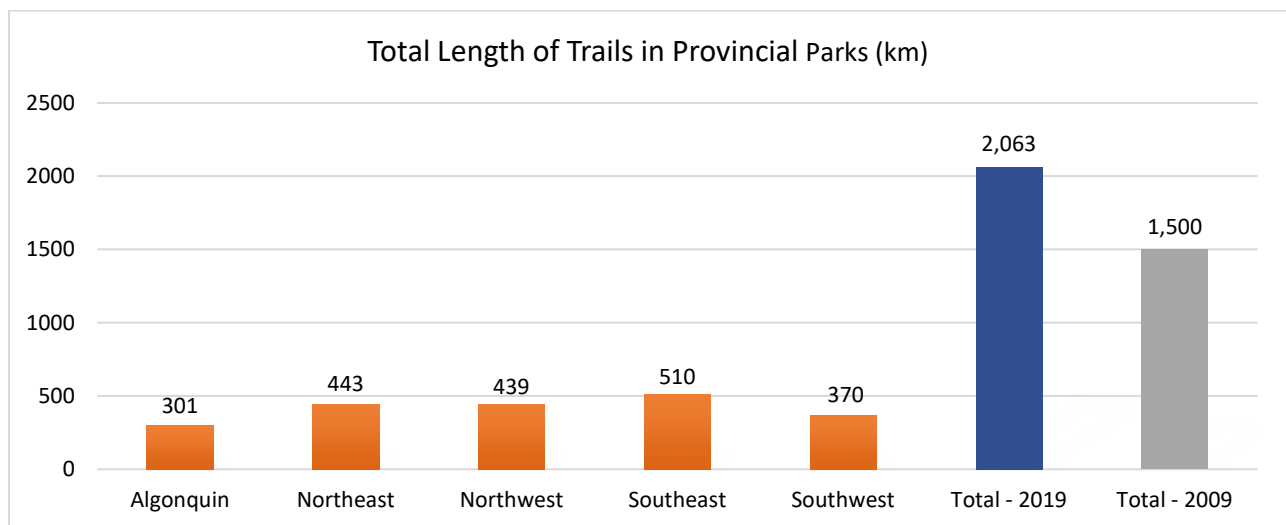
### Amount of Recreational Opportunities

- Overnight Opportunities in Provincial Parks**



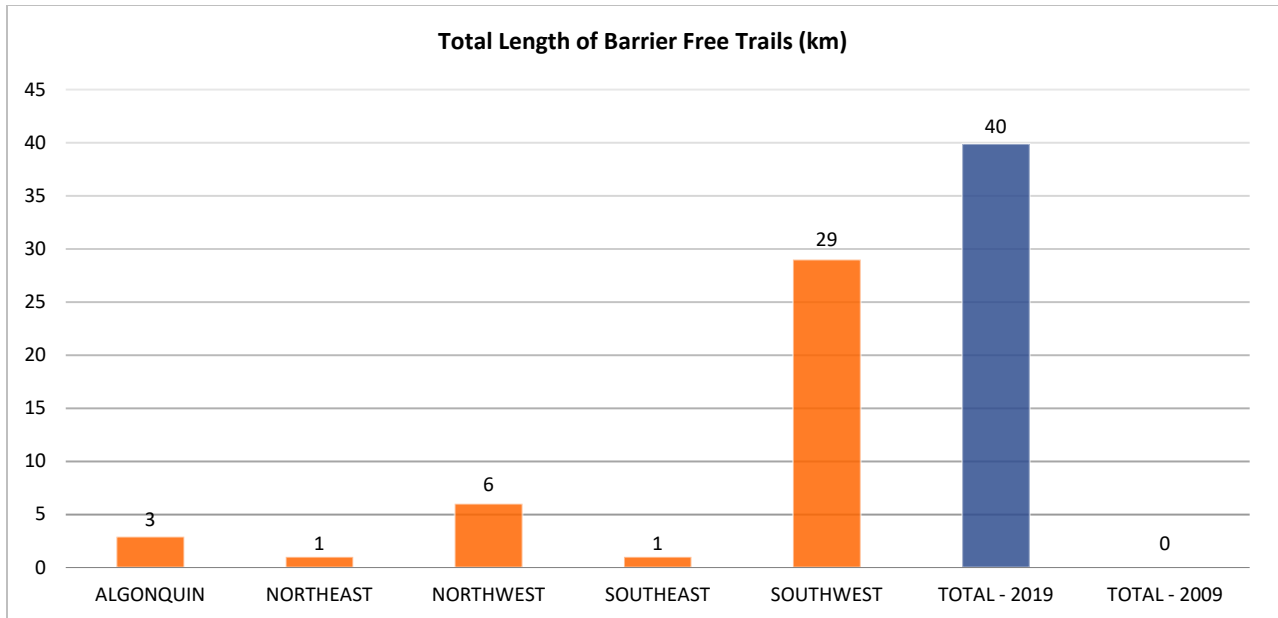
**Figure 1 - Total Number of Overnight Opportunities in Provincial Parks**

- Trails in Provincial Parks**



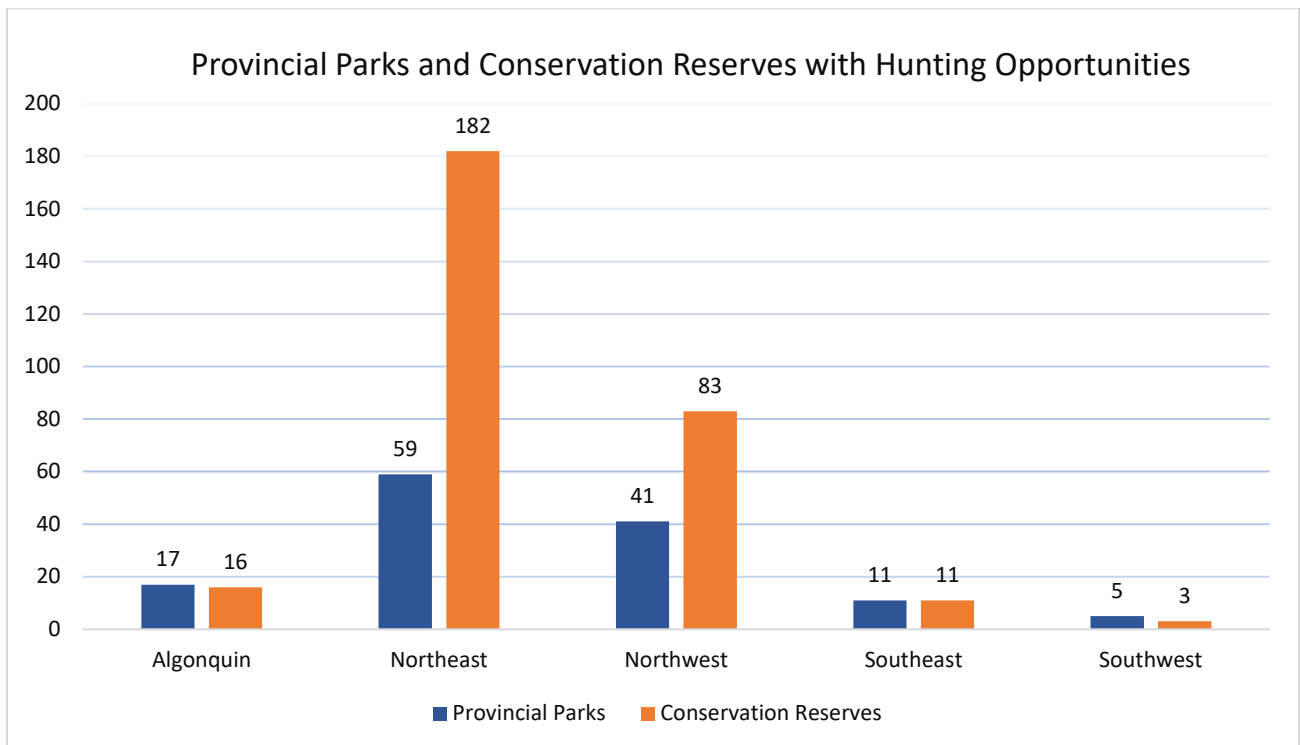
**Figure 2 - Total Length (km) of Trails in Provincial Parks**

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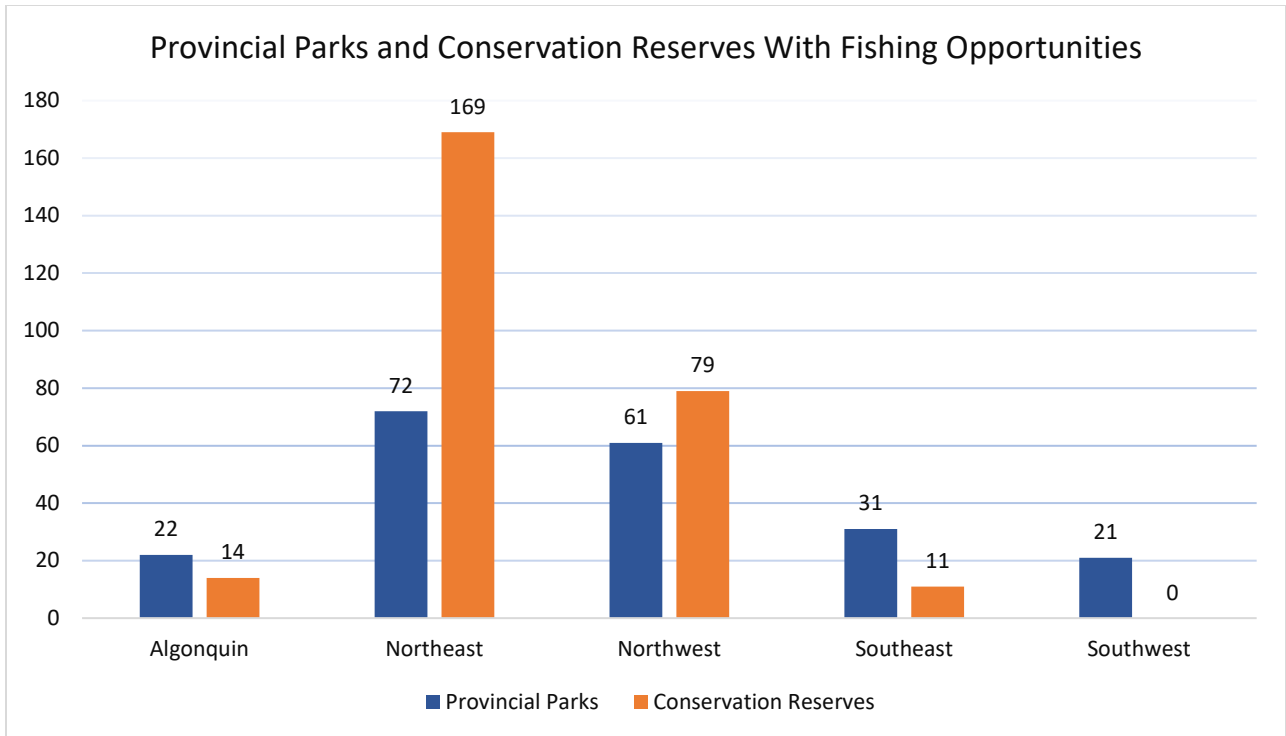
**Figure 3 - Total Length (km) of Barrier Free Trails in Provincial Parks**

- **Traditional Outdoor Heritage Activities**

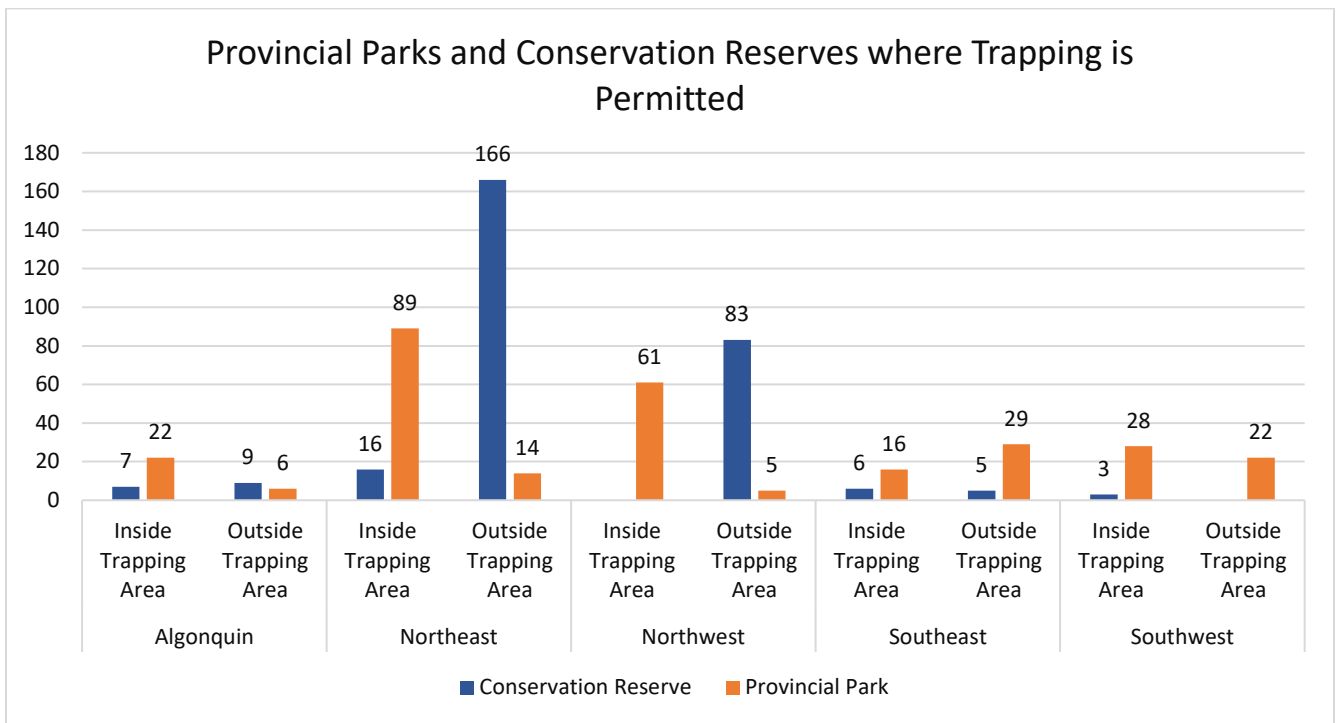


**Figure 4 – Provincial Parks and Conservation Reserves with Recreational Hunting Opportunities**

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**Figure 5 – Provincial Parks and Conservation Reserves with Recreational Fishing Opportunities**



**Figure 6 – Provincial Parks and Conservation Reserves where Commercial Trapping is Permitted**

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## Visitation

- Operating Provincial Parks

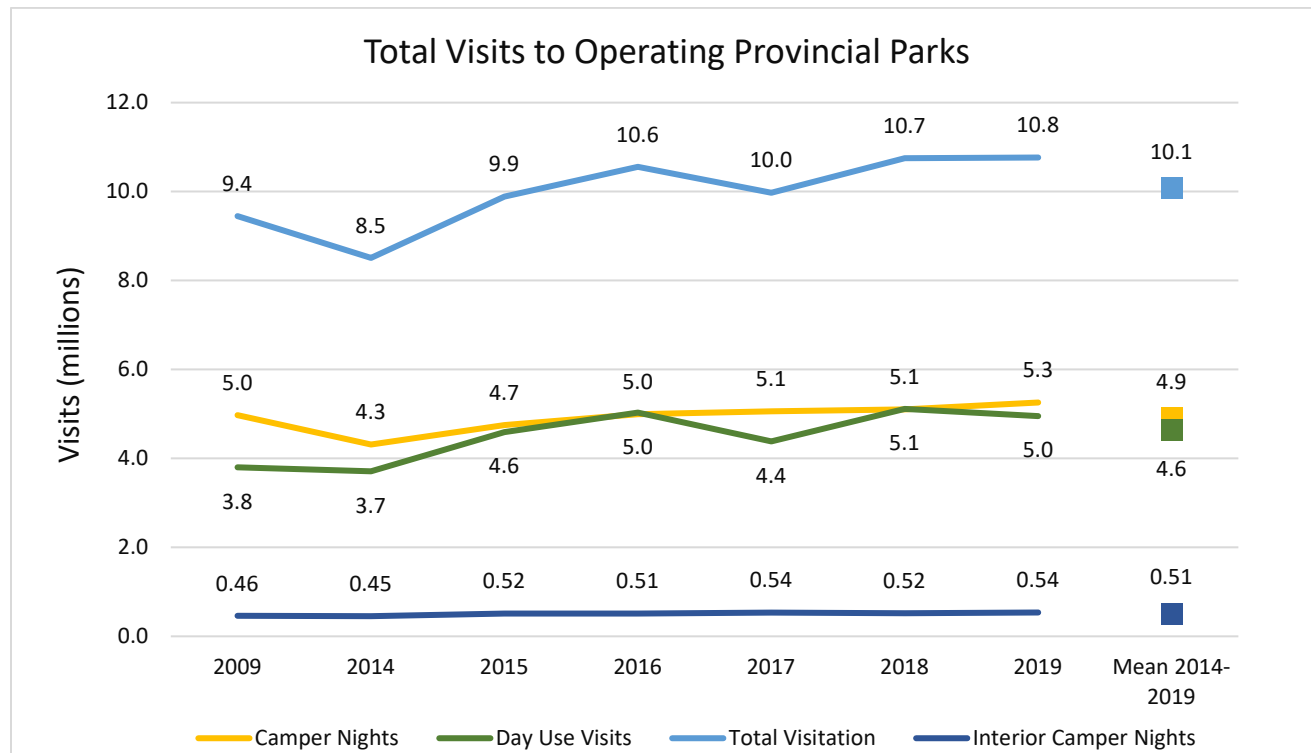


Figure 7 - Total Number of Visits (millions) to Operating Provincial Parks

## What's happening

### Recreational Opportunities

Ontario Parks offers a wide variety of recreational opportunities throughout its park system. Fluctuation in totals over time may be caused by several factors such as the removal or creation of opportunities in response to supply and demand, and availability of information.

The total number of overnight opportunities increased from 2009 to 2019, with changes in distribution among the different types of overnight opportunities: car camping sites, roofed accommodation and interior camp sites. In 2019, there were 19,253 car camping sites available, which was a decrease of 0.8% from 2009. This decrease over the 10-year period was a result of the closure of campgrounds in 3 underutilized parks in the Northeast and Northwest Zones, and other factors like closures of individual sites for rehabilitation. Some sites for car camping were converted to sites for roofed accommodations, which has resulted in higher utilization of those sites. Car camping sites were also expanded in some higher-demand areas, also leading to higher utilization and improved distribution of campsites overall. In 2019, there were 8,541 interior campsites available which was an increase of 12.2% and 174 roofed accommodations which was an increase of 49% from 2009.

Ontario Parks had 39.9 km of barrier-free trails available to visitors in 2019. Data for 2009 are not available because the information was not tracked. Ontario Parks developed an information system since 2009 which has enabled this information to be reported.

Operating provincial parks also provide visitor centres, museums, park stores, comfort stations, electricity services for camping, and other services and facilities to enhance the visitor experience.

### Traditional Outdoor Heritage Activities

#### Recreational Hunting

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Under the PPCRA, recreational hunting is prohibited in provincial parks unless allowed by regulation under the *Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act*. In contrast, recreational hunting is permitted in conservation reserves unless it is prohibited by regulation under the *Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act*. Indigenous communities may hunt in protected areas pursuant to their existing Aboriginal and treaty rights.

The hunting of waterfowl is regulated by the Canadian Wildlife Service. All other hunted species in Ontario are regulated by the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry (MNRF) under the *Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act*.

Currently, recreational hunting is permitted in at least a portion of 428 of Ontario's 635 provincial parks and conservation reserves (67%). Specific seasons, game species and regulations are set out in regulations under the *Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act* and published in the annual Ontario Hunting Regulations Summary. The MNRF collects hunting information for big game animals on a landscape scale and is not differentiated between the harvest inside or outside of protected areas. Therefore, it is not possible to determine the extent of hunting in protected areas currently. Efforts to acquire hunting data for provincial parks and conservation reserves are being made for future reporting.

## Recreational Fishing

Recreational fishing is permitted in all provincial parks and conservation reserves, except where fish sanctuaries have been established. Regulations that outline how anglers can fish in certain provincial parks and conservation reserves, including limiting when and where one can fish, the type of equipment one can use (e.g., bait, barbed hooks), and the number of fish one can possess, are made through the MNRF's Ontario Fishery Regulations under the federal *Fisheries Act*. Indigenous communities may fish in provincial parks and conservation reserves pursuant to their Aboriginal and treaty rights.

Currently, recreational fishing is permitted in all 340 provincial parks in Ontario. However, only 209 of the 340 provincial parks contain water bodies that are suitable to support fishing. Similarly, fishing is permitted in all 295 conservation reserves. However, only 273 of 295 conservation reserves contain water bodies that are suitable to support fishing.

## Commercial Trapping

Commercial trapping is governed by the MNRF's *Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act* and policies administered by the MNRF. Indigenous communities may trap in protected areas pursuant to their Aboriginal and treaty rights.

Commercial trapping is permitted in 292 of Ontario's 340 provincial parks (86%); however, only 216 are entirely or partially within "In Use" Trapline Areas. Trapping is also permitted in all 295 conservation reserves; however, only 263 of 295 regulated conservation reserves are entirely/partially within "In Use" Trapline Areas.

Under the Provincial Park Permitted Uses (Phase Out) Policy (2010), existing fur harvesting may only continue for lifetime of current trapper in these parks. If a license is revoked, surrendered, or application for transfer was received before then, that trapline within that park would have been rescinded. Exceptions exist for Indigenous people exercising Aboriginal or treaty rights.

While trapper harvests are recorded, the specific location of species harvested within the trapline (i.e., inside or outside protected area) is not known. Therefore, the numbers and varieties of species harvested in protected areas are unknown. The impacts of trapping are anticipated to be minimal due to the small size of the area being trapped and existing regulations for sustainable trapping.

## Visitation to Operating Provincial Parks

This increase in the recreational opportunities has supported the continued growth in the number of annual visitors to Ontario Parks. Ontario Parks welcomed 10.8 million visits to operating provincial parks in 2019, which is an overall increase of 13% since 2009.

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**Indicator last updated**

April 2021

**Data source(s)**

Protected Areas Section, Ontario Parks

**Related links**

N/A