

St. Lawrence Islands National Park of Canada

Location

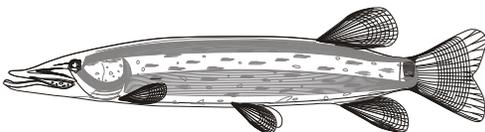
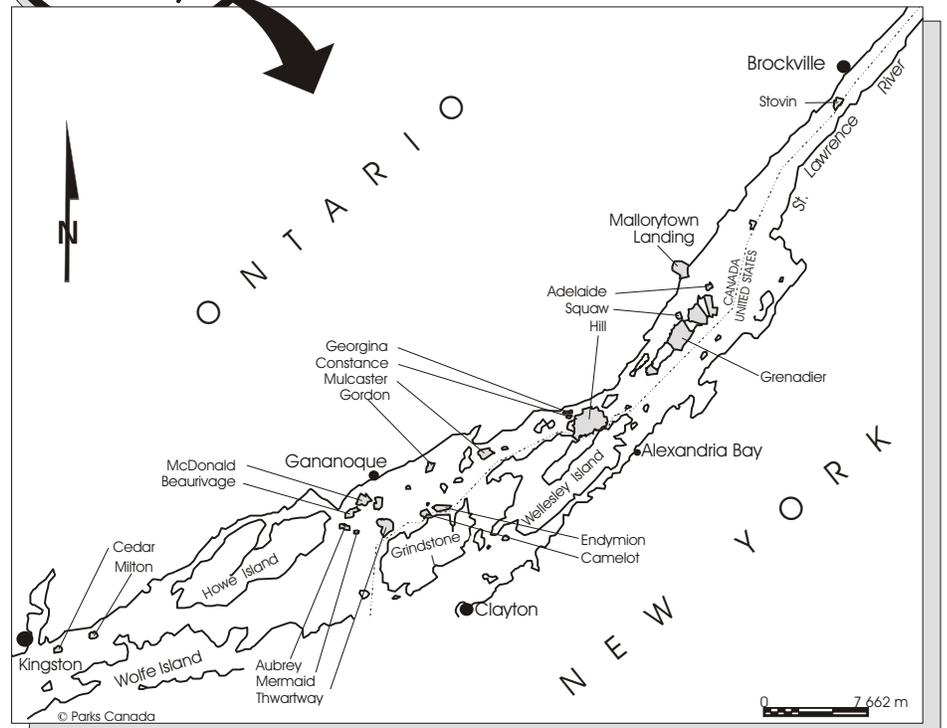
St. Lawrence Islands National Park is made up of all or part of 24 islands and over 80 shoals and islets located between Kingston and Brockville in the Thousand Islands region of the St. Lawrence River. Main Duck and Yorkshire Islands, situated in eastern Lake Ontario, are administered by St. Lawrence Islands National Park. Park headquarters are 20 km west of Brockville at Mallorytown Landing, the park's only mainland property. Though spread out along 80 km of river, the park's combined properties add up to only 9 km², making it Canada's smallest national park. It was formally established in 1904 as a result of local concerns of the near complete private ownership of the Thousand Islands. Today the park, along with La Mauricie National Park and part of Georgian Bay Islands National Park, represents Canada's Central Great Lakes - St. Lawrence Precambrian Region. St. Lawrence Islands National Park is located on the Frontenac Axis, a chain of highlands, linking Algonquin Park to Adirondack Park. St. Lawrence Islands National Park is located in the Mixedwood Plains Ecozone.

Climate

Climate in the Thousand Islands is moderated by Lake Ontario, immediately to the southwest of the islands. The average temperatures are -8°C (Jan.) and 21°C (July) with annual precipitation of about 970 mm. Occasional summer storms and high winds can make open sections of the river treacherous to navigate. Winters are usually cold enough to freeze all but the swiftest sections of the river. On a smaller scale, islands, like mountains and houses, tend to be cooler and wetter on their north and east facing sides. This micro-climatic effect causes a great deal of habitat diversity over relatively small areas that, in turn, have a high number of plant and animal species.

Geology

The islands are essentially part of an ancient mountain range that runs along the eastern part of the continent. The granitic bedrock, an extension of the Canadian Shield, is readily apparent as glacially exposed outcrops and innumerable shoals in the river, which may be a navigation hazard. Soils tend to be slightly acidic and shallow, often exposing the underlying granite and making it difficult for trees to acquire good anchorage.



Vegetation

The park is located in a transition zone between the Carolinian deciduous forests of southwestern Ontario and the more coniferous boreal forests to the north. Southern species, like hickory and beech, birches and hemlocks, exemplify the mixedwood nature of the park's forests. Some southern species, common in the USA, reach their northernmost limits in the Thousand Islands region. Two of these are Deerberry, which exists in Canada on only about four sites (three within the park), and pitch pine, found only in this part of eastern Ontario. Canada's largest stand of pitch pine is on park property on Hill Island. There are almost a thousand species of plants in the area, including rare species like rue anemone and winged sumac. A wide variety of other plant communities, including swamps, fens, marshes, open fields, and shrub land, can be found. The sheer diversity of both plants and animals can be linked to the microclimate phenomenon seen in hilly terrain where there are a variety of heat, light, and moisture regimes.



Wildlife

The variety of habitats and vegetation is paralleled by the region's faunal diversity. Over 34 species of reptiles and amphibians, 200 species of birds, 80 species of fish, and 50 mammal species have been recorded in the area. Larger park islands support deer, red fox, and coyote. The river is famous among anglers for its bass and muskellunge. Only Georgian Bay Islands National Park boasts a greater diversity of reptiles and amphibians. Of particular significance are the resident populations of black rat snakes, whose numbers are monitored by the park, and whose wintering sites are protected within the park. The park also actively monitors significant species like wild turkey and osprey. This section of the St. Lawrence is on the Atlantic Flyway, a major bird migration corridor. Migrating animals use the islands as stopover points while on their annual or seasonal wanderings.

Activities

People from all over the world come to the Thousand Islands. Fishing, boating, and sightseeing cruises are the major attractions. Park visitors can enjoy picnics, a beach, a Visitor Centre, kayaking and a nature trail at Mallorytown Landing, and campsites, trails, and docking on most park islands. Interpretive events throughout the park inform visitors about the ecology and history of the park and surrounding area.

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