

Free Ontario Park passes now available at local libraries

By Chris Drost

Libraries across the province, including those close to home, the North Hastings Public Library, Hastings Highlands Public Library, Wollaston Public Library and the Carlow/Mayo Public Library, have been provided with free provincial park day-use passes and discount coupons for future visits, and they are eager for you to take advantage of the offer. Just like when you borrow a book from the library, you borrow one of the participating library's Seasonal Day-Use Permit passes that allow free access for one vehicle and its passengers to 100 different provincial parks across Ontario. To borrow a pass you simply have to have a library card. The libraries also have a limited number of next day discount passes that they typically provide to those borrowing a pass.

"We have three passes to borrow at the North Hastings Public Library and about 30 discount passes to offer," says CEO/head librarian Kim McMunn.

In Hastings Highlands, the library has two provincial park passes to lend, as well as discount coupons. They have more details available on their website at www.hastingshighlandslibrary.ca/summer-provincial-park-pass. The summer-day-use-vehicle permit is valid between April 1 and Nov. 30. It does not guarantee entrance to a park if it is already at capacity.

Because the parks were closed during periods of time during 2020 due to the pandemic, the provincial government website says that for those who purchased an annual day-use-vehicle permit in 2020, it will remain valid until December 2021.

According to the Ontario Parks website, www.ontarioparks.com, Ontario Parks is the largest provider of outdoor recreation experiences in the province with over 10 million visitors from around the world. Ontario Parks represent eight per cent of the province's landmass, an area larger than the provinces of Nova Scotia and PEI combined. Of the 330 Ontario Parks, in excess of 100 have camping facilities, have 19,000 car camping sites and over 8,000 back country campsites.

Of the top ten parks in the province with the most summer visitation, at least four are within an easy drive from North Hastings, Algonquin, Sandbanks, Bon Echo and Presqu'île.