

Illegal cabins quickly becoming a big headache for MNR

by Darren MacDonald
The News

An increasing number of people are illegally building cabins on crown land, say officials at the Ministry of Natural Resources.

"The problem has been going on for quite a few years in this area," says Ken McWatters, the MNR's Senior Lands Technician in the Terrace Bay office.

"It is a strain—we really don't have the manpower to deal with the problem."

In the past year, the local office has resolved 22 cases in which people had erected illegal buildings on Crown Land.

"And that's just the ones we know about," McWatters says. "We know there's a lot more out there."

He says most of the illegal building are hunting and fishing camps discovered by MNR officers or, more often, by informants.

"People who we have told they can't have a camp come in and tell us 'well, how come he has one?'," McWatters says. "And we say 'Oh, he does, does he?'"

Even though they don't really have the manpower or the budget to deal with the complaints, McWatters says they are obliged to act when someone comes in and complains.

It's legislated

"It's legislated that people cannot do this," he says. "So when we receive a complaint, we have to act upon it."

As people become more environmentally aware, McWatters says proper management of crown lands has become more of a priority.

"We do have a responsibility to all of the people of Ontario to manage Crown Land for the Province in the best interests of everyone," McWatters says.

"But if everybody starts building haphazardly, it's going to mushroom into a huge problem. We're not at that point yet, but it's creeping up."

Another reason the Ministry has to control the problem is



Illegal cabins, like the one pictured above, are becoming more and more common, says the MNR's Ken McWatters. "People are getting better at building them, and they're getting better at hiding them," he says.

money, he says.

"We have people out there paying us for things like cottage lots," McWatters says. "It's not fair to the group that's paying us taxes for the use of the land to let the other group illegally occupy the land and not pay anything."

Although they want to discourage people using crown land for illegal cabins, McWatters says there are many things the Ministry wants people to enjoy doing.

"We're not out to try and shut everybody down," he says. "We want you to go out swimming, hunting, fishing, and all that stuff. But there are certain things that go on on crown land that are giving us problems—like illegal buildings."

Garbage dumping

Another problem they're dealing with right now is illegal dumping of garbage, McWatters says. There have been nine incidents in the past year alone that the MNR acted

upon.

"One person received a fine of \$103.75 for illegally dumping a bag of garbage," he said.

"While the others had to clean up the mess they made."

One or two years

But it's the illegal cabins that's giving them the biggest headache at the moment. Right now they're working on resolving eight more cases.

"To remove an illegal occupation takes approximately one or two years," he says. "It depends on whether you know who the person that's occupying the building."

The first step in resolving a case is posting a sign on the building in attempt to determine who the owner is.

Usually the sign is enough to scare the occupant into dismantling the building, but when it's not, the procedure

can take a lot longer.

McWatters says they want to be sure that the occupant doesn't have a legal right to the building before they destroy it.

For example, if someone can prove they have made use of the building for at least 60 years, then they can get legal entitlement to it.

"There was one guy who came in, and he had the building for 58 years," he says.

"If he had waited two more years, he would have had a

claim to it."

And if there are people actually living in the cabin, McWatters says they just ignore it.

Extremely rare

"We don't want to cause them any more trouble than they have already," he says.

But those cases are extremely rare, McWatters says. The majority of the buildings are for hunting and fishing.

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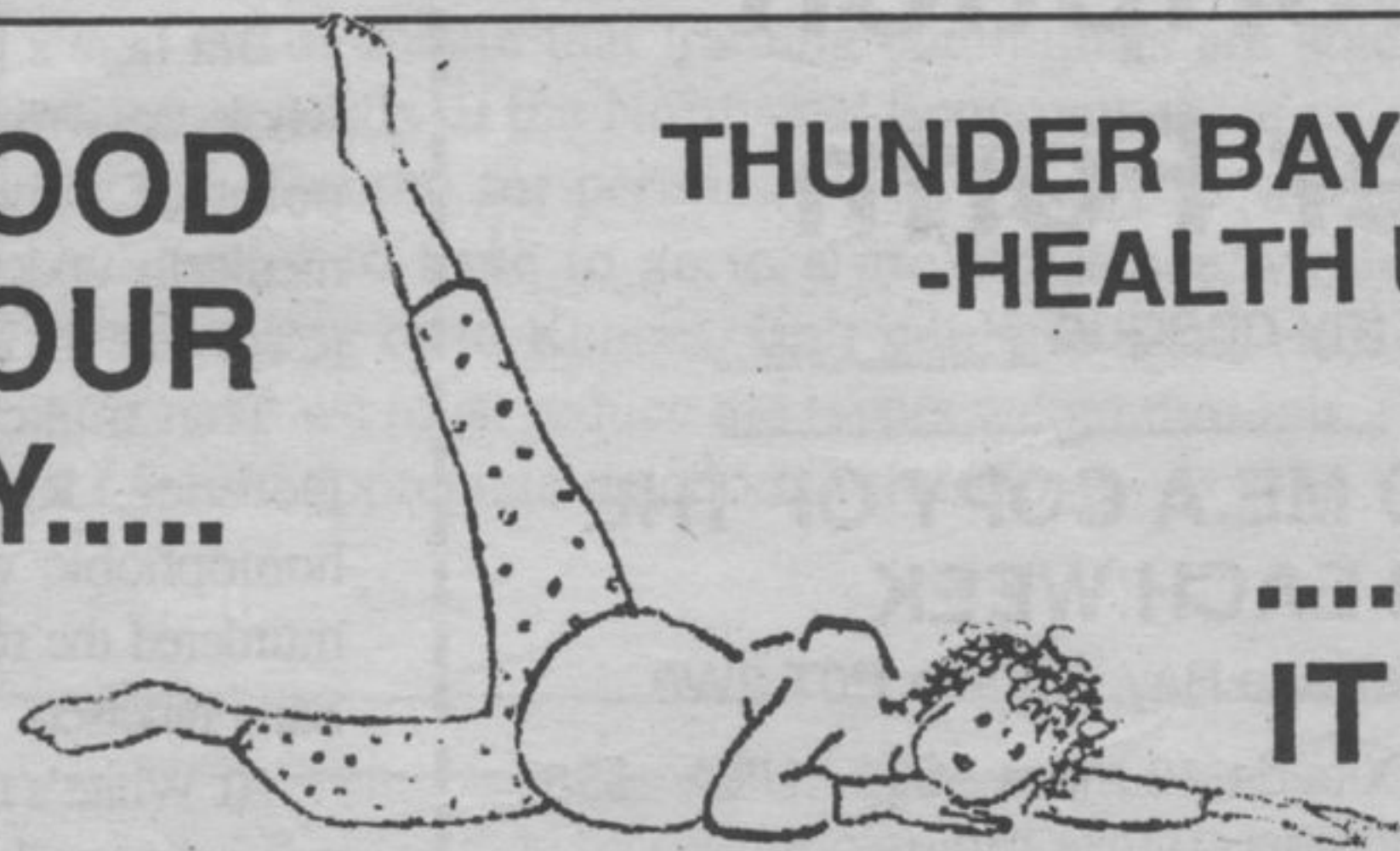
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is having a Tutor Training Workshop, on Saturday, February 22, from 10:30 AM to 3:30 PM.

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- what is expected of a tutor
- profile of the adult learner and learning styles
- reading and writing strategies
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