

Recommendations to address issues with the OPHEA Guidelines which result Barriers to Canoeing in Ontario Secondary Schools

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In this report, I wish to provide an overview of what has taken place in this area since the last board meeting. The report has two aspects, one with respect to Regional Development and a proposal for restructuring, and two, reporting on the progress made with Secondary Schools canoeing and OPHEA. Dave Goldman has an additional summary of the progress the Barrier's group made with respect to changing the OPHEA guidelines.

Secondary Schools:

The report below is one that I did as part of the Barriers to Canoeing committee. It attempts to review and summarize current regulations pertaining to Ontario Secondary Schools and the OPHEA (*Ontario Physical Education Safety Guidelines*). These guidelines outline the certifications required by teachers and trip leaders to take students canoeing. Schools have a higher duty of care for taking students canoeing as compared to when taking members of the general public out canoeing. This is why the OPHEA guidelines were established in the first place. I have tried to streamline the wording in the OPHEA documents pertaining to lifeguarding and have made several recommendations.

1. Swim Tests: For conducting swim tests prior to any canoeing or kayaking activity, the new wording would appear as:

Recommendation 1: When conducting a swim test prior to Outdoor Education activities, Swimming instructors must hold one of the following current certifications:

- *NLS Lifeguard certificate;*
- *Canadian Red Cross Water Safety Instructor Award;*
- *Lifesaving Society Swim Instructor Certificate;*
- *Lifesaving Society Instructor Certificate*
- *YMCA Instructor Certificate;*
- *Ontario Teacher's Aquatic Standard (OTAS) (delete)*

Review Note: *The Ontario Teacher's Aquatic Standard is noted above yet no one I spoke to knows anything about this certification. The Lifesaving Society is not aware of this being a recognized lifeguarding certification. This could likely be deleted from the revised wording.*

a. Definition of Wilderness: Standardize the wording for students participating in canoeing or kayaking trips:

Recommendation 2: When taking students into wilderness areas (beyond 2 hours for emergency medical assistance to arrive by land, air, or water), at least one Teacher or Trip Leader must have the following current certification:

▪ **NLS Lifeguard certificate**

Review Note: In the current guidelines, they say “within or beyond 2 hours” which is confusing.

b. NLS to Bronze Cross

It is recommended that OPHEA change the reference of requiring at least one Trip Leader to have NLS Lifeguard certification under the Instructor Qualifications section of the Outdoor Education Canoe Tripping guideline. The guideline currently reads: “at least one trip leader must have an NLS lifeguard certificate when travelling within or beyond 2 hours of emergency medical assistance”. The use of present terminology of “within or beyond 2 hours” is confusing and should read “beyond 2 hours” to be clearer. This should also be changed to Bronze Cross and read as follows:

Recommendation 3: “When travelling beyond 2 hours from emergency medical assistance, at least one trip leader must have the following current certification: Bronze Cross”

2. NLS requirements by guiding organisations and camps:

I examined which certifications are required with camps and guiding operations and out of the dozen or so that I looked at, only one made reference to their staff needing NLS. It would appear that the majority of organisations involved in canoeing and kayaking require either Wilderness First Aid Responder (80 hour) or Wilderness Advanced First Aid (40 hour) and Wilderness First Aid (16 hour) for assistant instructors or assistant guides. Even ORCKA recommends Wilderness Advanced First Aid for guides and Wilderness First Aid for assistant guides but no mention of lifeguarding or swimming requirements. These organisations include Outward Bound, Taylor Statten camps, Camp Arowhon, Wendigo Lake Expeditions, etc., and even ORCKA. The only camp that required NLS for its canoe tripping staff was YMCA Camp Pine Crest.

- **Outward Bound Canada:** Bronze Cross or NLS; Wilderness First Aid Responder
- **Taylor Statten Camp:** Canoe staff: Bronze Cross; current first aid and CPR C
- **Taylor Statten Camp:** Canoe Trip Guides: Bronze Cross; Wilderness First Aid
- **Camp Arowhon:** Canoe Trippers: Bronze Cross; Wilderness First Aid
- **Wendigo Lake Expeditions:** Wilderness Trip Leader: Bronze Cross; WFR, CPR/AED
- **YMCA Camp Pine Crest:** Leadership Trainers: NLS; WFA; Wilderness Advanced First Aid
- **ORCKA:** Canoe Trip Leader: no mention of NLS or Bronze Cross; Wilderness Advanced First Aid

3. Background information on Wording in OPHEA guidelines pertaining to Lifeguarding:

I have examined the wording of the OPHEA guidelines where NLS, lifeguarding, and swimming are mentioned. The wording is not consistent between the various Outdoor Education guidelines. I have provided a summary of these as follows:

3.1: Background information on Lifeguarding Requirements:

There is a variation in the wording between the various OPHEA Outdoor Education guidelines. The following are examples of the wording for lifeguarding requirements.

a) Guideline Outdoor Education - Canoe Tripping:

- Under the section dealing with Instructor Qualifications, the guideline states:

- *“When travelling within or beyond 2 hours of emergency medical assistance, at least one trip leader must have the following current certification: NLS Lifeguard certificate”*
- Under the section Swim Instruction Qualifications, the guideline states:
 - *“All instructors must hold one of the following current certifications: NSL Lifeguard certificate”*

b) Guideline Outdoor Education – Swimming:

- Under the section dealing with Recreational Swim, the guideline states:
 - *“During a recreational/free swim, the only acceptable lifeguard certification is NLS”*
 - *“Teachers must accompany students to the swimming area and be present at the swimming area or in the water during the recreational/free swim.”*

c) Guideline Outdoor Education – Canoeing Moving Water:

- The only place that NLS is mentioned is under the first aid certification where it states:
 - *“At least one supervisor must have one of the following current first aid certifications: NLS Lifeguard certificate, St. John Ambulance’s Emergency First Aid with CPR C and AED; Canadian Red Cross Standard First Aid, Canadian Ski Patrol First Aid certificate, equivalent to any of the above”.*

Review Note: *The guidelines refer to NLS under the Swim Instruction Qualification section which deals with the swim test, not a canoe trip.*

d) Guideline Outdoor Education – Canoeing:

- In this guideline, the only place that NLS is referenced is under First Aid Certification where it states:
 - *“At least one supervisor or an individual responsible for providing first aid must have one of the following current first aid certification: NLS Lifeguard certification...”*
- Under Instructor Qualifications, it states:
 - *“At least one supervisor/instructor or hired provider over the age of 18 must have a minimum of a Bronze Cross”*
- Under Supervisor Ratios, the guideline states:
 - *“When the number of non-swimmers in a group is more than four, an additional lifeguard with a minimum of Bronze Cross must be added”.*
- Under Swim Instruction Qualifications, it states:
 - *“All instructors for the swim test must hold one of the following current certifications: NLS Lifeguard certificate”*

Review Note 1: *It is interesting how they have referred to Bronze Cross as a “Lifeguard” but in other documents the only acceptable certification to lifeguard is NLS.*

Review Note 2: *It would appear that so long as there is an NLS qualified Lifeguard or instructor present during swim instruction, then we are compliant.*

Review Note 3: *From this wording, it appears that NLS serves more as a first aid requirement than as a lifeguarding requirement. Provided students do not participate in a "Free Swim", NLS is not required under current OPHEA guidelines.*

e) The Lifesaving Society: The following outlines why NLS should be changed to Bronze Cross in the OPHEA Outdoor Education guidelines for wilderness canoe tripping activities.

A review of the NLS Lifeguarding course manual was made examining the role of a lifeguard (NLS) vs the role of a lifesaver (Bronze Cross) in water related activities. The manual explains that if a lifeguard is working on his or her own, such as during a wilderness canoe trip, the lifeguard can no longer follow the procedures they are trained in by the Lifesaving Society. As a result, the Lifesaving Society advises its lifeguards (NLS) to now refer to themselves as Lifesavers (Bronze Cross) and avoid contact rescues due to the inherent risk associated with these types of rescues. This is evident in the following quotation from the Alert Lifeguard training manual:

"In a rescue situation, the lifeguard working without the support of another trained lifeguard should consider himself or herself a lifesaver and act accordingly (only as a last resort, would you use a body contact rescue on a conscious victim)." (Alert, Lifeguarding in Action, P. 50, 2004)

This would support the idea that NLS is not the correct certification for a wilderness canoe trip and one would argue the point that you could never truly have a lifeguard unless there were several lifeguards on duty and the water is familiar to the lifeguard, such as a camp waterfront with their swimming and canoeing programs. This is impossible on a canoe trip as new campsites are often used each day. Lifeguards are also paid professionals who work as a team with other Lifeguards as back up using specialized equipment to make contact rescues.