

Greenbelt Coalition decries proposed changes to endangered species legislation

It is becoming a pattern with this government to hear, once again, that Ontario's most sensitive and valuable environments are being offered to the highest bidder. 'Open for business' now also means trading protection for species at risk to anyone willing to pay the price. A strong and prosperous Ontario has a healthy and bountiful natural environment.

By weakening and outright removing protections in exchange for money this government weakens our province and sells our natural heritage out from under us. This move is particularly shocking given the global epidemic of species loss.

Ontario's Endangered Species Act was already insufficient. This proposal effectively removes the small safety net species at risk had remaining.

Like Bill 66, the process to determine which regulations can be avoided are taken out of the public eye and at the discretion of the Minister. Local habitats could be under threat without any notification or public input opportunities.

The government will establish a second set of rules for those that are able to pay more. Instead of following the rules everyone else has to, sprawl developers, aggregate companies, even our own municipalities can just pay their way out of the process, regardless of whether it undermines Ontario's environmental integrity.

Yet again we are forced to point out to this government that this proposal is not needed.

In Simcoe County we have a surplus of land available for houses and employment. We do not need to sacrifice our forests, wetlands and shorelines for more.

Who does this benefit?

Dredging wetlands that prevent flooding or paving over forests that purify our air destroys highly effective, low-cost natural solutions to climate change. The profit gained by developers and the sum paid to the government cannot match the ongoing value these natural ecosystems provide to our communities.

Simcoe County has a wealth of globally, provincially, and locally significant wetlands and shorelines. We are home to Ontario's largest municipally owned forest system. Our area is also home to over 60 species that are deemed vulnerable,

threatened, or endangered.

Which of these will
be the first to be offered up to the highest bidder?

We are particularly
concerned with proposals that:

? Would allow
industry, municipalities, and developers to bypass rules and regulations within
the Act for a price;

? Would allow the
Minister to avoid consulting with experts for species at risk, even if the
suspension of the regulations would, ?likely jeopardize the survival of the
species in Ontario?;

? Would allow the
Minister to avoid consulting or even notifying the public if they decide to
suspend regulations within the Act;

? Would suspend the
protections for locally threatened species as long as the species is ?healthy?
outside of Ontario. This would lead to extirpation and further jeopardize local
ecosystems;

? New additions to
the Species at Risk list would take longer to get protection (from 3 months to
a proposed 12 months). At a Minister's request the committee that adds new
species may be asked to re-evaluate the listing, which would only lengthen the
time that the species and their habitat would be vulnerable to development and
other damaging activities;

? Would no longer
issue stop work order permits on damaging activities for newly listed species
or their habitat for up to one year of listing. This means that damaging
activities, such as mining, excavation etc., would be allowed to continue,
unfettered, as the new species' habitat and species protections are reviewed by
committee

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