

The Honourable Linda Jeffrey
Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing
17th Floor
777 Bay Street
Toronto, Ontario M5G 2E5

Dear Minister Jeffrey,

As northern community and environmental organizations with many group and individual members, we would like to express our strong support for policies in the Provincial Policy Statement (PPS) that are protective of natural heritage in the north.

A healthy natural environment is intrinsic to our way of life in the north. Many citizens choose to live in the north specifically because of the identity, lifestyle and quality of life that access to nature affords. Ecotourism, hunting, fishing, snowmobiling, and other outdoor wilderness activities are also a very important part of the northern economy.

We support the positive changes proposed in the draft PPS regarding biodiversity, natural heritage, healthy communities, and climate change. However, we are disappointed that the draft PPS continues to afford greater protection to natural heritage in southern versus Northern Ontario. We advocate strongly for equal protection of natural heritage and healthy communities in Northern Ontario. Good planning should be for all of Ontario.

Here in the north, we already see the impacts of degradation of the natural environment as a result of poorly planned development. Looking to the future, we do not wish to be in the position that typifies many areas of southern Ontario, where communities are facing serious degradation (such as the loss of over 70% of wetlands). In the south, natural heritage planning is often about protecting what little remains in a highly degraded and fragmented natural landscape. In the north, however, we have the opportunity to proactively protect natural heritage on an ecosystem and watershed basis, and we urge the province to take this opportunity while it is still available. If we act now, land use planning in the north can be about protecting natural heritage systems according to sound ecological principles so that the many benefits provided by nature are always widely available to northerners and indeed to all Ontarians now and into the future.

To support healthy, sustainable and resilient communities across Northern Ontario, we urge the government, more specifically, to:

1. Protect water for the long-term by requiring watershed and/or subwatershed planning and the watershed studies needed to assess cumulative impacts (Draft PPS, section 2.2.1);
2. Protect significant wetlands across Ontario, and require an evaluation of wetlands that may be impacted by development prior to issuing approvals (Draft PPS, section 2.1.4 and 2.1.5);

3. Protect biodiversity and enhance landscape resilience to climate change by requiring natural heritage systems identification and protection across the province (Draft PPS, 2.1.1, 2.1.2, 2.1.3);
4. Enable municipalities to embrace policies that exceed provincial policies, by clearly stating that priority shall be given to policies that provide stronger protection for human health and natural heritage, based on the precautionary principle (Draft PPS 4.8). The PPS should clearly support municipalities in identifying and protecting locally significant features and areas;
5. Enable municipalities across the province to implement PPS policies by providing the support and resources necessary to complete watershed studies, identify natural heritage systems, and assess wetland significance.

In closing, we appreciate the sincere effort of the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing to improve the PPS so that it achieves the vision of strong, sustainable and resilient communities, a clean and healthy environment and a strong economy.

We caution, however that success in realizing this vision will depend on protecting the natural features and systems that are the foundation of our health and prosperity.

To this end, we need strong land use planning policies across the province, not just in southern Ontario.

Thank you for your attention. We look forward to your response, and would be happy to discuss this further.

Yours truly,

[List of organizations]: