

January 31, 2024

The Honourable Peter Bethlenfalvy
Minister of Finance
c/o Budget Secretariat
Frost Building North, 3rd Floor
95 Grosvenor Street
Toronto, Ontario M7A 1Z1

Dear Minister Bethlenfalvy,

Re: 2024 Budget consultations

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input into the 2024 Budget. On behalf of the 63 undersigned organizations, we respectfully request that the Government of Ontario invest \$100 million per year over four years in the establishment of new protected and conserved areas, as recommended by the government-appointed Protected Areas Working Group.

As you are aware, a healthy environment is key to enjoying a good quality of life in Ontario. It is also key to a healthy economy and avoiding the astronomical costs of flooding, pollution and other forms of environmental degradation. In maintaining a healthy environment, protected areas are effective nature-based solutions to climate change and biodiversity loss that enhance our resilience and conserve the plants, animals and ecosystems that sustain us.

In 2021, the Protected Areas Working Group appointed by the Ministry of Environment, Conservation and Parks provided strong recommendations in its report *A New Approach: Advancing Protected and Conserved Areas in Ontario*. Their recommendations below align with the recently updated *Ontario Biodiversity Strategy* and should be addressed in the 2024 Budget.

Launch a Wild Ontario Accelerator Fund

- Establish a new fund of \$100 million per year over four years to identify innovative and cooperative approaches to new protected and conserved areas.
- A made-in-Ontario fund could leverage matching resources from the federal government, as recently occurred through the \$1 billion tripartite framework agreement between the governments of Canada and British Columbia and the First Nations Leadership Council.

Secure Near-term Opportunities for New Protected and Conserved Areas

- Support First Nations that are interested in Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas.

- Complete protection for sites identified through Ontario’s Living Legacy and acquired lands by providing MECP with the staff resources required to undertake this work.
- Establish a team of staff with a suitable project budget to work with conservation partners – including Indigenous communities, the forestry and mining industries, and environmental groups – to explore opportunities for additional protections for Enhanced Management Areas and Provincially Significant Wetlands that are ecologically connected to existing protected and conserved areas.

Develop a new Made-in-Ontario Provincial Protected and Conserved Areas Strategy

- Establish a strong intra-ministerial project team of negotiators, planners, ecologists and analysts to undertake a new, modern, target-based land use planning exercise that is built on nation-to-nation dialogue and respect for Indigenous rights.
- Appoint a Provincial Protected and Conserved Areas Facilitator to support the work of the team.

We are confident that with the right investments Ontario can once again be a leader in establishing protected areas, with long-term benefits for all people who call Ontario home. We ask you to use this budget as an opportunity to create a positive, lasting conservation legacy.

Yours sincerely,

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Executive Director
Ontario Nature



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Ontario Campaigner
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Four Seasons Conservancy

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Headwaters Nature
"Exploring nature in the Headwaters area"

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*Junction Creek
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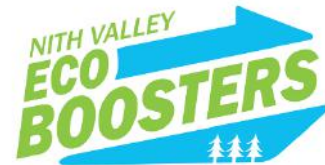
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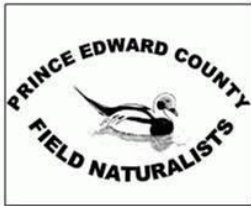
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Cc:

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