

Media Release – For Immediate Release

More than 40 environmental groups across North America call on Premier McGuinty to live up to election promise to protect caribou

Canadian musician Sarah Harmer signs letter to Premier in protest of exemption for logging industry

Toronto, June 17, 2008 – The Save Ontario's Species (SOS) coalition, a partnership of non-profit environmental organizations, delivered a letter today to Premier Dalton McGuinty calling on him to live up to his election promise to protect caribou in the wake of him giving the logging industry a blanket exemption from the new Endangered Species Act (ESA). Sarah Harmer, co-chair of Protecting Escarpment Rural Land (PERL), and 40 other groups across Canada and the United States, including Natural Resources Defence Council, Markets Initiative, Sudbury Naturalists and Evergreen, are urging the McGuinty government that swift action is needed to protect caribou.

The letter highlights the dire situation faced by Ontario's endangered caribou, one of Canada's most iconic species, because of continued logging in its habitat, while emphasizing the need for the new act to apply to the forestry industry. Cabinet will need to make a decision about whether or not to grant logging companies a one-year exemption before the Act comes into force on July 1, 2008.

"Premier McGuinty promised to protect large areas of the Boreal Forest to safeguard a future for woodland caribou, but instead it's looking like he plans to grant the very industry responsible for destroying caribou habitat a free pass," said Gillian McEachern of ForestEthics.

"The government has put forward nearly two dozen exemptions. Virtually all endangered species will suffer if these go through as proposed," said Caroline Schultz, Executive Director of Ontario Nature. "At this point, any compromise to the Endangered Species Act will have negative ramifications—from threatened iconic species like the woodland caribou to rare and precious habitats and ecosystems across the province."

More than 75 percent of Ontario's approximately 200 endangered species have already disappeared from the province or are struggling to survive. For their habitats to be truly protected, industry must be held to strict operation protocols. Without such protocols, there is little hope for the continued survival of Ontario's remaining endangered plants and animals.

"The new Act was supposed to herald change in land-use management to ensure the survival of endangered species," said Rachel Plotkin of the David Suzuki Foundation. "Instead, the forestry exemption cuts a hole through the Act that allows the status quo to continue."

The text of the letter is available at www.ontarionature.org/news/template.php3?n_code=411

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For more information, please contact:

Caroline Schultz, Ontario Nature, (416) 444-8419 ext. 237 Cell: (416) 768-9795

Gillian McEachern, ForestEthics, (416) 938-6032

Rachel Plotkin, David Suzuki Foundation, (613) 796-7999

Jennifer Foulds, Environmental Defence, (416) 323-9521 ext. 232; (647) 280-9521 (cell)

About Save Ontario's Species: S.O.S. is a collaboration among ForestEthics, Ontario Nature, CPAWS Wildlands League, the David Suzuki Foundation, Ecojustice and Environmental Defence.

*For a detailed background on the proposed exemptions and the Endangered Species Act, click on the link:
http://www.ontarionature.org/news/template.php3?n_code=409*