

Media Release

Provincial Energy Plan lacks solid conservation strategy says leading conservationist

(Toronto, ON, November 25, 2010) Ontario has failed to deliver a comprehensive strategy to support its goal of “a culture of conservation”, according to Chris Winter, a leading conservationist in the Province of Ontario.

Chris Winter is the Executive Director of the Conservation Council of Ontario, a provincial charity with a membership of over 40 organizations and a mandate to promote a united conservation movement across Ontario. His family’s monthly hydro consumption averages 350 kWh a month, about one-third the provincial average.

Winter takes issue with the recently announced conservation plan under the Long-Term Energy Plan (LTEP) in that it places too strong an emphasis on Local Distribution Companies (LDCs) as the “face of conservation”. “It’s like asking the cable companies to lead a provincial arts strategy,” Winter says. “They can deliver great programs, but not culture.” Among the weaknesses in the government’s conservation strategy, Winter notes:

- **Pricing:** The switch from a consumption surcharge to time-of-use metering changed the emphasis away from conservation to load shifting. The primary message is no longer to cut back on excessive consumption, just to shift to off-peak times.
- **Regulations:** Outside of the updated Ontario Building Code and the law to phase out incandescent bulbs (now a federal initiative), there has been no significant action on efficiency standards and the requirement under the Green Energy Act for mandatory home energy audits was dropped.
- **Incentives:** Conservation incentives are temporary and limited, instead of being continual and universal. Programs such as the Great Refrigerator Roundup are effective but limited in their overall impact.
- **Promotion:** Social marketing for conservation through Ministry and OPA campaigns has been as much about self promotion as about promoting a lasting commitment to conservation. A broader, more inclusive social marketing strategy is required.
- **Community engagement:** The LTEP relies exclusively on local utilities to market conservation. There has been virtually no government support for community-based conservation programs. The only remaining provincial community conservation funding program, the Community Go Green Fund, is being wound up.
- **A Culture of Conservation:** The focus is on kilowatts, not culture. Culture is the expression of common values, and it has a profound influence on our actions and social development. The government needs to recognize that a true culture of conservation applies not just to energy but also to natural areas, local and sustainable food, local green economies, urban development and complete community design, transportation, waste reduction, and pollution prevention.
- **Strategic Planning:** The government failed to act on the recommendation of the Environmental Commissioner of Ontario that “the Secretary of Cabinet direct the development of a comprehensive energy conservation strategy encompassing all major energy sources used in Ontario.” The Conservation Council of Ontario has said that the goal for a voluntary conservation strategy should be “to make conservation easy, affordable, and desirable.” All pricing, marketing, regulations and support programs should support this goal.

Faced with rising utility bills, instead of saying “help us conserve,” the response from the public and opposition critics alike has been “lower the rates.” This failure to embrace conservation points to the failure to invest in community-based conservation marketing and support programs.

“It may sound obvious,” says Winter, “but if you want a culture of conservation, you actually need to invest in culture.”