



Ontario Needs More and Better Parks

Queen's Park, November 3, 2015 – Ontario's acting Environmental Commissioner, Ellen Schwartzel is calling on the provincial government to step up its protection of environmentally sensitive lands.

In her Annual Report "*Small Things Matter*" released today, Schwartzel pointed out it's been years since the Ontario government spent any significant money to acquire new conservation lands. In fact, the government's annual land acquisition budget has been reduced in the last five years from about \$5.1 million to just \$1,000 for the entire province.

"This lack of dedicated funding makes it nearly impossible to protect new parcels of environmentally sensitive land, particularly in southern Ontario, where provincial parks cover only about 1% of the land," says Schwartzel. "This is critical, as southern Ontario has among the highest number of species at risk anywhere in Canada."

The Environmental Commissioner says that unless the Ontario government acts quickly, it will fail to meet the United Nations' Convention on Biological Diversity's target of protecting 17% of its land by 2020. "Currently, provincial parks and conservation reserves amount to only 10.2% of Ontario."

Schwartzel notes the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry also has the responsibility to restore existing provincial parklands when they have been degraded.

"Few provincial parks are pristine," says the Environmental Commissioner. "Many show the effects of historical land uses, in addition to facing continuous threats from activities both within and outside the park." Many provincial parks, for example, face serious problems from invasive species, which displace native plants and adversely affect the park's ecological integrity.

The Environmental Commissioner recommends that the government establish a dedicated ecological restoration fund for Ontario's provincial parks. "These problems in our parks are largely going unaddressed by the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry."

The Environmental Commissioner's reviews of Ontario's provincial parks planning and land acquisition programs can be found in Parts 4.2 and 4.4 of the report "*Small Things Matter*", which can be downloaded at eco.on.ca.

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*The **Environmental Commissioner of Ontario** is the province's independent environmental watchdog. Appointed by the Legislative Assembly, the ECO monitors and reports on compliance with the Environmental Bill of Rights, the government's progress in reducing greenhouse gas emissions and its actions towards achieving greater energy conservation in Ontario.*