



## Environmental Commissioner Releases Report Cards on Environmental Rights

Queen's Park, June 21, 2016 – Ontario's Environmental Commissioner, Dianne Saxe, released a series of report cards today rating how well ministries within the provincial government are upholding the public's environmental rights. Thanks to the *Environmental Bill of Rights, 1993 (EBR)* every Ontarian has the right to participate in government decisions that affect the environment.

"The *Environmental Bill of Rights* provides powerful, but often underappreciated, tools that enable the public to better protect Ontario's environment. But these tools are only as strong as the government allows them to be," said Commissioner Saxe. "I wanted to shine a light on how well the Ontario government is enabling the public to use their environmental rights, and to highlight where ministries are falling down, and where ministries' efforts should be celebrated."

Fourteen provincial ministries currently have varying responsibilities under the *EBR*. These ministries must provide prompt and meaningful information to enable public participation through the Environmental Registry. "Whether it is introducing a sweeping new law that will have impacts for the whole province, or issuing a permit that may affect a local stream, the government needs to let the public know about the proposal, and give the public an opportunity to provide input on it," said Commissioner Saxe. "Good environmental outcomes go hand-in-hand with effectively engaging the public."

The Environmental Commissioner's report cards on government compliance with the *Environmental Bill of Rights*, which were tabled in a report before the Ontario legislature, found that most ministries have room to improve. In particular, several ministries, most notably the Ministry of the Environment and Climate Change and the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry, are often woefully late in informing the public when they have reached a decision about issuing a permit or approval. This matters because the public is left in the dark about whether a company got the proper approval to operate. And, in the worst cases, it could potentially delay by years the opportunity for the public to appeal the permit, all the while the company has been operating.

Further, in some cases, provincial ministries meet the letter of the law, but they don't enable the public to meaningfully participate because of scant details about what they are proposing. For example, several types of notices are chronically deficient, providing few details on what is being proposed. This effectively bars the public from being able to provide informed comment on approvals such as:



- Aggregate pit permits issued by the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry
- Mining exploration permits issued by the Ministry of Northern Development and Mines
- Permits to take water issued by the Ministry of the Environment and Climate Change
- Liquid fuel handling code variances issued by the Technical Standards and Safety Authority (Ministry of Government and Consumer Services)

“Serving the public is what the *Environmental Bill of Rights* is all about. The government must take its responsibilities to heart,” said Dianne Saxe. “I am very pleased to see that since my office began the conversation with government on strengthening *EBR* practices over the last six months, many ministries have made significant improvement in clearing up their backlog of outdated notices on the Environmental Registry. As Ontario’s environmental watchdog, I’ll continue to make sure that over the rest of my term the government meets a high bar in respecting the public’s environmental rights.”

The report, *EBR Performance Checkup: Respect for Ontario Environmental Rights 2015/2016*, is available online at [www.eco.on.ca](http://www.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.