Questionnaire Response: Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters

1. If elected, will your government commit to the restoration of funding to the fish and wildlife programs at the MNR by providing the additional monies from the Consolidated Revenue Fund (CRF) to bring the funding for fish and wildlife programs back in line with previous levels, where the SPA serves to supplement, not replace, operating revenue? If not, will you at least commit to matching funding between the CRF and the SPA?

Ontario Liberals are committed to a healthy environment that is naturally diverse and that supports a high quality of life for the people of Ontario. Our mission is to manage our natural resources in an ecologically sustainable way to ensure that they are available for the enjoyment and use of future generations. We remain committed to conserving biodiversity and using natural resources in a sustainable manner, including the conservation and enhancement of fish and wildlife and their habitats.

One hundred per cent of all fish and wildlife revenues are deposited into the fish and wildlife Special Purpose Account. Since 2002, in addition to these revenues, we have increased the fish and wildlife budget by nearly 60 per cent.

The PCs slashed the Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR)’s budget by 25 per cent. Ontario Liberals increased MNR’s budget by 27 per cent. Of MNR’s $453-million budget, nearly one quarter is now for the Fish and Wildlife Management Branch.

The PCs will need to make up for a $14-billion hole in their platform. They have shown their willingness to slash MNR and Fish and Wildlife budgets in the past, and they would not hesitate to do it again.

2. If elected, will your government restore a Fish and Wildlife Management Branch within the MNR, and ensure that active fish and wildlife management is returned as a core business activity of the MNR?

We are happy to discuss this further with the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters (OFAH). We undertook an internal re-alignment at MNR to create a more coordinated and integrated approach to policy development and service delivery. To quote OFAH Executive Director Mike Reader following the re-alignment: “we respect the government’s right to make changes in order to improve its delivery, for the benefit of taxpayers and more importantly for our natural resources.”

We consider Fish and Wildlife to be a core activity within the ministry, and will keep it that way if re-elected.

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I am proud of the Liberal record of enhancing fishing and hunting opportunities for Ontarians. Among these initiatives is an expansion of the Ontario Family Fishing Events to include a full week in the summer and an additional weekend in the winter of licence-free fishing for Canadian residents to encourage new anglers to take up the sport of fishing. We have also developed Fish ON-Line, a Google-based tool that provides anglers access to: information on the fish species in over 13,000 Ontario lakes; fish stocking records; the angling regulations; lake contour maps for select lakes; and directions to and from a particular body of water.

In addition, we have established the first elk hunt in Ontario’s modern history, expanded opportunities for wild turkey hunting, and are allowing people to hunt with a gun on Sundays in 143 municipalities across the province. These are just a few of the tangible initiatives that Ontario Liberals have undertaken — and we will continue to work to enhance fishing and hunting opportunities in the future.

3. If elected, will your government ensure that provincial fish and wildlife managers have the up-to-date survey and harvest data collection they need to sustain and improve the management of Ontario’s valuable fish and wildlife populations?

Ontario Liberals believe that good policy and the sustainable use of our resources must be based on the best information possible. Wildlife population monitoring is done on an annual basis for a number of species. This includes aerial inventories for moose and elk, and various measures for black bear population analysis. We have conducted extensive fisheries monitoring and harvest surveys as well as harvest monitoring surveys for moose, elk, deer, black bears and wolves. We will continue to provide this quality survey and harvest data.

4. If elected, will your government amend the Endangered Species Act to ensure that COSSARO is publicly accountable for their assessments and decisions?

The Committee on the Status of Species at Risk in Ontario (COSSARO) is an independent body that relies on the best available science to make its assessments and decisions. While we respect COSSARO’s independence, Ontario Liberals will request that COSSARO’s decisions are grounded in publicly available sources so that they are accountable and transparent.
5. If elected, will your government commit to developing and implementing a provincial Crown Land Access Policy that maintains and enhances fishing and hunting opportunities by providing members of the public with secure access to Crown lands, that avoids special treatment for certain segments of society, and that builds on the commitment to heritage activities enshrined in the Heritage Hunting and Fishing Act?

Ontario Liberals are proud that anglers and hunters in Ontario continue to enjoy unrestricted access to the vast majority of Ontario’s Crown land for recreational pursuits. Even in areas where motorized vehicle use may be limited, anglers and hunters can still hike or canoe to access these areas. We provide opportunities for anglers and hunters to remain actively engaged in local land use and resource management planning activities and consultations to ensure their voices are heard. In late 2005, we launched the Crown Land Use Atlas Harmonization Project (CLUAH).

It was designed to review existing land use management direction for all provincial unregulated Crown land and water in Wawa District to ensure the balance of social, economic and ecological sustainability — and to reduce access conflicts. We have encouraged anyone interested in the local area access policies, including anglers and hunters, to participate in the CLUAH consultation process. We have also announced consultations to expand the CLUAH process to other parts of Northern Ontario.

6. If elected, will your government pledge that specific funds from this program will be allocated to maintaining roads following the close of forest operations to provide benefits associated with multi-use of these public roads?

We know these are challenging economic times in Northern Ontario and throughout the world. In 2005, our Liberal government implemented the Road Maintenance Funding Program and, since then, we have committed almost $400 million to forest access roads. Under the NDP, access roads were completely downloaded onto the forest industry. The PCs maintained this level of neglect by handing off the construction and maintenance of primary, secondary and tertiary forest access roads to the forest industry. The $14-billion hole in their platform now means that they will look to once again download this cost.

In contrast, Ontario Liberals will continue to provide opportunities for anglers and hunters to remain actively engaged in local land use and resource management planning activities and consultations to ensure their voices are heard.
7. If elected, will your government commit to a fully implemented regulatory system to ensure that Ontario remains CWD free, including passage of a regulation that would phase out deer and elk farming within five years, with appropriate compensation to operators?

Deer and elk have been raised on Ontario farms since the mid-1980s. There has been a decline in the number of these animals and of deer and elk farms. To date, Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) has not been detected in either Ontario farmed or free-ranging deer and elk.

We have provided $100,000 in funding to encourage increased surveillance of the disease among Ontario’s deer and elk farmers. We have worked with the federal government to prepare an Ontario Chronic Wasting Disease Surveillance and Response Plan to guide our efforts to prevent the entry and spread of CWD in Ontario. This plan complements a parallel program that we are conducting in the wild population as well as regulatory measures to restrict the import of high-risk deer and elk carcass parts from outside Ontario.

8. If elected, will your government immediately move to exempt nonprofit volunteer-run fish hatcheries from the requirement to obtain Certificates of Approval and associated costly discharge fees?

Ontario Liberals have made significant investments in the Fish Culture Program, including a $17-million rebuild of the Normandale Fish Culture Station. Over the past three years, MNR has stocked on average 7.2 million fish in Ontario waterways.

The Ontario Liberals’ priority is to keep our lakes and rivers safe for humans and for the environment. We therefore require that anyone discharging suspended solids and nutrients into our lakes and rivers do so in a manner in line with our strict water quality standards. Fish hatcheries are complex operations that deal with the disposal of wastewater. Both profit and non-profit fish hatcheries produce wastewater and materials that may require treatment before being discharged.

The PCs voted against the Clean Water Act, and against the Cosmetic Pesticides Ban, a law that has resulted in an 80 per cent reduction in pesticide levels in Ontario waterways.
9. If elected, will your government immediately move to change the provincial regulations so that cormorants can be better managed in the same way as other destructive birds, such as crows, starlings and blackbirds?

Between 2003 and 2007, our cormorant management strategy was successful in maintaining the nesting and migration habitat for a diversity of species — and in reducing the number of cormorant nests in trees by over 70 per cent in Presqu’ile Provincial Park. The number of cormorants nesting and roosting in living vegetation was also significantly reduced. These positive measures protected the nesting habitat for other colonial waterbirds and wildlife. Active management started again in the spring of 2011, with a focus on the removal of cormorant nests in the living trees where other colonial birds nest. Trees are responding to these efforts and are in various stages of recovery. We will continue to monitor the situation and work to ensure the sustainable management of cormorants and other bird species across the province.

10. If elected, will your government commit to ensuring that the Caribou Conservation Plan is refocused and prioritized so that it does not jeopardize the ecological, economic, and social benefits that the boreal forest can provide to the residents of Ontario?

Ontario Liberals have proposed a balanced approach to protect woodland caribou habitat in Ontario, including a qualified exemption from the requirements of the Endangered Species Act. Creating jobs and economic opportunity in the North is a priority for Ontario Liberals and is an important part of our five-year Open Ontario Plan. Many forest management plans have been incorporating the principles of the Caribou Conservation Plan, even before it was formally adopted, and forestry has been able to continue to do business successfully under the plan. Our plan will incorporate new science as it becomes available to ensure the best outcomes for caribou and caribou habitat.

11. If elected, will your government ensure that fish and wildlife values are fully protected and enhanced in the face of new renewable energy development in Ontario?

Replacing highly polluting coal plants with clean, renewable sources provides enormous environmental and economic benefits. In addition to creating sustainable jobs and reducing pollution, our Long-Term Energy Plan will help reduce threats to biodiversity due to climate change.
At the same time, strong measures to address the potential impacts of projects on fish and wildlife, and the habitats they need to maintain their populations, have positioned Ontario as a leader in sustainable development.

We developed strict criteria for natural heritage assessments, and bird and bat monitoring plans. Those applying to build waterpower projects in Ontario must follow stringent environmental assessment rules governing the potential effects of waterpower projects on wildlife species and habitats. They must also develop strategies to prevent, avoid or mitigate any potential negative effects.

In addition to these measures, we placed a moratorium on all proposed offshore wind projects until further scientific research is conducted on the impact on wildlife and the natural habitat. We will work with neighbouring US states to develop policies that ensure any future proposed projects protect human health and the natural environment on both sides of the Great Lakes.

12. If elected, in addition to continuing the province’s partnership with the OFAH for the provincial Invading Species Awareness Program, will your government commit additional resources to deliver the aquatic and terrestrial invasive species commitments of the province under the Ontario Biodiversity Strategy? This would include:

   i) preventing introductions of new invasive species through managing high risk pathways, focusing specifically on shipping (ballast discharge), horticulture, aquarium, and live food fish industries by enhancing capacity to conduct both pathway and species at risk assessments, and developing regulatory tools to prohibit high risk species; and

   ii) enhancing early detection and rapid response capability of invasive species, including the development of a provincial rapid response framework (similar to the MNR model for Rabies Response), creating an emergency fund to implement the response when required, and developing the capacity to quarantine or limit activities in infected areas.

Ontario Liberals have increased funding dedicated to invasive species management, research, monitoring, and education and outreach. Our 2008 budget committed $15 million over four years to the Invasive Species Centre in Sault Ste. Marie. Funding has been used for invasive species projects across the province.

We have begun the development of a rapid response framework, and have already held a series of exercises to test the response plan for the detection of Asian carp in Ontario.
Our platform includes a commitment to introduce a new Great Lakes Act, and a fund to protect the lakes. This initiative will provide new resources and standards to address invasive species.

The PCs have a $14-billion hole in their platform. Given their solid record of cutting environmental programs, it is reasonable to expect that funding for programs such as this would be severely cut under a PC government.

13. If elected, will your government commit to not creating a provincial long gun or firearms registry, given that the federal government, through the Criminal Code of Canada and the Firearms Act is the authority in this regard, given the potential cost to the taxpayers of Ontario, and given the fact that a provincial registry, at best, would only capture some of the firearms used/owned in Ontario?

We will not introduce a provincial long gun or firearms registry.