



Reinstating the spring bear hunt is the obvious answer

Bill Blackwell

President

The spring bear hunt has been anything but a dead issue since it was cancelled nearly 15 years ago. Every year since, Ontarians have been living with the consequences of a decision that was based on emotion, not sound wildlife management, and this year is no different. Between May and September, there have been five bear attacks (at least that we've heard about in the media) across the province. A man required 300 stitches after being mauled by a 400-pound black bear near Cochrane; a biologist doing surveying work near Foleyet was able to fend off a persistent bear by using repellent spray; a man walking two dogs in Sand Bar Provincial Park near Ignace was attacked from behind and later stalked by a bear; again in Cochrane, a bear made its way into a family's home while they were sleeping; and a woman credits her two dogs for saving her life when she was mauled by a bear near Peterborough in September.

Thankfully none of the attacks were fatal, but they serve as an important reminder to people and provincial politicians in particular, (because bear management is a provincial responsibility) of the benefits of a spring bear hunt. And some politicians are realizing it. There has been a recent increase in discussions about bringing back the spring bear hunt, fostered in part by the introduction of Bill 114 by Thunder Bay-Atikokan MPP Bill Mauro. We urge you to call, write or email your MPP to let them know that you support the bill and the reinstatement of a spring bear hunt.

Ontario's spring bear hunt was a successful wildlife population management tool to assist in maintaining the abundance and density of bears at levels that minimized dangerous encounters between people and bears. On average, about 4,000 bears were harvested annually in the spring bear hunt, and about 70% of these were male bears. Used in combination with a fall bear hunt, this two-pronged bear management system reduced bear densities, particularly male bears, and assisted in the control of the size of the bear population. This in turn reduced aggression and cannibalism by male bears on other bears, predation on other species such as deer fawns and moose calves, and reduced bear interactions with people.

The spring bear hunt provided benefits to people and society, and minimized costs associated with problem bears. It was an excellent, proven example of sustainable development in practice, where the benefits from a renewable natural resource were being maximized and costs to people and society minimized.

With no spring bear hunt, there are now more problem bears in the spring, summer, and early fall because there are more bears in the population. There are more aggressive, cannibalistic males in the woods that cause other bears to avoid them and thus, for example, seek food in other areas near people such as towns and cities. Berry crop shortages or failures worsen these effects.

Other methods to try to address problems with bears have failed. For example, according to the Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR), trapping and relocation of problem bears has a failure rate of 80% for adult bears of either sex. So, proper wildlife management requires a spring hunt to reduce harmful interactions with humans, supplying benefits to people and society, but also to maintain bear populations at levels more consistent with long-term average food supplies for the bears themselves.

The cancellation of the spring bear hunt was not only bad for people and public safety, it was also bad for the bear population. The hunt provided wholesome food, valuable hides, and rewarding hunting experiences for thousands of hunters each year. It generated over \$40 million every year and sustained many jobs (all of which have flowed to our neighbours in Manitoba and Quebec because they continue to have spring bear hunts).

Your Federation is unwavering in its position to have the spring bear hunt reinstated. This, among other issues, will continue to be front and centre in 2014 and beyond.

As I reflect back on what has been a very busy and hectic year, I would like to take this opportunity on behalf of myself, our Board of Directors and Head Office staff to wish you all a safe and successful hunting season. Thank you for your continued support of the OFAH, happy holidays and nothing but health and happiness in 2014.



The importance of harvest reporting

Angelo Lombardo

Executive Director

With approximately 105,000 moose, 400,000 deer, 105,000 black bears, and over 1,000 elk, Ontario is blessed with an abundance of huntable game populations. Each year, licensed hunters pour hundreds of millions of dollars into the provincial economy as they spread out across our majestic land base to take advantage of some marvelous hunting opportunities. In order to ensure the wise use of our resources, wildlife managers need access to high quality data in order to make informed decisions.

There is a common misconception among hunters that reporting results is merely a means for the MNR to cut back on game seals and to limit hunting opportunities. The reality is that hunters are the only source of two vital pieces of information needed for wildlife management: when and where animals are harvested. This and other information is used to monitor wildlife populations, develop regulations such as changes to seasons and bag limits, and to ensure harvest is sustainable.

Accurate hunter reporting can lead to better wildlife management, which should in turn help to optimize the quantity and quality of our hunting opportunities. And yet, despite their importance and simplicity, some hunters do not submit harvest reports. Reasons range from forgetfulness and indifference, to a general distrust of the government and resentment that aboriginal people are not required to report their harvest.

Current reporting requirements are as varied as the species we hunt. Licensed hunters are legally obligated to submit harvest and/or hunting effort information for wild turkey, elk, bear, wolf/coyote (in select WMUs) and for many moose and deer seasons. Additionally, reporting is voluntary for a random sample of moose adult validation tag and deer licence holders.

Turkey hunting provides a concrete example of how harvest reporting can help create hunting opportunities. The Wild Turkey Management Plan for Ontario states that a fall turkey season will only be considered in a WMU when spring turkey harvest exceeds 200 birds for three consecutive years (or 3 out of 4 years). Although spring harvest results are only one of the criteria used to open a fall turkey season, accurate reporting helps wildlife managers identify potential opportunities. If hunters do not report their harvest, regardless of turkey population size in their WMU, it could take much longer to open a fall season (if it happens at all).

As a growing segment of Ontario society, hunters continue to face challenges in preserving the heritage and traditions that we hold dear. It is our duty as responsible hunters to demonstrate that we take seriously our role as conservationists. Cooperation in the game management process is an important element in maintaining credibility and preserving our hunting heritage. It is easy for us to sit back and criticize the government for poor wildlife management decisions; however, we cannot make things better if we do not participate in the process. And who knows – with a little more effort on the part of licensed hunters, we may just see better wildlife management and more hunting opportunities.

Does the current reporting system contribute to wildlife management? Yes. Could it be more efficient and cost-effective? Absolutely. The OFAH will continue to push for improvements to our reporting system to make sure it is easy and convenient for hunters to submit reports. We also want to ensure it is cost-effective, and that only the required information is collected and utilized in a way that will maximize the benefits for wildlife populations and hunters, alike.

As our big game seasons wind down and we celebrate another fall hunting season, please take some time to report on your hunting seasons and remind your friends and family to do the same.

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It is available ten times per year. Please direct inquiries to:

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More opportunities await hunters and trappers this fall

Bill Blackwell

President

Fall is in the air, and I for one couldn't be happier. As the days get shorter and the nights get cooler, there is so much to look forward to, especially this year with new and expanded hunting opportunities.

It's been nearly 60 years since the last Mourning Dove hunt took place in Ontario. Now, thanks in part to ongoing advocacy by the OFAH and Long Point Waterfowl, a Mourning Dove hunt has been established in southern and central zones. Falling under the Migratory Game Birds Hunting regulations, the season opened on the same day as the early goose hunt and extends for 70 days. The bag limit is 15 birds/day, the possession limit is 45 birds and only non-toxic shot can be used. The new Mourning Dove season will provide economic, ecological and recreational benefits to the residents of Ontario. It is also a great opportunity for young hunters in the province.

I can't talk about increased hunting opportunities without mentioning Sunday gun hunting. Since 2005, when the MNR developed a Sunday gun hunting policy, 155 municipalities across southern Ontario have passed resolutions in support. The most recent additions to the list include Douro-Dummer, Malahide, and Enniskillen. Despite these successes, we still have more work to do in proving to some municipalities the benefits of Sunday gun hunting. It is a cost-effective wildlife management tool; it's a public safety issue (the Ministry of Transportation says there is a motor vehicle/wildlife collision every 38 minutes in the province, 90% of which involve whitetail deer); it's of major economic importance (hunting activity in Ontario represents \$1.5 billion in annual economic activity); and it gives families one extra day (and, for some, the only day) to spend time together, mentor a youth and enjoy the great outdoors.

Given all of the opportunities now available, we can only assume the number of students taking the Ontario Hunter Education Program will continue to increase. The program has seen 11 consecutive years of growth and, as it looks now, 2013 won't be any different. The increase in numbers can be attributed, in part, to the success of the Hunter Apprenticeship Safety Program and a variety of mentoring opportunities across the province. Today's youth are becoming increasingly interested in spending time outside rather than in front of the television. They realize hunting is a healthy recreational activity that provides them with a lifelong connection with wildlife.

Hunting, however, isn't the only opportunity to engage youth in the province's rich outdoor heritage. Recently, the Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR) and the Ontario Fur Managers Federation rolled out a new youth trapping program. Now, youth between the ages of 12 and 15 will be eligible to obtain a trapping license. The license will permit youth to possess, prepare and sell pelts commercially. To qualify, youth must successfully complete the Fur Harvest, Fur Management and Conservation Course (FHFMC) and be accompanied by a licensed trapper 18 years of age or older. The FHFMC provides training with an emphasis on safety, humane trapping techniques, and sustainable wildlife management practices. The OFAH is pleased that the MNR recognizes that a youth trapping program will not only provide recreational and outdoor benefits, but also pass along knowledge of an activity that is part of the cultural fabric of Canada.

As I head out this fall to enjoy the many hunting opportunities that await me, I can't help but reflect back on the many accomplishments of our organization and the gratitude that I feel towards each and every OFAH member. Thank you for your commitment and dedication to the future well being of this province's fish and wildlife. I wish you nothing but a safe and enjoyable hunting season.

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New navigation laws will be a double whammy in the Algonquin Land Claim area

Angelo Lombardo

Executive Director

The land settlements of the Algonquin Land Claim are a major concern for OFAH members who live, work and recreate in eastern Ontario. Until now, concerns have focused on the land portion of the 117,500 acres that is scheduled to be transferred when the treaty is signed. This is likely due to the fact that ownership of property is generally only tied to the land itself and because there has been federally legislated protection for the public right of navigation under the Navigable Waters Protection Act (NWPA). This protection applies to all navigable waters; defined as those waters capable of being navigated by any type of floating vessel for transportation, recreation or commerce. This would mean that all accessible waters would remain publicly available regardless of whether the adjacent lands are privatized. Although this may have been true during the first 20 years of the Algonquin Land Claim negotiations, last year's changes to the NWPA by the federal government will shut the door on future public navigation for hundreds, if not thousands, of waters in the land claim area. We can now expect an even greater impact on anglers and hunters than originally anticipated.

Many environmental organizations sounded the alarm last year when Bill C-45 was tabled and passed by the Government of Canada. Although the NWPA may have been responsible for flagging an environmental issue, it was not a main line of defense by any stretch of the imagination. The NWPA is, and always has been, intended to protect the Canadian right of navigation. It was never intended to be used as an environmental law.

Let's face it. If navigation laws were the only thing standing between development activities and the protection of our aquatic resources, then there are obviously bigger problems we need to address. While other groups were spending time and energy on environmental concerns, the OFAH sounded the alarm on the NWPA for an entirely different reason: public access to our lakes, rivers and streams.

We often only stop to think about the importance of something once it is gone, or in the case of the NWPA, is on its way out. I think many of us take the public right of navigation for granted because it has been in place for more than 130 years. The new Navigation Protection Act will only protect our right of navigation in 162 oceans, lakes and rivers across the entire country. What will happen to navigation in the hundreds of thousands of other Canadian waters?

In my April column, I highlighted many of our specific concerns with the amendments to the NWPA contained in Bill C-45 and talked about what it means for anglers and hunters. As anglers and hunters, we have experienced fences, wires and other obstructions across our favourite trout streams or canoe routes as they pass through private lands. These obstructions are a public safety concern and are illegal. Although Transport Canada claims this type of activity will remain an infringement on the public right of navigation under Common Law, it will now be up to an individual to fight this through a court of law. How many everyday Ontario anglers and hunters have the time or the money to fight a court battle to maintain our right of navigation? Most of us will likely move onto the nearest unobstructed water. The bottom line is: we should not have to.

The changes to the NWPA will be felt wherever there are private lands nearby Ontario waters. With all of the public lands and lakes that will be lost through the Algonquin Land Claim, and the public hunting and fishing opportunities that will go with them, the major changes in federal navigation laws will leave non-Algonquin anglers and hunters with even fewer opportunities once the dust settles.

The potential for the Algonquin Land Claim to impact on anglers, hunters and other Crown land users has been known from the very beginning. Although it appears the changes to the NWPA were not specifically intended to restrict public access, the fact remains that we will potentially lose access to thousands of lakes, rivers and streams across the province. The OFAH remains on the front lines of a battle to maintain public hunting and fishing opportunities in the Algonquin Land Claim area. Rest assured that your Federation will not stand idly by while our hunting and fishing heritage is eroded by new navigation protection laws.



Land claims in Ontario - What does the future hold?

Bill Blackwell

President

For the past five years I have spent the third week of July teaching youth at the Long Point Waterfowl Youth Camp. During the week I, along with 3 other instructors, have taught young people between the ages of 12 and 16 the Canadian Firearms Safety Course, the Ontario Hunter Education Course and the Wild Turkey Hunter Education Course. Nothing can match the joy and pride on the kids' faces as they proudly display their certificates after completing an intense week of classroom and outdoor instruction. I know they are all looking forward to their future as anglers and hunters and their role as conservationists.

However, as I spent the week surrounded by all of those eager young faces, I couldn't help but reflect upon all of the challenges facing us and wondering what kind of hunting and fishing opportunities await those kids and my three young grandchildren, given the competing pressures of government reductions in natural resources funding and involvement, increasing numbers of native land claims, expanding access restrictions and a host of other issues that we are currently grappling with.

The Algonquin Land Claim and a court challenge to the Williams Treaty are two examples of native claims that have the potential to drastically affect our access to natural resources, impact on fish and wildlife species and affect our ability to hunt and fish as we have done for generations. We do not dispute that First Nations people have rights under Section 35 of the Constitution, nor do we dispute their right to harvest fish and wildlife for sustenance and ceremonial purposes. These rights are enshrined in law and have been reaffirmed by the Supreme Court of Canada. However, somewhere along the line, the government negotiators, the courts and our politicians seem to have overlooked the fact that many of our forefathers fished and hunted for the same reasons as First Nations peoples, and that for them, the right to do so was an equally important part of their collective heritage. The right to hunt and fish, and the ability to access our natural resources to engage in these activities is a part of our history, a fact that is often overlooked by negotiators who sit at the table representing the government, and supposedly, all Canadians.

For over twenty years, the OFAH has been involved with the Algonquin Land Claim. Throughout the process, we have been repeatedly told that the negotiations were being conducted in good faith, and that there was considerable common ground between the Algonquin and the 1.4 million non-aboriginals who live as neighbours. Unfortunately, when you read the Agreement in Principle (AIP) released last December, it is clear that all of the input and expert advice offered by stakeholders like the OFAH, the Federation of Ontario Cottage Associations, the Canadian Sportfishing Industry Association and thousands of residents who live and work in the area of the claim, largely fell on deaf ears.

Since Day one, the OFAH has sought to ensure that above all else, the AIP would be based upon conservation of our natural resources and principles like fair sharing. We provided a conservation definition for inclusion in the AIP that reads as follows, "Conservation is the protection, use and management of natural resources to supply benefits at optimal levels for present and future generations of Ontarians." However, thus far, conservation has taken a back seat in the negotiations. The courts have repeatedly recognized that conservation trumps all, but to date, the AIP is not reflective of this.

Anglers and hunters, through their license fees, currently pay for roughly two thirds of all fish and wildlife programs in Ontario. If, however, our governments and our political representatives do not recognize that the AIP and its contents deserves more discussion, more consultation, more fairness, and most importantly, the enshrinement of conservation principles in the AIP, the very real possibility exists that the resources that we pay for today will be lost tomorrow.

As part of the negotiations process, we have sought to ensure that the AIP, while providing for the resolution of longstanding grievances on the part of the Algonquins, also ensures that the rights of non-aboriginals are respected. This is not a land claim that exists in a barren landscape in the far north where populations are scarce. It is a modern agreement that will exist in a settled landscape where existing resource uses are fully allocated and the interests of all occupants of the land must be considered.

The Algonquin Land Claim is only one of many in Ontario, but given the size and magnitude of the claim, the speed at which the AIP is moving forward, and the apparent lack of any plans for further public consultation, you can't help but wonder what the future holds. We understand that despite the input provided to the two levels of government during public 'information' sessions earlier this year, there are no plans to go back to the public to tell them how their input was valued or incorporated into the negotiation process. We also understand that the time for further discussions is limited, given the governments' intent to have the Algonquins ratify the AIP by the end of the year.

Over a century ago, anglers and hunters in both Canada and the U.S. recognized the need for a new way of conserving our natural resources. What resulted is the North American Model for Wildlife Conservation, which has served as the underpinning of our fish and wildlife resource policies, and is responsible in part for the restoration and enhancement of countless fish and wildlife species that otherwise would have been endangered. That legacy, and the commitment of all anglers, hunters and others to the conservation of our resources must not be negotiated away. Land claim settlements elsewhere in Canada have recognized the importance of conservation of the resources and the concept of fair sharing. That needs to be the case here as well, if we are to guarantee that future generations, both Algonquins and non-aboriginal, will have anything left to enjoy.



Conservation Officers on the frontline of fish & wildlife protection

Angelo Lombardo

Executive Director

If you hunt or fish in Ontario, chances are that at some point in time you have had contact with an MNR Conservation Officer (CO).

For more than 100 years, CO's have been charged with the responsibility of preserving and protecting our valuable natural resources. In the process, they cover over one million square kilometers and over 250,000 lakes, rivers and forests while enforcing over 27 pieces of provincial legislation and four federal laws; conducting investigations; educating the public; and appearing in court as expert witnesses. At any given time they could be involved in investigations related to fires, parks, off road vehicles, boats, aggregates, fish and wildlife and species at risk.

Working out of 25 MNR districts and three Great Lakes management units, they are also involved in canine, special investigations and training/education. In synch with changing times, CO's also spend an increasing amount of time using the internet as an investigative tool to track down individuals involved in the illegal trafficking of fish and wildlife.

Despite all of these activities and the growing demands on their time, the number of CO's in Ontario continues to slowly but inexorably decline. There are currently 291 positions in the Enforcement Branch, down from 310 positions in 2006/2007. More alarming is the fact that over the same span of time, the number of 'boots on the ground' officers slipped from 191 to 180. The loss in terms of numbers may not seem like a lot, but considering the amount of territory that CO's must cover and their involvement in investigations that may take them hours from the nearest community, and you can appreciate why the OFAH has always held CO's in high regard and considers them to be one of the most effective services provided by the MNR.

Take it from me; even if you haven't seen a CO in the course of your daily activities, they are out there. From making visits to hunt camps in the fall to appearing at council meetings on discharge bylaws and Sunday hunting, CO's are around. What we need is more of them; to ensure adequate protection of our natural resources and ongoing safety of the public and the officers.

We can appreciate that the Ontario government, like governments everywhere, is engaged in a restraint exercise and is seeking to cut fat from the budget. In doing so, however, the province should exercise caution in terms of what it cuts, and consider the long term impact of those cuts before proceeding. As noted by the Environmental Commissioner, the Ministry of Natural Resources receives only a tiny amount of the overall provincial funding envelope and suffers from drastic underfunding, a situation that has been ongoing for years and has resulted in cuts to virtually every program, including enforcement and other critical 'on the ground' services.

Fishing and hunting, both in Ontario and across the country is big business. In 2012, resident and non-resident anglers and hunters in Ontario purchased almost two million hunting and fishing licences, and for the first time in a long time, purchases of migratory bird permits have increased. Anglers and hunters contribute several billion dollars to the provincial economy each year, and Canada-wide the total is over \$13 billion. In Ontario, proceeds from fishing and hunting licences fund roughly two-thirds of the entire provincial fish and wildlife budget. For ten years straight, the Hunter Education program has graduated more new hunters than the year before; an encouraging trend. These are positive signs for the outdoor community, and will hopefully result in more anglers and hunters than ever on the water and in the field.

OFAH members and the vast majority of anglers and hunters in Ontario are scrupulous in their compliance for the laws that protect our resources. Unfortunately, there will always be a few who show nothing but disdain for seasons, limits or boundaries. For the future well-being of our natural resources, and in the interests of providing expanded opportunities for all anglers and hunters to pursue their passion, it is important that we maintain a strong and stable enforcement regime.

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Federation members go that “extra-extra” mile

Bill Blackwell

President

When your Federation talks about that “extra-extra,” we’re talking about membership and donations—in that order!

The first “extra” is the most proactive step. It represents the difference between let’s wait and see versus let’s make it happen. Today, nearly 85,000 motivated members make it happen for our hunting and fishing future. They also make it happen for our hunting and fishing friends who may never fully appreciate the extra effort OFAH members put into opportunities that non-OFAH members will automatically enjoy. If they are excited about elk, wild turkey, and other new hunting and fishing opportunities, imagine what we could achieve if we had their “extra” support too.

The second “extra” represents OFAH voluntary donations that drive our success. Simply stated, OFAH membership dues fund our core conservation mandate and provide outstanding benefits, but it will never be enough to keep up with the high standard we set for OFAH projects and programming. Your Federation asks more of its members when its members asks more from its Federation. In lesser hands, grassroots conservation programs would have died a thousand deaths. We salute OFAH members who, as always, deliver the “extra-extra.” You put your money where your passion is and find solutions when others don’t even understand the need for grassroots contributions.

Today, Federation members have never been more prepared to volunteer their time and donate dollars to support our programs that protect lakes from invasive species, stock fish, restore native species, improve habitat, provide fish and wildlife research, and teach kids about conservation. The roll-up-the-sleeves and make-it-happen fortitude to carry the conservation workload reflects the volunteer spirit so deeply woven into the OFAH culture.

Travel anywhere in Ontario to find OFAH members volunteering at the local fish hatchery, spending late nights at conservation club meetings, mentoring new hunters and teaching outdoors safety, selling OFAH/Conservation Lottery tickets at the local mall or driving around the community to find prizes for kids’ fishing events. Many OFAH members simply cannot get the time from busy work and family schedules to stand shoulder to shoulder with fellow volunteers and that’s why participation in OFAH fundraising programs is another way to lend a hand.

If we didn’t personally know how hard OFAH members work to support their outdoors future, it might be too easy to take that membership, donations and hands-on volunteer work for granted. Rest assured, your “extra-extra” does not go unnoticed by your Federation.

I smiled when I read a message penned to an OFAH fundraising campaign letter. “Just a drop in the bucket,” said an OFAH member who made a donation of what his family budget could afford, knowing that every “extra-extra” bit helps.

We hope that every OFAH member shares that spirit as we approach a couple of our most successful conservation fundraising programs, which if you haven’t seen them yet, you will shortly. There’s never an obligation to donate and we sincerely appreciate every dollar you can afford to contribute, if you choose to help beyond your OFAH membership support.

As your OFAH president, it’s been my pleasure to personally chat with thousands of OFAH members at various fish and wildlife events and outdoor trade shows. OFAH members come from all walks of life. We work hard for our money and invest it wisely. While some of our members appreciate more ways to receive OFAH charitable receipts, some members are on severely fixed incomes. Family priorities come first. That’s why it’s so heartening to hear members say “although we can’t always donate, we always find a way renew our OFAH membership.” What more can your Federation ask?

Thanks for going the “extra” distance for conservation and your family’s outdoors way of life.

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Sustainable fisheries benefit all Ontarians

Angelo Lombardo

Executive Director

I recently heard about Waterhen Lake, and not for the reason you might expect. I do not have any plans to wet a line in Waterhen Lake, but I am following the changes on this Manitoba lake with great interest. The Walleye and Northern Pike commercial gill net harvesters of Waterhen Lake are seeking sustainability certification from the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC). You might be wondering how a Manitoba lake can help our fisheries here in Ontario. It sets a critically important precedent.

If successful, Waterhen Lake will become the first freshwater fishery in North America to obtain MSC certification. It has already helped to open the door for Ontario's commercial fisheries to pursue sustainability certification. On June 19, it was announced that Ontario's Lake Erie commercial fisheries for six species, including Yellow Perch and Walleye, has entered into MSC assessment. The assessment is expected to be completed by the summer of 2014, meaning Ontario could have certified sustainable fish products in the very near future. The Ontario Commercial Fisheries' Association (OCFA) should be commended for initiating this process, but we must not overlook the fact that the Lake Erie fisheries are already fully licensed and regulated. Sustainability certification would have the most effect in Ontario where there is currently little or no government-enforced regulations: Aboriginal commercial fisheries.

What makes the Waterhen Lake case even more interesting is the fact that the 22 licensed commercial fish harvesters are also members of local First Nations communities. This is not a situation where the Manitoba Government is forcing certification on the First Nation commercial harvesters. The harvesters themselves want to be certified. Not only to help them be more competitive in the market place, but also to ensure they will have a sustainable and productive fishery in the future.

The need for sustainability certification for Aboriginal commercial fisheries is becoming more and more apparent in Ontario. The unregulated Lake Nipissing commercial gill net fishery is just one example of the government's increasing unwillingness to regulate Aboriginal commercial fisheries. The obvious benefit of a market that demands sustainable fish products is that it forces fish harvesters to get certified and therefore comply with a set of criteria that ensures a fishery is sustainable. A less than obvious by-product of sustainability certification is that it compels government agencies (i.e. MNR) to do their jobs without being swayed by political agendas. Through the certification process, the MNR would be accountable to carry out a full evaluation, through monitoring and assessment, of the fishery. The criteria for certification itself would establish a set of rules and regulations that are often absent from Aboriginal commercial fisheries in Ontario. We could avoid the loss of benefits that has occurred in Lake Nipissing.

The presence of certified sustainable freshwater fish products in the market may push more and more Ontario commercial fisheries to seek certification in order to stay competitive. We can only hope that sustainability certification will become a necessary cost of doing business for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal commercial fisheries and becomes the norm in Ontario. For this to become a reality, it will require us as consumers, to support sustainable fish products. If your buddy considers buying fish from the back of a truck, make sure he understands the connection between his "roadside grocer" and the reason local fish stocks have declined.

MSC certification will not solve all of Ontario's commercial fishery issues. It would however, represent a monumental step towards ensuring their sustainability. The success of Waterhen Lake will prove that sustainability certification can be done for a freshwater commercial gill net fishery. Perhaps most importantly, it will show us that sustainability certification can be done for a First Nations commercial gill net fishery. The bottom line is that it can be done and should be done because the sustainability of our fisheries will depend on it.

If the Ontario government is not willing to do something about unsustainable Aboriginal commercial fisheries, then I suggest we start to push the agenda. We can start by encouraging our friends and families to buy certified sustainable fish by looking for the MSC symbol during their next trip to the grocery store or local fish market. Regardless of whether you are Aboriginal, non-Aboriginal, a commercial harvester or a recreational angler - if we conserve our fisheries resources, everybody wins.



Hunting heritage alive and well in Ontario

Bill Blackwell

President

Fall hunting season will be here before you know it.

Are you ready?



Don't wait until hunting season starts to sign up for your Ontario Hunter Education and Firearms Safety courses. Classes fill fast, and the paperwork takes several weeks.

Register today!

www.ohep.net or call Call 705-748-6324 ext. 224

We are right in the heart of summer, but I'm already thinking ahead to fall; when the air turns cooler and the leaves begin to change colour. To me, that means one thing: hunting. I'm especially looking forward to this year's fall hunt because I missed out on my other favourite time of year, which is spring turkey season. I had knee replacement surgery at the end of March, and thought for certain I'd be in the field in time. Was I wrong! Instead of venturing out in the hopes of taking a bird, I had to listen to other people's success (or lack of success) stories while sitting on the sidelines.

As OFAH President and as a Hunter Education and Firearms instructor, one of my greatest pleasures is teaching young people interested in hunting for the first time. I'm also a passionate supporter of new opportunities for youth hunting, like the recent hunt experienced by three eager youth who visited Bird's Eye View Pheasant Farm for a day of turkey hunting with a mentor. This is a wonderful example of the work that the OFAH and its partners do to introduce and engage youth in this heritage activity.

Today's youth do not have the same access to hunting opportunities that my generation and my son's generation enjoyed. Many may want to try hunting, but lack the tools, knowledge or access to huntable properties to get started. Providing opportunities for young hunters to gain the expertise, licenses and skills they need to hunt safely is an increasing priority for the OFAH, our member clubs, and other stakeholders in the outdoor community. Waterfowl Heritage Day is a perfect way to introduce new hunters to the outdoors, so please try to take advantage of this phenomenal opportunity. Upcoming youth hunting events include the Longpoint Waterfowl Youth Event; the OFAH Delta Waterfowl Youth Heritage Day; and the OFAH Bird's Eye View Youth Pheasant Hunt in October. Be sure to check www.ofah.org/hunting/youth-hunting for new announcements.

Hunter Education instructors from across the province recently visited the OFAH/Mario Cortellucci Hunting & Fishing Heritage Centre for the 22nd Annual Hunter Education Instructor Conference. The weekend featured a number of interesting speakers, and was capped off by the Saturday night dinner which saw former OFAH/MNR Hunter Education Program Coordinator Pat Hogan, former MNR Ontario Coordinator for Hunter Safety Bill McKittrick, and former instructor and past OFAH President Terry Smeltzer inducted into the Ontario Hunter Education Hall of Fame.

Mandatory hunter education was introduced in Ontario at the urging of the OFAH in 1960 and, since then, more than one million people have been trained to think "safety first" when taking part in a hunt. Working in cooperation with the MNR, the OFAH administers this important program, which last year alone processed over 21,000 students. In fact, the number of students has increased every year for the past eleven years. Clearly, rumours that suggest hunting is on the decline are greatly exaggerated.

Hunting is part of the cultural fabric of Canada. Our nation was founded on the opportunities that hunting, fishing and trapping afforded our ancestors and indigenous peoples. Even today, recreational hunting activities contribute billions of dollars to the provincial economy every year. There are roughly 440,000 trained and licensed hunters in Ontario celebrating our hunting heritage each year. If you can, I encourage you to engage our youth, and take a kid hunting.



A bright future for Lake Ontario's fisheries

Angelo Lombardo

Executive Director

We can accomplish great things when we work together. This is clear when you look at the Normandale Fish Culture Station, which opened its doors last month (see page 4 for highlights).

The OFAH has always believed that fish culture is a key program area for the Ministry of Natural Resources – it provides put-grow-take fisheries, it protects vulnerable fisheries and waterbodies by providing fishing opportunities elsewhere, and it supports species rehabilitation and biodiversity initiatives. Several years ago, the OFAH supported the long-term commitment of the province to rebuild Normandale and we worked with the MNR to operate the Ringwood Fish Culture Station with the Metro East Anglers to raise Chinook Salmon, Coho Salmon, Rainbow Trout, Brown Trout and Atlantic Salmon for Lake Ontario while Normandale was being renovated.

The Lake Ontario Management Unit and Normandale Station staff also worked with several Lake Ontario-based clubs, some of which are OFAH clubs, on Chinook Salmon pen-rearing projects; helping young Chinooks imprint on local waters to support the nearshore fishery. The continued success of the province's Chinook Salmon program, secured in this new hatchery, is another cause for celebration. It is a fishery worth over a hundred million dollars annually to the economy, and it supports thousands upon thousands of hours of recreation for anglers, including many tournaments (both local ones and large ones such as the Great Ontario Salmon Derby).

Normandale has played a key role in the Lake Ontario Atlantic Salmon Restoration Program (LOASRP), which the OFAH and the MNR have been working on together since 2006 as lead partners. Back then, we began full-scale restoration, knowing it was a long-term project requiring years of planning and commitment. Now, we're celebrating the fruits of that labour, with the new Normandale now playing a greater role in the Atlantic Salmon program as it houses both broodstock and production fish.

Fish production is just one of the four components of the restoration program along with habitat rehabilitation, assessment and research and education. Normandale will be playing a role in education, through the new visitors' centre.

None of this would be possible if it weren't for the support of key sponsors such as Ontario Power Generation; lead sponsor of phase two of the LOASRP. In the beginning of the program, our first corporate supporter was the Liquor Control Board of Ontario, and they have remained steadfast partners for almost eight years now. Some of the original stakeholder partners in the program were the Canadian Sportfishing Industry Association and Trout Unlimited Canada. Other key partners include the Toronto Dominion Friends of the Environment Foundation, which supports our habitat restoration efforts, and Fleming College, whose teaching hatchery in Lindsay is the other main fish production site for the program. All in all, the success of the program is based on the strength of partnerships, which is forty-plus strong. I also wish to recognize our phase one lead sponsor, Banrock Station Wines of Australia, whose initial support got the program off the ground in 2006. We wouldn't be where we are today without this support.

On behalf of its 100,000 members, supporters and subscribers, and 710 member clubs, the OFAH would like to congratulate MNR staff, contractors, suppliers, engineers, and architects who worked so hard to make this day happen – your efforts are appreciated by us all, and I look forward to what we can accomplish in the future.

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Aboriginal commercial fisheries setting a double standard for conservation

Bill Blackwell

President

In March, the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR) signed a new commercial fishing agreement with the Saugeen Ojibway Nation (SON) to commercially fish in the areas of Lake Huron and Georgian Bay that flank the Bruce Peninsula. The OFAH was extremely disappointed that the Ontario Government negotiated and signed the agreement on behalf of the people of Ontario without prior consultation. Following a review of the agreement, the OFAH is having trouble determining where and how the perspectives of recreational anglers were negotiated into the agreement. Although this is the third consecutive SON-MNR agreement, it is the first time SON commercial fishing efforts will be expanded into Owen Sound and Colpoy's Bays. The agreement also has new provisions that allow for the netting of fish in close proximity to the mouths of tributaries, which could negatively affect the spawning runs of several fish species. These new provisions are concerning because of potential threats to public safety and conservation of the resource. In addition to these new issues, the OFAH continues to be concerned about a lack of consideration in the SON-MNR agreement for other fish species harvested as by-catch by the commercial fishery. You can read all of the OFAH's questions and concerns about specific details in the agreement in the April 19 OFAH Media Release: www.ofah.org/news.

Conservation is the protection, use and management of natural resources to supply benefits at optimal sustainable levels for present and future generations of Ontarians. Regardless of whether you are an angler, a commercial harvester or an aboriginal harvester, we all have a vested interest in the conservation of our fishery resources. We need to recognize that sound harvest limitations are science-based and intended to uphold the principles of conservation. It is not about limitations. It is about conservation.

As anglers, we are not strangers to following a complex set of rules and regulations. Abiding by these regulations is just one of the ways that licensed and law-abiding anglers in Ontario are directly contributing to the conservation of our fishery resources (buying a license is another). Read through your copy of the Ontario Fishing Regulations Summary (if you were lucky enough to get your hands on one - see page 2) and you will see that anglers in Ontario are restricted by seasons, gear, creel limits, size limits, and geographic restrictions. The principles of conservation are not unique to the management of recreational fisheries and, therefore, the rules of conservation must be applied universally across all users for the benefit of the fishery.

When conservation is not prioritized over other social, cultural, economic or political considerations, we all lose. We only need to look at the current state of the Lake Nipissing Walleye population to see the devastating effects of unregulated commercial fishing. One hundred years of fish and wildlife conservation management in North America tells us that unregulated harvest is not compatible with conservation. Although the SON-MNR agreement is more formal than what we see for the Lake Nipissing Walleye gill net fishery, it still obliges us to pause and ask: does this agreement place conservation as the utmost priority?

In Ontario, non-aboriginal commercial harvesters are required to have an Ontario Commercial Fishing Licence (OCFL) before they can even put a net in the water. The terms and conditions of an OCFL sets limits on the species, size of fish, gear, persons who may fish, locations, periods and times of day when fishing can occur, as well as the loading, landing, handling and transportation of fish. This high level of regulation on commercial fishing is imposed for the purpose of conservation and, therefore, is a necessary cost of doing business to ensure we maintain a productive and sustainable fishery.

If we have an existing commercial fisheries management regime in Ontario (i.e. OCFL) that is science-based and designed to uphold conservation, then why do we choose to manage aboriginal commercial fisheries under a different and often incompatible management regime?

For the sake of future generations, conservation cannot continue to have this double standard.

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To review of OFAH's position on the Lake Nipissing Walleye situation, visit www.ofah.org/nipissingwalleye



CWD: The single greatest threat to Ontario's wild cervid populations

Angelo Lombardo

Executive Director

Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) has been a concern of the Federation's since its discovery in 1967, in a captive mule deer in Colorado. Canada's first case of CWD in a wild cervid (such as deer, moose, caribou or elk) was discovered in Saskatchewan in 2001, where it has persisted in free-ranging herds despite huge and costly eradication efforts. To date, CWD has been found in at least 18 US States and 2 Canadian provinces, including in a moose in Alberta.

In the early days of Canada's CWD eradication program, positive cases were directly linked to the presence and movement of captive cervids. Academics and wildlife managers now agree that the cervid farming industry is responsible for the introduction and spread of CWD.

The disease is always fatal. There is no live test for CWD, and no vaccine. Symptoms include emaciation, drooling, abnormal behaviour, deteriorating body condition, and pneumonia. Due to its long incubation period, infected animals may not show symptoms of CWD for years. CWD is thought to be caused by an abnormal protein (called a prion) that accumulates and causes lesions in the brain of infected animals. Prions can be transmitted between animals through saliva, urine and feces, and can persist in certain soils for years.

The Ministry of Natural Resources has operated the Ontario Chronic Wasting Disease Surveillance Program since 2002. Thanks to the cooperation of Ontario deer hunters, 9,414 white-tailed deer have been tested for CWD to date. Fortunately, CWD has not yet been detected in Ontario. In 2005, the MNR released the CWD Surveillance and Response Plan that outlines the province's proposed response to the detection of a positive case of CWD in Ontario. Unfortunately, the surveillance program fails to protect our wild cervid populations by continuing to permit the inter-provincial movement of live cervids, native and otherwise, and by allowing the continued existence of cervid farms.

The picture isn't any brighter on the federal side. In late 2012, we were informed that the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) is proposing a zoning approach as their plan to control the spread of CWD in Canada. The zoning approach is widely used in Europe and has successfully halted the spread of many wildlife diseases. CFIA proposes to group provinces together based on the presence of CWD in their wild and captive cervid populations. Movement restrictions and CFIA's responsibilities would differ between zones, allowing CFIA in some cases to abdicate its authority. The zone approach continues to permit the inter-provincial movement of live cervids.

The CFIA has formed a CWD Task Force to brainstorm methods of controlling the spread of CWD. Unfortunately, 10 of the 17 positions have been reserved for representatives from industries and government ministries that fervently support cervid farming. This biased membership will make it difficult to generate a complete and objective list of options, which must include the elimination of the cervid farming industry. OFAH has long fought for the elimination of cervid farms, with proper compensation to farmers. With the support of our sister organizations in five provinces and one territory (Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland and Labrador, and the Yukon), we have written to the Honourable Gerry Ritz, Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, requesting, as a first step, a complete and immediate prohibition on the inter-provincial movement of live cervids. We also requested a re-examination of the membership of the CWD Task Force to include representatives from all Canadian provinces and wildlife conservation organizations.

Given the importance of this issue, your Federation will continue to petition government to establish effective methods to prevent the spread of CWD and to eliminate the industry that continues to expose our wild cervid populations to unacceptable risk.

Darrell Rowledge, President of the Alliance for Public Wildlife, recently spoke at the 85th OFAH Fish & Wildlife Conference about CWD. Visit www.ofah.org/conference to view his presentation.



Another successful conference in the books

Bill Blackwell

President

What a whirlwind this past month has been. We're winding down from the OFAH's 85th Annual General Meeting and Fish & Wildlife Conference; another successful one for the books. More than 450 attendees from all corners of the province and even south of the border gathered at the Delta Meadowvale Resort and Conference Centre in Mississauga for three days of timely discussions, good friends and great food. My wife Rose and I haven't missed a conference in more than a decade and you can be sure that we are already looking forward to next year's event.

Brand new this year was a trio of workshops on Saturday, in lieu of the traditional trip to the Toronto Sportsmen's Show. These were a hit, to say the least. We were pleased to have Martin Gelenyse with Ontario Hawking Club Inc. to speak about falconry as an exciting hunting opportunity; Darcy Alkerton of Wildlife Technologies Canadian Expert shared his tips and tricks for coyote hunting; and Robin Horwath and Ed Skrabek with the Ontario Fur Managers Federation highlighted one of Canada's oldest traditions: trapping.

One of the things I enjoy most about conference is the platform it offers attendees to ask some tough questions to government and industry representatives, including Deputy Minister of Natural Resources David O'Toole and MNR staff. Many questions were asked, and several concerns were raised over the new Saugeen First Nations Commercial Fishing Agreement, the Williams Treaty, and the Algonquin Land Claim. Although the Algonquin Land Claim has been a significant file for the OFAH for years, the public is now beginning to realize how the transfer of no less than 117,500 acres of Crown land could impact not only them, but also future generations. For the latest information, and to view a webcast featuring presentations on the land claim made by the OFAH, Canadian Sportfishing Industry Association and Federation of Ontario Cottagers' Association, visit www.algonquinlandclaim.ca. The site also includes maps, a questionnaire, contact information for MP's and MPP's, as well as a letter to both Prime Minister Stephen Harper and Ontario Premier Kathleen Wynne.

Our 85th conference also featured many dynamic and engaging speakers. OFAH Executive Director Angelo Lombardo delivered his inaugural Year in Review, which looked at all of the achievements and challenges the Federation faced in 2012; OFAH Assistant Manager of Fish & Wildlife Services/Fisheries Biologist Matt DeMille discussed the sustainability of commercial fisheries in Ontario; Rob Southwick, President of Southwick Associates provided a lesson in hunting and fishing economics; Solicitor Tim Danson spoke about the Williams Treaty; Director of the Biodiversity Branch and Renewable Energy Program with the MNR Eric Boysen brought attendees up to speed with MNR's Transformation Plan; Retired Algonquin Park Superintendent John Winters gave his perspective on the Algonquin Land Claim; and President Darrel Rowledge of Alliance for Public Wildlife gave an eye-opening presentation on Chronic Wasting Disease.

If you were unable to attend conference this year, or want another opportunity to listen to one of the speakers, be sure to log onto www.ofah.org/conference for all of the highlights.

I'm proud and privileged to be serving my third year as President of this wonderful Federation, which is celebrating its 85th anniversary this year, and still going strong. I know we have a tough road ahead, but if those three days back in mid-March are any indication, I am confident in our efforts as an organization of 100,000 members, supporters and subscribers strong, that we can achieve great things over the next year.

I would be remiss if I didn't thank each and every staff member at OFAH head office for their hard work and dedication in the months and weeks leading up to conference and the event itself. It's a big job but if anyone can pull it off, OFAH can.



Falconry workshop



Coyotes and coyote hunting tactics



Trapping workshop



Fish stocking is an investment in conservation

Angelo Lombardo

Executive Director

For decades, local volunteers have offered countless hours of their time and energy to collect, rear and stock fish in Ontario's waters. The Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters is pleased to have recently partnered with the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR) to deliver a new Community Hatchery Program (CHP) that will help ensure this valuable work will continue.

Fish stocking, community involvement, and volunteerism are all incredibly important components of successful fisheries management in Ontario. Community hatcheries have enabled members of the public to actively participate in fish culture projects that stock millions of fish annually and provide direct benefits to Ontario's recreational fisheries. The new CHP will use a more targeted approach to help strengthen community-based stocking efforts by offering greater certainty and enhanced support for Ontario's community hatcheries.

In the past, the MNR's Community Fisheries and Wildlife Involvement Program (CFWIP) offered funding to community fish culture and stocking projects. The CHP will use the funds that would have been allocated to community fish hatcheries through CFWIP to provide a new delivery process and support system specifically for community fish culture and stocking projects. The new Land Stewardship & Habitat Restoration Program (administered entirely by the MNR) along with the new CHP will replace CFWIP as the government funding sources for community-based fish and wildlife projects in Ontario. See page 2 for more information on these two new programs.

Ontario's community-based fish hatcheries are only one component of the province's total fish culture and stocking efforts. Community-based stocking efforts complement the MNR's provincial Fish Culture Program, which is responsible for a large share of fish stocking in Ontario. Of the almost nine million fish produced by nine provincial MNR hatcheries, over 80% are stocked directly by MNR into Ontario waters. The remainder of MNR fish production helps support community hatchery rearing and stocking.

The millions of fish produced and stocked by MNR are critically important for offering more and better quality recreational fishing opportunities throughout Ontario. The Canadian Sportfishing Industry Association has estimated that recreational fishing generates \$4 billion annually in Ontario. Creating new fishing opportunities and enhancing existing opportunities using fish stocking will provide enormous socioeconomic benefits, particularly as a mechanism for generating revenue for the MNR's Fish and Wildlife Special Purpose Account (SPA). The SPA is the primary funding source for fish and wildlife management in Ontario and, therefore, maintaining or enhancing the current level of fish production of recreationally-fished species should be considered by the government as an investment in fish and wildlife conservation.

We would like to compliment the Deputy Minister of Natural Resources, David O'Toole, for confirming that MNR's Fish Culture Program "will remain a core function of activity" and is "absolutely fundamental to the future of our responsibilities in the province" at the recent 85th OFAH Fish and Wildlife Conference. We assume this strong commitment from the Deputy Minister means that there will be no financial cutbacks to MNR's Fish Culture Program and that MNR will continue to invest in fish production and stocking at levels that will contribute to the enhancement of Ontario's recreational fisheries.

The OFAH looks forward to working with the MNR and Ontario's community hatcheries to deliver a program that will complement the MNR's Fish Culture Program to offer enhanced ecological, social and economic benefits for our recreational fisheries.

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Something old is new again

Bill Blackwell

President

In some of my recent columns, I have outlined our concerns about the process followed during negotiation of the massive Algonquin land claim, including the appalling lack of public consultation before and after the release of the draft Agreement-in-Principle last December.

Unfortunately, this is not the only large aboriginal issue facing the OFAH and anglers and hunters at the moment, nor is it the only aboriginal issue that could potentially have a major impact on our ability to hunt and fish in some areas of the province.

In 1923, seven First Nations signed the Williams Treaty, which provided land and financial compensation to the signatories. Under the terms of the Treaty, they agreed to the extinguishment of their pre-existing rights to hunt and fish for food, social and ceremonial purposes in their traditional territories covered by Clause Three of the Treaty (an area in southern/eastern Ontario).

In 1992, those seven First Nations brought a court action to review the terms of the 1923 Treaty, which included a claim that they had not given up those rights.

In 1994, in what is known as the Howard decision, the Supreme Court of Canada re-affirmed that under the Williams Treaty, the First Nations had indeed given up their hunting and fishing rights and that the conditions of the Treaty were upheld. The OFAH was an intervener in the Howard case, arguing that the conditions of the Treaty were valid; a position shared at the time by both the federal and provincial governments.

In 1996, the First Nations once again sought leave from the Supreme Court to argue the matter, but the court refused to hear the case.

Fast forward to October 30, 2012, when the OFAH received a letter from the Deputy Minister of Natural Resources notifying us that on October 29, 2012, litigation in the federal court in Ontario had commenced, supported this time by both the federal and provincial governments. The letter indicated that 'new historical evidence' had come to light that supported the position of the Williams Treaty First Nations in their quest to re-establish their traditional right to hunt and fish in the Treaty area.

The trial is expected to stretch into mid-2013, and is scheduled for 168 trial days over 18 months and involves thousands of pages of documentation and the testimony of almost two dozen 'expert' witnesses whose documents alone will be over 4,000 pages. The OFAH has learned that evidence collection in support of the case actually began in May 2012 with hearings in the affected First Nations communities.

The Deputy's letter also indicated that while the trial is proceeding, the province has adopted an Interim Enforcement Policy. The Interim Enforcement Policy stipulates that aboriginal people who identify themselves as such, when harvesting or transporting wildlife or fish for personal consumption, social or ceremonial purposes, would not be subject to enforcement procedures, with few exceptions. By adopting the Interim Enforcement Policy while the case is still before the court, the province is pre-judging the outcome of the trial in favour of the First Nations, undermining a decision of the Supreme Court of Canada and seeking to wipe out years of equal treatment of all anglers and hunters, including those from Williams Treaty First Nations.

When asked why the province would not have discussed this dramatic turn of events with the OFAH before going back into court, the province replied that it was part of its litigation strategy NOT to tell the OFAH. That response speaks volumes. In order to prevent the OFAH from participating fully in the court case, at a stage in the process where we could have challenged the evidence presented in court, the province intentionally kept the information secret until the case had started. I find it disturbing that our own government, who previously took the opposite point of view at the Supreme Court, has not only reversed its position, but has done so behind closed doors.

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NWPA: What does it mean for anglers and hunters?

Angelo Lombardo

Executive Director

In December of 2012, the Government of Canada passed Bill C-45 (Jobs and Growth Act) as a means to implement the federal budget. Bill C-45 contained a number of amendments to the Navigable Waters Protection Act (NWPA) that would not only change its name to the Navigation Protection Act, but would also change the scale and scope of its application.

The NWPA is one of Canada's oldest laws. Its origin dates back to 1882 and reflects a time when Canada's waterways remained among our primary means of transportation. Although the societal demand for water-based transportation may have declined during the past century, the value of maintaining safe and navigable waters remains critical for accessing hunting and fishing opportunities.

Despite Transport Canada's insistence that the impacts to angling and hunting will be negligible, the OFAH remains concerned that the reduced scope of the new Act could negatively impact the accessibility of angling and hunting opportunities in some areas. The existing NWPA applies broadly to all bodies of water capable of being navigated by any type of floating vessel for transportation, recreation or commerce. The new NPA, however, only applies to 162 of Canada's waters (oceans, lakes and rivers) that are listed under Schedule 2 of the Act. This means that the right of navigation in all waters not listed in Schedule 2 will no longer be protected under the new Act (as they were under the NWPA).

The changes to navigation laws will reduce certainty for continued access to our waterways. First and foremost, we are concerned that access to traditional fishing and hunting opportunities will be restricted because gaps in legislation could allow for obstructions to navigation within unlisted waters. Even if other existing laws are able to fill in some of the gaps, there are no guarantees that another agency will have the resourcing or expertise to effectively deal with navigation concerns. Other federal agencies, provincial agencies and municipalities have relied on Transport Canada for their expertise and advice related to navigable waters to effectively implement their own laws and regulations. As an example, some in-water obstructions to navigation (e.g. dams) are subject to Ontario's Lakes and Rivers Improvement Act. The OFAH is not aware of similar legislation that prevents out-of-water obstructions (or in-water obstructions that do not necessarily disrupt water flow or level) to navigation (e.g. fences, wires, etc.).

The changes also have the potential to be a serious public safety concern. Fences, wires, and any other obstruction across waters can be extremely dangerous, especially in running waters.

Although Canadians still have a public right of navigation, the changes in navigation protection laws will result in reduced prevention of infringements on this right. For anglers and hunters who use waterways that flow through private lands, the changes will be especially troubling because landowners now have more latitude to obstruct public access to our lakes and rivers.

In addition, the changes in navigation protection laws will also result in a much more challenging means of recourse for infringements on the Canadian public right of navigation. There are thousands of waters in Ontario not listed under the Act, where the Canadian public right of navigation will now only be protected under Common Law. This means that infringements on your navigation rights would now need to be addressed through the courts (e.g. private or public nuisance complaint, Canadian public right of navigation). Unfortunately, relying on Common Law puts an undue onus on the angler and hunter to identify and challenge infringements on their rights to navigation, not to mention that very few of us can afford the time or money that is needed for this process.

For the OFAH, the changes in navigation protection laws represent a marginalization of recreational angling and hunting. For anglers and hunters, the smaller rivers, streams and lakes that have been delisted by the federal government provide essential fishing and hunting opportunities in Ontario. The focus on commercial interests and lack of consideration for how important navigation is to recreational fishing and hunting works to devalue the enormous socioeconomic value of the recreational fishing and hunting industry in Canada. Recreational fishing alone is worth more than \$8.5 billion across Canada.

The OFAH will continue to seek greater clarity from the federal government on what these changes will mean for anglers and hunters.



Coming to a hunt camp near you

Bill Blackwell

President

What comes to mind when you hear the words "Algonquin Land Claim?" I imagine it means different things to different people. For residents living within the claim area, the question may be, "how will the claim impact on my home and property values?" For anglers and hunters, the question might be, "how will this affect my favourite fishing and hunting spots, or my right to hunt and fish on public land?" For anyone who owns a cottage on lakes that lie within parcels of land selected by the Algonquin as part of the settlement the question might be, "will this affect my ability to access my cottage?" For snowmobile or ATV riders, the question may be, "will this impede my use of traditional trails that once were part of Crown land?" Local municipalities, businesses, campers, hikers, boaters and others who live, work or recreate within the land claim, and in particular in areas which have been selected by the Algonquin as settlement lands, will no doubt have their own list of questions and concerns, given the lack of public information and consultation thus far.

On December 24, hunt camp owners and land use permit holders throughout the land claim received a letter from the province that read in part:

"We have determined that your recreation camp is on Crown land that may be transferred to the Algonquins of Ontario (AOO) in the future. The purpose of this letter is to inform you of the proposed transfer of Crown land to the AOO, and to schedule a meeting with you. The discussion will assist in identifying considerations and exploring options that may be available to you. The Algonquins will negotiate agreements for hunt camps with those holding Crown land use permits for hunt camps. Ontario would like to begin working with you now to find approaches that best meet your needs and the needs of the AOO."

I can't help but wonder why the government would send out a letter before the draft Agreement-in-Principle (AIP) has been signed, and before any public consultations have been held. It states in the letter that "comments and information provided to the Crown during this consultation will be considered and used to finalize the Agreement-in-Principle and to inform the environmental assessment process for the Algonquin Land Claim." This suggests that what they hear from hunt camps and land use permit holders, and at any upcoming public meetings may impact on what the final AIP looks like. However, last summer, the Chief Provincial Negotiator was asked at a meeting in Bancroft whether changes would be made after the draft AIP was released, and his answer was, "we don't anticipate much changing after the fact."

The government has recently released a tentative public information meeting schedule which is supposed to begin in March. Take note of the fact that the meetings are being billed as public information meetings, NOT consultation meetings. The OFAH, along with a number of other stakeholders that have been involved in discussions around the land claim for many years, repeatedly demanded that public consultation take place BEFORE the draft AIP was released, or at the very least, before it is signed by the three parties. Whether the comments made at these meetings will alter what the final product looks like is open to question. Regardless, it is important that people attend the meetings, ask questions, demand answers and get informed. Encourage everyone you know who is affected to go and let their concerns be known.

Fast forward ten years down the road, when 117,500 acres of Crown land is private; when some public lakes are private; some access/use of remaining Crown lands and waters have been restricted; and that what was once Crown lands have become provincial parks. Ask yourself, did I do enough to have my concerns heard? I know for my sake, my children's sake and my grandchildren's sake, I would not want the answer to that question to be "no."

No one said it better than the late Rick Amsbury, a dedicated OFAH member and former Executive Director of the Canadian Sportfishing Industry Association, "at the end of the day in the land claim process, anglers and hunters will get what they settle for, and therefore, we will deserve what we get."



Celebrating 85 years of conservation

Angelo Lombardo

Executive Director

Who would have thought that 85 years ago, when a group of anglers concerned for the future of the province's fish populations formed the Ontario Federation of Anglers, that it would lead to what is known today as the oldest and largest nonprofit, charitable fish and wildlife conservation organization in the entire province? This didn't happen by accident. Conservation is the cornerstone of the OFAH. Wise, science-based management of Ontario's fish and wildlife and the lands and waters they inhabit is the focus of everything we do.

Immediately, the Federation took on initiatives that were important to its founding clubs, including a petition to undertake a survey of Ontario's game fish. The government appointed a Special Fish Committee to study the fishery, and its findings were published in 1931. Following that important study, the Federation urged the government to conduct a similar survey of provincial game, which was completed in 1933. The Federation's recommendations to these and other committees helped forge a constructive and strong working relationship with all levels of government that continues to this day.

In 1947, several hunting organizations joined forces with the Federation to become the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters Incorporated (OFAH). Over the next thirty years, an ever-increasing number of outdoors enthusiasts recognized the value of the conservation organization, and threw their support behind the OFAH.

Since that time we have been instrumental in improving deer, moose and black bear management; we worked closely with the Ministry of Natural Resources to restore wild turkey; we made significant financial and volunteer contributions to the restoration of elk; we contributed to the restoration of the wood duck and trumpeter swan, and our Bring Back The Salmon program and its partners have been successful in releasing more than 4.5 million Atlantic Salmon into Lake Ontario and its tributaries in an effort to restore a self-sustaining population; the list is endless.

As you know, the Federation is the voice of anglers and hunters. That's why we, on behalf of 100,000 OFAH members, supporters and subscribers, represent your interests at all levels of government on matters related to fishing and hunting, fish and wildlife conservation, management, restoration and protection. We weigh in on everything from firearms legislation to access issues, and all points in between. This is communicated through *Angler and Hunter Television*, *Angler and Hunter Radio*, and *Ontario OUT OF DOORS* magazine, all properties of the OFAH.

The OFAH is more relevant now than it was eight and a half decades ago, and we're continuing to gain momentum. Membership is at an all time high; the number of students taking the OFAH administered Ontario Hunter Education Program on behalf of the MNR, which OFAH member clubs helped initiate in 1960, has been on the rise consecutively for the past 11 years; and, the opening of the OFAH | Mario Cortellucci Hunting and Fishing Heritage Centre in 2010 provides a unique place for volunteer anglers and hunters to proudly reflect on and share our conservation success stories with generations young and old.

These are accomplishments we can all be proud of. That's why if you haven't already registered, I invite you to attend our 85th Annual General Meeting and Fish & Wildlife Conference March 14 to 16. It will give you the opportunity to help celebrate our achievements, hear from industry experts about the issues that affect you as an angler and hunter, and you'll meet our OFAH Board of Directors and head office staff, who strive to ensure the protection of our hunting and fishing heritage and the enhancement of hunting and fishing opportunities in this province. You will not want to miss this 85th anniversary celebration, so be sure to register soon.

It's amazing to reflect back on what has been done over a span of 85 years; and I know we can only continue to achieve great things for future generations to enjoy. On behalf of our Board of Directors and head office staff, we look forward to seeing you in March.



Conference Details

Dates:

Thursday, March 14-
Saturday, March 16

Location:

Delta Meadowvale Resort
& Conference Centre,
Mississauga

Register online:

www.ofah.org/conference

Register by phone:

705-748-6324 ext. 232

Angler & Hunter HOTLINE is produced exclusively for members of the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters.

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Algonquin Land Claim: the next phase

Bill Blackwell

President

Did you know...?

- The claim covers 14,000 square miles (36,000 square kilometres).
- It is composed of 59% private land; 23% provincial parks; 14% provincial Crown land; and 4% federal Crown land.
- The area of the claim is home to 1.4 million non-aboriginal residents and approximately 8,000 Algonquin.
- 150,000 licensed hunters live in the claim area.
- The area also includes 13 provincial ridings and 13 federal ridings.
- Located within its boundaries are 35 provincial parks, 18 of which are operational and 17 are non-operational.

A new year is upon us but, in some cases, old issues remain front and centre. An example is the Algonquin Land Claim. The history of the claim dates back to 1991, when the province agreed to enter into negotiations with the Algonquin; the federal government joined the negotiations in 1992.

Over the last two years, the level of intensity around the negotiations has increased considerably, as the provincial government sought to have a draft Agreement in Principle (AIP) in place before the last provincial election. This did not occur, but the pace of negotiations has continued to accelerate.

Since the early 1990's, representatives of several stakeholder groups impacted by the land claim have sat on one of two groups: the Committee of External Advisors (CEA) or the Municipal Advisory Committee (MAC). Over the years, these groups have met dozens of times with federal and provincial negotiators and provided advice on the claim from the view of non-aboriginal anglers, hunters, trappers, cottagers, municipalities, and others who will be impacted by the claim. Unfortunately, most of the advice provided by these groups, particularly the CEA, has not been heeded.

In 2012, a smaller stakeholders focus group from the CEA was involved in more in-depth discussions with the two government negotiators and a cadre of federal and provincial staff. The focus of these meetings was the harvest chapter of the AIP. The OFAH and others in the smaller stakeholders group have argued for inclusion of several core principles in the AIP, including: a definition of conservation; fair sharing of resources; designated or allocated species; a fisheries management plan for Algonquin Park and other areas in the claim; cooperative vs. comanagement of resources and, above all else, full public consultation before an agreement is signed.

In early December, a final version of a harvest chapter was presented to the focus group. For the first time, the group was given a slide show on the parks component of the AIP. Each time a version of the harvest chapter has been presented to the group, the OFAH has provided an in-depth response, based on a promise made by the provincial negotiator that these concerns would be taken to the negotiating table, and feedback given. It is clear that the majority of concerns raised by the OFAH and others have gone unheeded.

More disturbing is the commitment within the parks chapter to the creation of a large, new Environmental Class Park in the claim area for the protection of historic and cultural values that the Algonquin are seeking. It's unclear what the creation of this new park will mean for the maintenance of traditional uses such as hunting and fishing in the area. Also included in the parks chapter is a commitment to transfer three non-operational parks and parts of four other protected areas to the Algonquin, a guarantee of representation on the Parks Board for the Algonquin, and a commitment that will see the Algonquin participate in developing management and strategic plans for 16 other parks and protected areas within the claim area.

A draft 20 chapter AIP was released in mid-December 2012, with public consultation slated to finally begin in mid-February. Both levels of government need to understand the dramatic impact that the AIP and final Treaty will have on the lives of all those who live in the area of the claim. Because of this, nothing less than a full public consultation process will do, BEFORE either level of government signs on the dotted line.

For further information on the claim, to read the draft Agreement in Principle, and for background information on the claim itself, go to www.aboriginalaffairs.gov.on.ca/english/negotiate/algonquin/preliminary-draft-aip.asp.

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A new year brings new challenges

Angelo Lombardo

Executive Director

It's hard to believe that another year has come and gone. I hope you all had a wonderful Christmas and holiday season. As we start a new year, I can't help but reflect on the one that just passed, and wonder what lies ahead given some of the momentous changes that have recently taken place. 2012 had its fair share of ups and downs. On a positive note, in April the Harper government honoured its commitment to the firearms community and scrapped the badly flawed long gun registry. Later in the year, all of the records contained in the registry were destroyed, with the exception of Quebec's, which are the subject of an ongoing court battle between the province and the federal government.

In May, the first ever National Fish & Wildlife Conservation Congress, spearheaded by the OFAH, brought together governments, policy and program managers, fish and wildlife experts, nongovernment organizations (NGO's), academics and others from across Canada and the United States to chart a course for the future conservation of our nation's fish and wildlife resources. The Congress also provided a venue for Prime Minister Stephen Harper to announce the creation of a national Hunting and Angling Advisory Panel to provide advice to the government on a wide range of federal policies that impact on hunting and fishing and conservation.

On the other hand, there are a number of federal issues that still demand our attention. Changes to the fisheries act were introduced as part of the federal budget in May, 2012. The OFAH has been engaged in consultation with the federal government and other stakeholders since that time, and will continue this year. The federal government has also recently introduced changes to the Navigable Waters Protection Act. The OFAH has provided comments and outlined our concerns around the potential impact of these changes on the outdoor community. Other issues of note at the federal level that will occupy our time during 2013 include changes to the Species at Risk Act, and the National Conservation Plan (NCP).

We were pleased to sign a new five-year funding agreement with the province in support of the Invasive Species Awareness Program, a flagship OFAH program. The Ontario Hunter Education Program (OHEP), administered by the OFAH, continued its amazing run of success. For the eleventh straight year, the number of people taking the course increased, which suggests that the demise of hunting is greatly exaggerated. Unfortunately, not all of the news on the provincial front was good. The marked drop in walleye numbers, particularly spawning walleye in Lake Nipissing, caused a major upheaval. Using the MNR's own data, the OFAH was able to demonstrate how the decline of the stock was related to the commercial gill net fishery. Regardless, the province chose to ignore its own science and blame recreational anglers for the decline. The Ministry has announced that as of January 1, 2013, the daily limit will be reduced from four to two fish within the current slot size. The commercial gill net fishery will not share in the reduction of fish taken, which promises to undermine efforts to rebuild the walleye stock.

Another issue we will continue to deal with in 2013 is the Algonquin Land Claim. For the latest on this, see our President's column on page 3.

In 1994, both the federal and provincial governments, as well as the OFAH, appeared before the Supreme Court in support of the 1923 Williams Treaty, under which the seven First Nations signatories to the Treaty gave up their traditional harvesting rights. The Supreme Court concluded that the Treaty was valid, and that the harvesting rights claimed by the signatories had been extinguished. In 1996 the Supreme Court reaffirmed that decision and refused to hear the case again. So what's changed? Fast forward to October 2012, when the OFAH was suddenly notified that the federal and provincial governments had returned to court on the Williams Treaty, this time in support of the First Nations' fight to regain their traditional harvesting rights. The outcome of the case could have profound implications for anglers and hunters, and the OFAH will be seeking ways to participate in the legal process as it winds its way through the system.

Another major challenge in 2012 was the announcement in May of major cuts to the provincial budget, and cuts to a range of ministries, including the Ministry of Natural Resources, which must trim \$70 million from its budget over the next three years. This will result in office closures, job losses, program cuts and a new way of doing business for the MNR. Unfortunately, this new approach appears to be heavy on regulation but light on program and service delivery.

This March 14-16, your Federation will celebrate 85 years of conservation success. Please plan on attending our Annual General Meeting and Fish & Wildlife Conference. For more information or to register online please visit www.ofah.org/conference.

Although we may face some challenges in 2013, I know that with the support of our Board of Directors, our hard working and committed head office staff, and our valued 100,000 members, supporters and 675 member clubs, we will continue to have a positive impact on the well being of this province's fish and wildlife. All the best in 2013.