

# ONTARIO FEDERATION OF ANGLERS & HUNTERS



*Ontario Conservation Centre*

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OFAH FILE: 349A/452  
August 11, 2014

Honourable Bill Mauro  
Minister of Natural Resources  
Room 6630, 6th Floor, Whitney Block  
99 Wellesley Street West  
Toronto, Ontario  
M7A 1A2

Dear Minister:

The Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters (OFAH) is Ontario's largest non-profit, conservation-based organization, representing 100,000 members, subscribers and supporters, and 720 member clubs. On behalf of our membership, particularly in OFAH Zone C, we would like to express our concerns with restricted access across the Abitibi Trestle Bridge near Iroquois Falls, Ontario.

Recently, Resolute Forest Products indicated that they will be closing access to the trestle bridge that provides traditional access over the Abitibi River from Iroquois Falls to Twin Falls Road, Bush Road and, ultimately, Lake Abitibi (the largest lake in Fisheries Management Zone 8). Resolute claims that they no longer use the bridge for forestry operations and cites a recent engineering firm's report as rationale for the closure. The OFAH has compiled a list of potential impacts and considerations for the closure of the trestle bridge from an angling, hunting and outdoor use perspective.

## Access

- According to the 2005 Survey of Recreational Fishing in Canada, a lack of access is one of the issues affecting the fishery in FMZ 8. The closure of the trestle bridge will only add to these local access concerns.
- The trestle bridge provides direct access to Twin Falls Road that is an access point for the local hydro-dam and corresponding boat launch above the dam. Anglers accessing the river from the town of Iroquois Falls cannot easily pass the dam upriver and rely heavily on the trestle bridge to access the boat launch and ultimately to Lake Abitibi.
- The trestle bridge also provides direct access to Crown lands and traditional hunting areas heavily utilized by the residents of Iroquois Falls and surrounding communities.
- There are a large number of camps, cottages, and campsites located across the Abitibi River near Lake Abitibi. Many residents of Iroquois Falls invested in these areas under the assumption that direct access would continue via the trestle bridge.
- Once the trestle bridge is closed, residents will be required to drive north through Cochrane and then south to access the boat launch and Lake Abitibi, as well as other Crown lands and waters. This will turn a typical ten-minute trip for access to these traditional heritage activities into a two-hour commute. There is a real risk that individuals may choose to no longer partake in these activities or focus their attention on other areas unaccustomed/unsuitable for the potential increase in resource use.

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- There is a concern that if Resolute Forest Products no longer has an interest in the trestle bridge for forest operations, then they may not have an interest in the roads located across the bridge (Bush Road, Twin Falls Road, etc.). If these roads are left unmaintained, then there is a serious risk of completely losing access to Abitibi River, Lake Abitibi, traditional hunting areas and camps, cottages, and campsites. Clarification is required on who owns/maintains the roads once Resolute no longer requires them for forestry operations. The future of these roads is arguably as important as the bridge access point itself.

#### **Socio-Economics**

- According to the 2005 Survey of Recreational Fishing in Canada, angling in Fisheries Management Zone 8 (Iroquois Falls/Lake Abitibi area) accounts for over \$81,600,000 in spending on investment goods wholly or partially attributable to recreational fishing. A large amount of fishing activity in FMZ 8 occurs in Lake Abitibi and the surrounding area.
- The Crown lands and waters that would become more difficult to access have enormous social, economic, and cultural importance to local residents for hunting, fishing, trapping, fuel wood collection, gathering, and other outdoor heritage activities. The loss of direct access across the Abitibi River from Iroquois Falls has the potential to impact the quality of life for local residents and even cause an outward migration of residents to communities with closer access (e.g. Cochrane).
- There is also a risk of reduced retention/interest of local youth in traditional cultural heritage activities, including angling, hunting, and resource conservation.
- Local tourism will also be affected, as visitors are more likely to use services in other communities with easier access to Crown resources.
- The OFAH suggests that this unique situation would be a prime project for the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund Corporation (NOHFC), which works to build strong and prosperous northern communities and offers unique programs to help foster hope and opportunity across Northern Ontario.

#### **Safety**

- The loss of access over Abitibi River from Iroquois Falls via the trestle bridge will have serious impacts on emergency services, response times, and evacuation procedures for the community and for resource users on the east side of the river.
- The OFAH acknowledges that the trestle bridge in its current state may present significant safety concerns and potential environmental concerns for the Abitibi River (if left to deteriorate further). We agree that safety must be a top priority.

#### **Conclusion**

Access to Crown lands and waters is critically important for sustaining the quality of life for residents in northern Ontario. Many residents in the Iroquois Falls and Lake Abitibi areas also rely on access to nearby Crown lands and waters for economic stability. The OFAH recognizes that safety must be a top priority and is not suggesting that the existing bridge access should be maintained at the expense of human safety or environmental concerns. We are recommending that all possible solutions be explored to help maintain this key access point because of all the impacts outlined above. Resolute Forest Products has made a commitment to work with Iroquois Falls and various Government of Ontario ministries to help minimize the impacts of the bridge closure.

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Due to the potential for significant social, cultural, and economic impacts to Iroquois Falls, local First Nations communities and the broader fishing and hunting community, we recommend that the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry should play a key role in helping to find a solution. This process should not only look at the bridge itself, but should also examine the connected forest roads that are just as important for access to local natural resources and traditional outdoor activities.

Thank you for consideration, and we look forward to your response.

Yours in Conservation,



Angelo Lombardo  
Executive Director

AL/gh

cc: Honourable Greg Rickford, Minister of Natural Resources  
Honourable Michael Gravelle, Minister of Northern Development and Mines  
Honourable Michael Coteau, Minister of Tourism, Culture and Sport  
Honourable Steven Del Duca, Minister of Transportation  
Charlie Angus, MP Timmins-James Bay  
Gilles Bisson, MPP Timmins-James Bay  
John Vanthoff, MPP Timiskaming-Cochrane  
Rosalyn Lawrence, Assistant Deputy Minister, Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry  
Eric Boysen, Director, Biodiversity Branch, Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry  
Gilles Forget, Mayor of Iroquois Falls  
Resolute Forest Products  
OFAH Zone C Executive  
OFAH Board of Directors  
Greg Farrant, OFAH Manager, Government Affairs & Policy  
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