

ONTARIO FEDERATION OF ANGLERS & HUNTERS



Ontario Conservation Centre

P.O. Box 2800, 4601 Guthrie Drive, Peterborough, Ontario K9J 8L5
Phone: (705) 748.6324 • Fax: (705) 748.9577 • Visit: www.ofah.org • Email: ofah@ofah.org

OFAH FILE:
February 12, 2021

Mr. Michael Parsa
Parliamentary Assistant to the President of the Treasury Board
95 Grosvenor St., 3rd Floor
Toronto, Ontario
M7A 1Z1

Dear Mr. Parsa:

Subject: 2021 Pre-Budget Consultation

Thank you for the opportunity to share our ideas for how the Government of Ontario can shape the 2021 Budget to support people now, and build towards strong economic recovery.

The Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters (OFAH) is Ontario's largest non-profit, fish and wildlife conservation organization, representing 100,000 members, supporters, and subscribers, and 725 member clubs across the province.

The 2021 budget, and many that will follow, will seek to fill holes left in the wake of this pandemic. Personal, business, and societal economic challenges will worsen the growing mental health concerns arising from pandemic-related stress, anxiety, and grief that the people of Ontario are dealing with.

We need to focus near-term stimulus and job creation on actions that will not only help the people of Ontario today, but also help us create and strengthen sustainable and lasting economies. Investments that help to fortify the social well-being of the people of Ontario while providing stimulus and economic response will be our fastest route to recovery.

While some of Canada's traditional social and recreational economies will remain challenged in the near-term by restrictions, post-pandemic anxiety, and significant uncertainty, Ontario's 4-billion-dollar fishing and hunting sector has remained relatively strong throughout the pandemic and can continue to be a source of economic and social strength as the people of Ontario seek safety in outdoor activities that also offer mental and physical health benefits.

Like almost all other sectors, fishing and hunting has been impacted by COVID-19. The closure of the Canada-US border has eliminated non-resident tourism, and some residents have not been able to participate. Despite these challenges, it remains a strong economic sector for Ontario and has considerable room for growth with proper investment.

The OFAH is proposing modest government investments that will create jobs and drive economic stimulus in the outdoors sector, while generating long-term conservation, economic, and social benefits that can be sustained for the people of Ontario. The following are four OFAH requests for the 2021 Ontario budget. We are asking the Government of Ontario to:

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- 1. Make greater investments from the Consolidated Revenue Fund (CRF) to match the Fish & Wildlife Special Purpose Account (SPA) contributions to the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry's (MNR) Fish & Wildlife Program budget.** The SPA, generated from fishing and hunting licence fees, fines, and royalties, pays for approximately two-thirds of the MNR's Fish & Wildlife program budget currently. In the short-term, increased CRF investment would help offset the almost complete loss of non-resident licence fee revenue (due to pandemic restrictions) that will put significant strain on core fish and wildlife management programs. In the long-term, this investment would finally achieve the original intent when the SPA was established to have matching CRF funds. Investing in Ontario's fish and wildlife will strengthen the sustainable resource-based economies that depend on them. In addition, this investment will also offer long overdue recognition that the people of Ontario who don't contribute to the SPA realize disproportionate benefits from fish and wildlife relative to CRF contributions to fish and wildlife management. For the most recent five years with available reports (2012-13 to 2016-17), it would require an average of \$25.8 million annually from CRF to match SPA contributions (range \$19.1M - \$30.6M). This is an extremely modest investment to enhance an already \$4-billion sector.
- 2. Invest in the promotion of fishing and hunting to encourage domestic participation and spending, as well as domestic tourism related to fishing and hunting.** The idea of 'staycations' has always been an important part of Ontario's outdoors culture. Ontario has so many diverse fishing and hunting opportunities that many anglers and hunters spend their vacation time and money within the province. Although fishing and hunting supports many tourism destinations in Ontario, a lot of outdoors-related 'tourism' spending, occurs at gas stations, grocery and hardware stores, restaurants, motels, and other small businesses in northern and rural areas that are not fishing and hunting outfitters or retailers. For this reason, fishing and hunting is often overlooked and undervalued as a source of significant domestic tourism. We strongly encourage the government to invest in promotion through the Ministry of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries to 1) encourage fishing and hunting 'staycation' tourism stimulus among anglers and hunters, and 2) encourage recruitment from outside of existing fishing and hunting community. This investment will not only encourage immediate stimulus through spending related to the activities themselves, but will also boost licence sales and the revenue available for fish and wildlife management in Ontario. Promoting Ontario's outdoors has been a longstanding priority for the OFAH, and we would be open to a discussion about how our messaging and broad audience reach could be leveraged to promote domestic outdoor tourism.
- 3. Make immediate investments in municipal infrastructure projects like boat launches, dedicated and accessible fishing areas, and docks that can promote and facilitate access for Canadians to participate in water-based outdoor recreation.** We also ask that the government invest in infrastructure like aging dam mitigation projects and other habitat projects to create immediate jobs and economic stimulus, as well as long-term environmental benefits, like invasive species mitigation and water quality improvement, to support strong and sustainable resource-based economies. We are proposing five infrastructure project ideas that are outlined in the attached document with a more detailed description, specific budget request, and list of potential partners.
- 4. To maintain or enhance investments through multi-year Transfer Payment Agreements (TPA) with the OFAH to continue our conservation and outreach partnership programs.** These programs are essential for fish and wildlife conservation, and to maintain the public awareness and interest in outdoor activities needed to sustain fish and wildlife management and resource-based economies in Ontario. Programs like the Invasive Species Awareness Program have decades of partnership experience with the Government of Ontario and have leveraged as much as two dollars for each TPA dollar invested, as well as a massive audience reach with tens of millions of impressions and millions of dollars in media value.

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Our proposals for the 2021 Ontario Budget aren't spending plans. They are strategic investments in fish and wildlife management, promotion of fishing and hunting, and infrastructure that will create jobs now, while supporting and enhancing sustainable resource-based economies.

Investments in fishing and hunting achieve greater fish and wildlife conservation, enhanced social well-being for millions of Ontarians, and fortification of a proven \$4-billion economy. There are few investments the Government of Ontario can make that will truly achieve this triple bottom line of social, environmental, and economic sustainability. For a province like Ontario, enhancing fishing and hunting must be a part of our post-pandemic recovery.

Thank you again for the opportunity to share our ideas, and we would be pleased to discuss them with you further.

Yours in Conservation,

Matt DeMille
Manager, Fish and Wildlife Services

/md
Attach.

cc: The Honourable Peter Bethlenfalvy, Minister of Finance
The Honourable John Yakabuski, Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry
The Honourable Jeff Yurek, Minister of Environment, Conservation and Parks
Stan Cho, Parliamentary Assistant to the Minister of Finance
Angelo Lombardo, OFAH Executive Director
OFAH Board of Directors

2021 Ontario Budget Proposal – Infrastructure Project Descriptions

1. Boating Access and Infrastructure Funding

Angling is a significant economic driver in Ontario with more than 1.2 million licensed anglers that contribute greater than \$2.2 billion annually to the province's economy. With more and better boat launches, adequate docking, and available parking space for vehicles and trailers, governments at all levels will benefit through increased participation in angling (and boating) that brings revenue into many sectors of local economies. As part of this concept, additional amenities could be considered such as boat washing stations (to prevent the spread of aquatic invasive species), fueling services, bathroom and fish cleaning facilities, and sustainable infrastructure designs (e.g. permeable pavements). There are existing and successful programs in the U.S. such as the Boating Access Grant Program and the Boating Infrastructure Program that this could be modelled after.

Budget Request: \$10-20 million/5 years

Potential Partners: OFAH, municipalities, Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative, tourism associations, local angling groups, conservation authorities, Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry.

2. Accessible Fishing Grants

Angling participation has been declining in Ontario, particularly in areas where opportunities to experience the natural environment are limited, such as urban locations. Access for angling should be fostered for its socio-economic, mental health, and physical health benefits, especially during and after this pandemic. One way this can be achieved is by improving angling access through dedicated recreational fishing areas. Fishing access points can involve the construction of structures such as shoreline nodes and piers (i.e. fixed platforms) to provide safe and accessible fishing areas that will increase outdoor opportunities and direct angling pressure away from undesirable locations. This strategy generates revenue for local businesses, reduces travel by creating nearby fishing opportunities, and can be naturalized and incorporated into habitat restoration projects as demonstrated by the Urban Recreational Fisheries Strategy for the Lake Ontario Northwest Waterfront – Fishing In Your Backyard.

Budget Request: \$2-4 million/year

Potential Partners: OFAH, municipalities, Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative, local angling groups, conservation authorities, Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry.

3. Provincial Boat Wash Program

Implement boat washing stations at high traffic boat launches across Ontario to help prevent the spread of aquatic invasive species (AIS). For example, Lake Ontario and Lake Erie are known to possess a number of AIS, including, but not limited to, Round Goby, Eurasian water milfoil, water soldier, zebra mussels, spiny waterflea, etc. Most boaters and anglers understand the Clean, Drain, Dry (a voluntary protocol) is the most effective method to mitigate the introduction/spread of invasive species; however, many locations across Ontario lack infrastructure (i.e., boat wash stations) that supports this behaviour. By establishing permanent boat wash stations at high-risk and high-traffic boat launches (and staffing them via the OFAH Invading Species Hit Squad), this project will help curb the in-land spread of AIS in Ontario. The goal of implementing this project will be twofold: 1) education through exposure and 2) prevention through action.

Budget Request: \$1.5 million

Potential Partners: OFAH, municipalities, Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative, Federation of Ontario Cottagers' Associations, private marinas, Boating Ontario, conservation authorities, Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry, Ministry of Environment Conservation and Parks.



4. Habitat Project Funding

Idea: Funding program(s) to help 1) local agencies (municipalities and conservation authorities), and 2) community groups/NGOs plan and deliver larger strategic local habitat projects, including barrier mitigation (including minor barriers such as perched or undersized culverts), and tree and shrub planting to support bank stabilization, spawning habitat rehabilitation, and invasive species control. For community groups, a restored Recreational Fisheries Conservation Partnerships Program (federal) and reinvigorated Land Stewardship and Habitat Restoration Program and/or Great Lakes Guardian Community Fund (provincial), geared to help local agencies and stakeholder groups plan and deliver strategic aquatic habitat restoration projects, would achieve this. Outcomes will be improved habitats and their supporting ecosystems, resulting in increased biodiversity and better recreational fisheries.

Budget Request: \$24 million/3 years

Potential Partners: Indigenous communities, conservation authorities, municipalities, Fisheries and Oceans Canada, Great Lakes Fishery Commission, and provincial and local stakeholder groups as leads. Many partners possible for each individual project.

5. Barrier Mitigation Funding

Idea: Many of Ontario's legacy barriers/dams on rivers are failing and responsible for negative impacts on the environment ranging from blocking migratory fishes, thermal pollution, sediment build-up, and poor flood control management. At the same time, barriers can be key to controlling the abundance and spread of aquatic invasive species such as Sea Lamprey. Nowhere is this concern more relevant than Great Lakes tributaries. Funding is required to assess, review, and mitigate Ontario's legacy barriers to achieve fish passage, invasive species control, and address climate change and flood risks. Outcomes are new, removed and replaced, or mitigated dams across the province.

Budget Request: \$10 million/3 years

Potential Partners: Conservation authorities and municipalities would be key partners to lead the process, many already have plans and processes initiated, but stalled due to a lack of funding for the planning process. Indigenous communities, Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative, Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry, and Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks, Fisheries and Oceans Canada, Great Lakes Fishery Commission.