

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

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His Worship Steve Clarke
Mayor of Orillia
50 Andrew Street South, Suite 300
Orillia, Ontario
L3V 7T5

Dear Mayor Clarke:

The Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters (OFAH) is Ontario's largest, non-profit, fish and wildlife conservation-based organization, representing 100,000 members, subscribers, and supporters, and 725 member clubs. We are writing to share our concerns with Orillia's COVID-19 Waterfront Parking and Boat Launch Program.

Over the past year, we have been contacted by dozens of OFAH members, anglers, and recreational boaters from across southern and central Ontario expressing opposition to the exorbitant fees being imposed on non-locals through the COVID-19 Waterfront Parking and Boat Launch Program. We have also heard from local businesses that are concerned about how these measures will impact their economic recovery now and future viability if domestic tourism shifts away from the community.

The COVID-19 pandemic has driven thousands of people to seek solace in outdoor pursuits, including angling and recreational boating. While we acknowledge the need for unprecedented measures to safeguard public health from the threat of COVID-19, we also know that outdoor activities are extremely important right now. This is especially true for nature-based outdoor activities like fishing, hunting, and boating that can be done within public health guidelines while providing essential social, physical, and mental health benefits.

The 2005 Survey of Recreational Fishing in Canada indicates that Lake Simcoe is by far the most intensely fished inland lake in Ontario excluding the Great Lakes. Anglers spent over 560,000 cumulative days fishing on the lake in one year. A 2013 socio-economic assessment commissioned by the Ministry of Natural Resources estimated expenditures associated with recreational fishing on the lake at \$33.69 million, \$10.78 million in total tax revenues, and the creation of 301 jobs. Clearly, Lake Simcoe is an economic powerhouse for the municipalities and businesses that directly and indirectly rely on it.

Outdoor-based recreation, especially for a destination like Lake Simcoe, also provides enormous potential to help kick-start local economies and help many small businesses in the Lake Simcoe watershed recover from the impacts of COVID-19. Some people are newly discovering or rediscovering outdoor activities, and this presents unprecedented opportunities for outdoor recreation-based tourism to draw new interest in the community. There are many communities in Ontario that envy the potential that Orillia has.

Ontario has made tremendous progress against COVID-19 and is currently in Step 3 of the provincial reopening plan. As restrictions continue to ease, the tourism sector is going to play a vital role in the post-pandemic recovery of Ontario's economy. Access to valuable resources like Lake Simcoe and the activities it supports should be viewed as an opportunity for huge economic return to local communities that far exceeds the small revenue generated from increased fees. In 2012, recreational boating and dozens of associated subsectors contributed \$4.4 billion in direct and \$8.9 billion in induced and indirect revenues to the Canadian economy.

We fear that the deterrent effect of the current fee structure might not be fully reversed once pandemic restrictions are fully lifted. Significant damage may have already be done to existing businesses already struggling because of the pandemic and to the image of Orillia as being a tourism destination for outdoor recreation. This image is not only important for attracting post-pandemic tourists, but also future small business investment in the community. While many other municipalities charge launch fees for both residents and non-residents, the fees are generally more reasonable:

- Beaverton \$15
- Marathon \$10
- Barrie \$10-\$17.70
- Niagara \$10
- Innisfil \$25
- Collingwood \$8

Given the expectation of enhanced focus and interest on outdoor recreation in our post-pandemic society, the City of Orillia should be investing in positioning themselves as a destination, rather than sending signals for visitors to stay away. This is a short-sighted strategy that could have long-term and negative ramifications for the community. We urge the City of Orillia to recognize the tremendous value provided by the gem of a waterfront with access to Lake Simcoe and recommend a re-evaluation of the fee structure.

Yours in Conservation,



Matt DeMille
Manager, Fish and Wildlife Services

MD/jb

cc: City of Orillia Council
 Allan Lafontaine, Orillia District Chamber of Commerce Executive Director
 Wayne Forgrave, OFAH Zone H Chair
 Angelo Lombardo, OFAH Executive Director
 Mark Ryckman, OFAH Manager of Policy