

ONTARIO FEDERATION OF ANGLERS & HUNTERS

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Ontario Conservation Centre

OFAH FILE: 450

February 11, 2022

The Honourable Peter Bethlenfalvy
Minister of Finance
Frost Building North
95 Grosvenor Street, 3rd Floor
Toronto, Ontario
M7A 1Z1

Dear Minister Bethlenfalvy:

Subject: 2022 Pre-Budget Consultation

Thank you for the opportunity to share our ideas for how the Government of Ontario can shape the 2022 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 2022 budget, and many that will follow, will seek to fill holes left in the wake of this ongoing 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.

Like almost all other sectors, fishing and hunting have been impacted by COVID-19. Past closures of the Canada-US border eliminated non-resident tourism, and some residents of Ontario have not been able to participate in fishing and hunting as they would have in the past. Some of the impacts to fishing- and hunting-related tourism have been mitigated by capitalizing on strong domestic (Ontario resident) participation, but challenges will remain because of ongoing restrictions, post-pandemic anxiety, and significant uncertainty. Despite ongoing challenges, Ontario's 4-billion-dollar fishing and hunting sector has remained relatively strong throughout the pandemic as Ontario residents seek safety in outdoor activities that also offer mental and physical health benefits. Fishing and hunting can be an even greater source of economic and social strength for the people of Ontario because there is 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 five OFAH requests for the 2022 Ontario Budget. We are asking the Government of Ontario to:

1. **Make greater investments from the Consolidated Revenue Fund (CRF) to match the Fish & Wildlife Special Purpose Account (SPA) contributions to the Ministry of Northern Development, Mines, Natural Resources and Forestry's (NDMNRF) Fish & Wildlife Program budget.** The SPA, generated from fishing and hunting licence fees, fines, and royalties, pays for approximately two-thirds of the NDMNRF'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 do not 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. The province has taken steps to encourage domestic vacations with the Ontario Staycation Tax Credit and this is a welcome program that can support motels, outfitters, cottages, campgrounds and other accommodation providers that may have been hit hard by the pandemic. This program, however, does not directly recognize or support the majority of fishing and hunting activity in Ontario that does not require overnight accommodation (e.g., day trips, using hunt camps), but does result in spending. Beyond the many tourism destinations in Ontario, a lot of outdoors-related 'tourism' spending occurs at gas stations, grocery and hardware stores, restaurants, and other small businesses in northern and rural areas that are not fishing and hunting outfitters or sector-specific 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 beyond what is associated with overnight accommodation, 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 long-standing priority for the OFAH, and we would welcome 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 and delivery pathways, including the existing and successful Green Shovels Collaborative.

4. **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 Invading 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.

5. **Increase investment in the Forest Access Roads Funding Program to \$100 million for the 2022/23 fiscal year (from the \$50M-\$75M in recent years).** The OFAH fully supports the request of the Ontario Forest Industries Association (OFIA) to enhance support for this critically important fund. This program not only supports critical northern infrastructure to support the jobs and economies of natural resource sectors like forestry and mining but should also be considered as multi-use public infrastructure. Forest roads offer greater access to municipalities and Indigenous communities, emergency response (e.g., wildfire), utility and railway maintenance, as well as a gateway for the people of Ontario to explore and enjoy sustainable recreational activities such as fishing, hunting, trapping, camping, snowmobiling, and berry picking. In a May 30, 2018 letter to the OFAH, Premier Ford committed to this very thing as the Leader of the Ontario PC Party, *“An Ontario PC Government would look to unlock Crown lands for hunting, angling, and tourism; and explore ways to create public access to resource access roads, including forest access roads.”* This is a modest request relative to other provincial infrastructure investments, but a well-maintained forest roads network is as critical to the financial and social well-being, and even sustenance, of Northern Ontario residents as any other grey infrastructure.

Our proposals for the 2022 Ontario Budget are not 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
 Director, Policy and Programs

MD/jb
 Attach.

cc: Honourable Greg Rickford, Minister of Northern Development, Mines, Natural Resources and Forestry
 Honourable David Piccini, Minister of Environment, Conservation and Parks
 Honourable Vic Fedeli, Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade
 Honourable Lisa MacLeod, Minister of Heritage, Sport, Tourism and Culture Industries
 Honourable Kinga Surma, Minister of Infrastructure
 Dave Smith, Parliamentary Assistant to the Minister of Northern Development, Mines, Natural Resources and Forestry
 Angelo Lombardo, OFAH Executive Director
 OFAH Board of Directors

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2022 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 US 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 Northern Development, Mines, 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 Northern Development, Mines, 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, Green Shovels Collaborative, Ministry of Northern Development, Mines, 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, Green Shovels Collaborative, 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, Green Shovels Collaborative, Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative, Ministry of Northern Development, Mines, Natural Resources and Forestry, and Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks, Fisheries and Oceans Canada, Great Lakes Fishery Commission.