

705-748-6324
email: ofah@ofah.org
www.ofah.org



OFAH MEMBERSHIP

Hunt. Fish. Conserve.

● PO Box 2800, 4601 Guthrie Drive, Peterborough ON K9J 8L5

January 30, 2026

Hon. Peter Bethlenfalvy
Minister of Finance
c/o Communications Services Branch
Frost Building North, 3rd Floor
95 Grosvenor Street
Toronto, Ontario
M7A 1Z1
MOFconsultations@ontario.ca

Dear Minister:

General

The Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters Membership (OFAH) is Ontario's largest, non-profit, fish and wildlife conservation-based organization, representing 100,000 members, subscribers and supporters, and 670 member clubs. We appreciate the opportunity to share our vision for the 2026 budget. By supporting heritage activities like fishing and hunting, the government can amplify the economic contributions of these sectors while ensuring the health of our natural resources. We believe strategic, high-return investments in these areas will generate substantial economic activity and highlight Ontario's world-class outdoor opportunities.

Ontario's \$4 Billion Fishing and Hunting Economy

Ontario is home to 37 per cent of all Canadian anglers (approximately 1.1 million individuals) and 33 per cent of all Canadian hunters (approximately 426,000 individuals). These participants drive demand across a broad range of industries, including retail, manufacturing (such as transportation equipment and metal products), and services like accommodation and food. By supporting these sectors, the government can maintain and increase the economic activity that provides thousands of jobs and billions in income throughout the provincial economy.

Economic analysis conducted in 2018 estimated the combined impact of fishing and hunting on the Ontario economy:

- Total Expenditures: Approximately \$5.796 billion.
- GDP Contribution: \$4.173 billion.
- Total Employment: 32,678 FTE jobs.
- Total Labour Income: \$2.034 billion.

1. General Recommendations

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 (MNR) Fish & Wildlife Program budget. Inflation, tariffs, and supply chain disruptions have increased costs, putting unanticipated stress on the SPA. Anglers and hunters have long been the primary stewards of the fish and wildlife program and now seek a provincial commitment that matches their investment.

Invest in the promotion of fishing and hunting to encourage domestic participation and spending, as well as domestic tourism related to fishing and hunting. Ontario boasts tremendous fishing and hunting opportunities and beautiful landscapes. In the face of economic uncertainty, it is important to maximize domestic spending.

Hire **more Conservation Officers** to protect our natural resources.

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 while creating local construction jobs.

Maintain investment in the **Forest Access Roads Funding Program** at \$79 million for the 2026/2027 fiscal year.

2. Fisheries

Enhance **monitoring and assessment of stocked waterbodies** to identify what is working well, where improvements are needed, and where resources could be reallocated more effectively.

Conduct angler surveys, including **creel surveys and questionnaires**, to better understand angler experiences, expectations of stocked fisheries, and other relevant participation and satisfaction metrics.

Explore **alternative species mixes**, including opportunities to expand Aurora Trout stocking or evaluate Tiger Trout potential, where appropriate, while carefully assessing ecological implications.

Engage FMZ advisory councils in developing and implementing **FMZ-level stocking plans** to strengthen transparency, alignment, and stakeholder involvement.

Expand fisheries monitoring by developing a **broadscale monitoring program for flowing waters**.

3. Wildlife Research and Monitoring

Ensure continuity of funding for important **wildlife surveillance and monitoring programs** like moose aerial inventories, chronic wasting disease surveillance, and barbed-wire hair trapping for black bears.

Invest in **investigation of alternative population assessment methodologies** (e.g. drones, forward-looking infrared) to stretch limited dollars further.

Maintain funding for the ongoing **moose research project in northwestern Ontario** to ensure completion and transfer of science results into management action that will benefit moose populations.

4. Partnership Programs

The most cost-effective path toward fish and wildlife conservation lies in the power of partnership. For every dollar the government provides in core funding, non-government partners can unlock hundreds of volunteer hours.

Increase support for the Community Hatchery Program (CHP) by expanding funding opportunities and updating program policies to better enable Indigenous-led stocking under the CHP banner. In 2024, the CHP supported 37 community hatcheries, 1,272 volunteers who donated 46,563 hours of their time to raise 9,192,747 fish to stock in public waters. This represents a direct economic contribution of over \$1.55 million. Effectively, CHP volunteers are providing the province with the equivalent of 28 full-time staff at a fraction of the cost to Ontario taxpayers. These volunteer-run hatcheries have also become education hubs where local residents and kids can learn about fisheries management and ecology and get involved in local conservation activities.

Maintain support for the Invading Species Awareness Program (ISAP) to continue to implement and undertake activities that support the Ontario Invasive Species Strategic Plan and the *Invading Species Act*. With the province's support, ISAP delivers programming including the Invading Species Hit Squad program that helped address youth unemployment in communities in Ontario, creating 27 positions across 18 organizations and over 90 collaborative partners.

5. Invasive Species

In 2024, the province invested \$16 million over three years to protect the economy and environment from the threat of invasive species. This investment included the investment to develop the Invasive Species Action Fund (ISAF), helping municipalities, conservation authorities and Indigenous communities help stop the spread of invasive species in the province and support work being done on invasive Phragmites control, mapping, and environmental restoration.

From the \$16 million investment, only \$5 million was allocated to the ISAF. The need for this investment to be increased can not be stressed enough. The ISAF has been oversubscribed every cycle with many important projects being unfunded due to limited resources. **We recommend an increase of funding to \$10 million over three years for the ISAF** to ensure high-quality projects are being supported. This enables programs such as ISAP to deliver invasive species initiatives, particularly through the Invading Species Hit Squad, while addressing youth unemployment in communities across Ontario and leveraging federal funding to help partners expand on-the-ground projects.

6. Protected Areas

As mentioned in our January 2025 letter to the Minister of Environment, Conservation, and Parks, there are several non-operating parks in northeastern Ontario with the potential for increased recreational opportunities with minimal investment: Greenwater, Obatanga, Shoals, and Crescent Lake Campground in Lake Superior Provincial Park. The government clearly recognizes the value of protected areas and accessibility to Ontarians given recent investments in expansion and infrastructure at other protected areas. We urge the province to explore opportunities to **expand camping and recreational opportunities at these locations**. Considering the proximity of several camping areas to their historic access points, road-accessible camping could be achieved with little extra investment.

Closing Remarks

The provincial government and OFAH share a commitment to protect and enhance Ontario's outdoor heritage. By prioritizing these strategic investments, the government will help secure the long-term health of Ontario's fish and wildlife populations while amplifying the economic contributions of the angling and hunting sectors.

Yours in Conservation,



Matt DeMille
Executive Director

cc: Hon. Doug Ford, Premier
Hon. Mike Harris, Minister of Natural Resources
Hon. Todd McCarthy, Minister of Environment, Conservation and Parks
Hon. Kevin Holland, Associate Minister of Forestry and Forest Products
OFAH Membership Board of Directors
OFAH Foundation Board of Directors
Mark Ryckman, OFAH Director of Policy
Sophie Monfette, OFAH Director of Programs