

ONTARIO FEDERATION OF ANGLERS & HUNTERS



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Ontario Conservation Centre

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TO: OFAH Board of Directors

Attached is the preliminary draft of the head office report for the upcoming December meeting so that you can review it prior to our meeting.

We will not read the report into the record, but will provide and read only executive summaries of the information you are given, and any updates that could not be reported on in time for the distribution of this material.

I encourage you to please read the material prior to the meeting.

Yours in Conservation,

Michael A. Reader
Executive Director

MAR/jb
Attach.

cc: Angelo Lombardo
Terry Quinney
Greg Farrant
Sue MacCallum

Regulation Allowing Use of Leashed Tracking Dogs in Ontario

The OFAH Big Game Advisory Committee had a good brainstorming session with MNR Wildlife Policy Section in September toward the development of allowing hunters to use leashed tracking dogs.

For more clarity on the issue, there is nothing that prevents a hunter from doing this with a leashed dog in most of all moose WMU's/seasons (dogs are allowed in most WMU's, but must be licensed). A large number of especially southern deer WMU's do not currently allow the use of dogs in hunting, and that prevents the use of leashed tracking dogs.

The general consensus among the OFAH Big Game Advisory Committee and the MNR includes a maximum leash length, there shall be no fee for service allowed, trackers would have to wear hunter orange, dogs would need to be licensed through the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act (ensures qualified hunters only), no regulation of breeds, and no certification of handlers.

The MNR raised some initial concerns about the use of deer blood in training tracking dogs, but these have been addressed. Training is not hunting under the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act, so deer blood can be used, and there should be no concern about doing this with Ontario hunter harvested deer.

Federal Draft Woodland Caribou Strategy/Draft Updated Science Review

We reviewed a new federal draft Woodland Caribou Strategy and Scientific Review document in expectation of an October 25 submission. The consultation period deadline was extended to February 2012, giving us more time to respond.

The new science review provides more clarity about the national status of woodland caribou. Ontario woodland caribou do not appear to be much at risk (except for the Kesagami herd in Cochrane-north area according to the feds, who obtained their information from the provinces). Ontario woodland caribou status is generally similar to the status in Quebec, Newfoundland, and Manitoba (likely sustainable populations), unlike Alberta and Saskatchewan woodland caribou, which are at higher risk.

The federal recovery strategy should help inform MNR implementation, but what the province will do with this information remains a question.

We remain convinced the science demonstrates that Ontario woodland caribou should be down listed provincially and federally – they have clearly not declined 30% in three generations, which is the COSEWIC criteria for a threatened species.

Provincial Woodland Caribou Conservation Plan Implementation

There has been no adequate MNR response received yet from our submission on woodland caribou habitat regulations.

Also, the MNR has not yet responded to a January promise to draft an information piece for OFAH members in advance of meetings (essentially, we are looking for an MNR explanation and assurance that woodland caribou conservation/related forest management will not negatively affect moose populations, hunting, access or moose, bear, and wolf management).

Deer Removal Authorization (DRA) Review – the Need to Get Some Input to the MNR

MNR Wildlife Policy Section has confirmed the opportunity for the OFAH to convey our thoughts and recommendations in review of Deer Removal and Harassment Authorization (DRA) policy and procedures.

We have provided initial recommendations through the Human Wildlife Conflict Advisory Group (HWCAG), namely:

- DRA should be modified to allow harassment of deer at night; and
- there should be restrictions on DRA agents to ensure limited number and local origin (i.e. more alignment with elk removal/harassment policy).

These are member concerns that will be brought forward.

Final Consultations – Moose Review Phase II

The OFAH Big Game Advisory Committee and the Big Game Management Advisory Committee expects one more product from the Moose Review II; it will be raised with MNR Wildlife Policy Section at the BGMAC meeting.

Ontario's Moose Website

Ontario's Moose Website has now been updated with a new layout and content. This new website has a quick link web address, which can be accessed at ontario.ca/moose

The new website content includes basic information on moose biology, information regarding Ontario's moose management program and related policies/guidelines, provincial and WMU-specific hunter and harvest information for the past five years, and existing information pertaining to the resident tag draw.

In the coming months, the MNR may be adding more materials to this website, and are also considering developing similar sites for other species. MNR Wildlife Policy Section would welcome any thoughts and feedback you might have.

Species at Risk – Provincial

We reviewed a draft of 10 species-at-risk (SAR) recovery strategies and government responses in September. No OFAH submissions were made on the basis that we will only respond if they negatively and directly impact on our members' interests or game species management/conservation.

Through the Species at Risk Program Advisory Committee, we have reiterated our support for landowner "Safe Harbour" provisions to encourage landowner creation of SAR habitat without property rights loss (consequence of ESA s.10 habitat protection). We have advocated for stewardship first and Safe Harbour provisions since the very beginning of the ESA discussions.

COSSARO will be reviewing the status of 11 species in late November, including the status of peregrine falcons.

Big Game Management Advisory Committee

This committee has not met since the March 2011 moose harvest plan review.

Human-Wildlife Conflict Advisory Group (HWCAG)

HWCAG met in early November, and received welcome feedback from the inter-ministerial steering committee to which HWCAG makes its recommendations.

OFAH Preliminary Scoping Submission: Wildlife Feeding Regulations

We have been confidentially asked for early input to help scope out priorities for wildlife feeding regulation. Although baiting is clearly not in the scope, large-scale baiting beyond hunting seasons gets difficult to distinguish from "feeding," and OFAH assistance to help clarify the gray area will be important.

We have been conducting scientific literature review in advance of drafting such a submission.

Elk Management/Harvest Planning

Ontario's first modern day elk hunt produced a 31% tag fill rate (65 tags were issued to the 70 individuals or groups who were eligible to purchase a tag. From the 65 tags issued, hunters harvested 20 elk in the one-week season. Other highlights include:

- 95% of hunters voluntarily checked their elk at MNR check stations (18/20);
- 50% of the hunters hunted on private land (in an area with 50/50 Crown/private land area); and
- 75% of the elk harvested were taken from the two WMU's in which the agricultural conflict area overlaps.

We are trying to make sense of mixed messages, rumors, and conflicting views regarding what the First Nation harvest of elk might be. Our opinion is that there should not be any attempt to plan 2012 allocations until after an early 2012 elk aerial inventory is completed.

Kawartha Highlands Signature Site Park (OFAH Zone E)

In 2011, strategies to achieve management objectives have been implemented in the Kawartha Highlands Signature Site Park (KHSSP). In particular, the introduction of permitting fees for boat caches and motorized vehicle use has raised concerns with OFAH members who fish and hunt in the park. We strongly advocated for a reduction of the excessive and inappropriate fees that were introduced for boat caches, and have reached a tentative agreement with the MNR (Ontario Parks) to reduce the fee from \$107.50/boat/year to \$20/boat/year. In addition to the unreasonable permit fees, we are concerned with who is being targeted, namely anglers and hunters (who are not associated with private or tenure property within the park). We will continue to monitor the implementation of permitting fees for other activities (e.g. ATV use) to ensure that traditional hunting and fishing opportunities in the park are not compromised by excessive costs.

Darlington Provincial Park, Controlled Waterfowl Hunt (OFAH Zone E)

OFAH Zone E administers the Controlled Waterfowl Hunt at Darlington Provincial Park. In July 2011, OFAH Zone E submitted a proposal to increase the number of blind locations used for the hunt from seven to nine. The proposed blind locations would provide additional opportunities (up to four hunters per day), unique hunting opportunities (i.e. for diving ducks) and increased benefits (i.e. revenue). The proposal intended to help maintain participation in the hunt further into the season, because diving ducks visit Darlington later in the fall than most dabbling ducks. The proposal was reviewed and subsequently rejected by Ontario Parks.

Darlington Provincial Park, McLaughlin Bay Restoration Project (OFAH Zone E)

The steering committee for the McLaughlin Bay Restoration Project held multiple meetings in September and October 2011. This project has an overall goal of restoring habitat and improving water quality in McLaughlin Bay. The OFAH sits on the steering committee for this project, because McLaughlin Bay is the site of the OFAH-administered Controlled Waterfowl Hunt at Darlington Provincial Park. This hunt represents one of the few remaining public hunting opportunities within the Greater Toronto Area, and we want to ensure that project objectives and activities are consistent with maintaining, or even enhancing the existing hunting and fishing opportunities in McLaughlin Bay.

Strawberry Island (OFAH Zone D)

Strawberry Island (Manitoulin Island) was purchased by the Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC) in 2002, and has recently been proposed to be designated as a nature reserve class provincial park. The proposed designation has raised concerns, because the previous owners permitted local residents to hunt on the island for almost 80 years. We submitted comments and recommendations regarding the EBR posting for Strawberry Island's designation. Our concerns were mostly focused on the loss of socio-economic and cultural benefits associated with hunting on the island. In addition, we emphasized the potential for ecological impacts that are likely to occur due to the absence of deer hunting, particularly for the sensitive vegetative communities of the Island. We also submitted a Letter to the Editor of The Recorder to raise the profile of this issue.

Trail User Safety During Hunting Season Campaign (OFAH Zone H)

Huronian Trails and Greenways (HTG) is in the middle of a campaign to promote hunting safety awareness for trail users in Simcoe County, specifically targeting nonhunters. OFAH Zone H has representation on the steering committee for this project. We are also monitoring this project to ensure all information and messaging is accurate and promotes a positive public image of hunting. In early November 2011, the project distributed a local media release, "Be Safe, Be Seen safety tips for trail users during hunting season." Future initiatives of this project include distribution of hunter orange bandanas to trail users, as well as the development and distribution of a promotional brochure.

Lake Simcoe (OFAH Zones G and H)

The Lake Simcoe Fisheries Stakeholder Committee (LSFSC) had a brief hiatus following the August meeting. A primary focus of this committee continues to be the development of bait regulation options to satisfy the Lake Simcoe Protection Plan policy 7.3-SA (only bait from the watershed can be used in Lake Simcoe). There is an expectation that bait regulation options will be presented for public comment in late 2011 or early 2012.

With the end of year approaching, funding applications are underway for the 2012 year. The support from the EcoAction program is a great start, and further applications to Wildlife Habitat Canada, the Canadian Wildlife Foundation, Habitat Stewardship Program, and the Greenbelt Foundation, are underway.

Algonquin Land Claim

The Algonquin Land Claim continues to occupy a great deal of time and attention.

There has recently been a significant change at the Committee of External Advisors (CEA) with the sudden retirement of Bill Calvert, Chair of the CEA, and Al Stewart, Natural Resources Advisor to the Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs. Both have been invaluable sources of information and advice, and will be missed. The government has also tendered the contract for the Chief Provincial Negotiator in keeping with new guidelines adopted since the E-Health scandal. Brian Crane, who has been the Chief Provincial Negotiator since 1997, is required to reapply for his position. This will not be resolved until mid-December, and no serious negotiations are expected until February, at the earliest.

We have been informed that the Harvest Chapter of the AIP is now ready in draft form. At the request of the federal Minister of Aboriginal Affairs, we will be consulted on the harvest chapter before the federal negotiator and Minister agree to sign off. We have also been told that a significant amount of Crown land is included in discussions with the Algonquin, plus a large amount of cash. The lands under discussion are broken down into a large number of smaller parcels throughout the claim area. The Ontario Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs has not come to grips with the need to consult with groups such as the Ontario Hunt Camps Association and others, but continues to insist that progress is being made to ensure the protection of fish stocks.

Under Sparrow, conservation is the priority, and only when conservation concerns are satisfied should an aboriginal priority be assigned. Sparrow also implies a management regime to manage all harvests, which in essence means designated species. Ontario is resistant to include designated species in the AIP, even though many other AIP's contain very specific numbers for each species. The MNR is adopting a laissez faire approach; in other words, let things play out and see what happens. If a conservation threat is created, only then will they consider designating species. Recent information indicates that the MNR wants to determine what the Algonquin want, and will then try to sell it to nonaboriginal stakeholders.

To date, there has been no indication from the Ontario negotiator about what the public interests are and how these will be represented at the table. This may result in an accusation of bad faith being filed against the province during the EA process. There remains a serious need for detailed discussions to occur for the process to work. The federal government is pushing the province hard on these issues, but Ontario continues to remind them that natural resources are a provincial jurisdiction. This ignores the fact that unless the federal Minister and Chief federal negotiator are prepared to sign the AIP, there will be no deal.

According to the Chief Federal Negotiator, Ron Doering, some of the materials produced by the OFAH in the past have been captured in the documents being discussed. The federal government also continues to insist that the OFAH and others be consulted before the process goes forward. Mr. Doering also informed us that the Appeal Court overturned the lower court ruling in favor of the Ardoch First Nation, and denied their request for funding to mount a challenge against the province, the claim process itself and the application by the MNR of the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act.

Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs – Negotiations Workshop

On September 21, along with the Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO) and the Georgian Bay Association, the OFAH participated in a panel discussion at the Ontario Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs. The audience included all senior staff in the Negotiations Branch of the Ministry who were seeking stakeholder feedback on the negotiation process itself, with particular concern for shortcomings or gaps. We addressed major themes including conservation and resource sustainability, fair sharing, harvest allocations, definition of conservation, enforcement, designated versus nondesignated species, access, public lands transfer and major court decisions.

Bill C-19, An Act to amend the Criminal Code and the Firearms Act

As you are aware, on October 25, the federal Minister of Public Safety and National Security introduced Bill C-19, An Act to amend the Criminal Code and the Firearms Act, legislation designed to scrap the long gun registry and provide for the destruction of all data associated with that system. We were pleased to have been asked to emcee the media announcement of the bill at a farm outside of Ottawa, along with the Minister of Public Safety, the Minister of Small Business, Candice Hoepfner, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister and the local MP. Several stakeholder representatives, including one from the OFAH, spoke at the media launch, which was covered live by CBC and CTV.

The government has signaled its intentions to move forward quickly with the bill, and as of this writing, the bill has already completed Second Reading and has been sent to the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security. Hearings on the bill commenced on November 3, 2011 with the Minister of Public Safety being the first witness. We are expecting to be asked to testify before the Committee during the week of November 14, 2011.

Bill C-19 is similar in nature to Bill C-391, introduced in 2009 by Candice Hoepfner, but includes the destruction of all records, something her bill did not. It is this aspect of the bill that is attracting the most negative attention from the opposition.

Explosives Act

On September 20, we were invited to Ottawa for a meeting with senior staff at the Explosives Branch, Department of Natural Resources, to discuss changes to the Explosives Act impacting on ammunition.

The proposed amendments will loosen the restrictions on hand loading regulations and stored materials, and are broadly supported in the firearms community. We have sent the federal Minister of Natural Resources a letter of support, as has the Saskatchewan Wildlife Federation, the British Columbia Wildlife Federation, and the Canadian Shooting Sports Association.

Municipal Discharge Bylaws and Sunday Gun Hunting

Beckwith Township – Council felt that the issue was brought to them by local hunters too late to consider for this fall's hunting season. They have commissioned a poll for this fall and committed to making a decision either way on Sunday gun hunting before Christmas. We have been recently contacted by local members who are pressing the Council to bring the issue forward; however, there are a number of newer large homes being built in the area, which are attracting a significant number of former Toronto/urban residents. This is unlikely to help create a situation where Council will be supportive of new hunting opportunities.

Zorra Township – Council continues to pursue changes to the noise bylaw that could have a significant negative impact on the Tavistock Rod & Gun Club, an OFAH member club with 186 members. The threat of court action by the municipality continues to be a real possibility, despite efforts by the club to reach a compromise with local neighbors and municipal officials. At the core of the dispute is the attempt by Council to apply provincial noise level standards to the club. At one point, Council planned to attend the club at some future date to assess the noise levels for themselves. In the meantime, negotiations between the club and the municipality continue with court action pending.

Municipality of Clarington – The municipality has approved a new noise bylaw. This will impact on two non-OFAH shooting clubs by imposing new curfews and decibel levels. One of these, the Orono Rod & Gun Club, which has a few individual OFAH members, asked for assistance in fighting the proposed changes at Council. We wrote to Council on August 3, 2011 outlining the club's long history in the area, and the lack of substance behind the arguments against the club by some local residents, particularly since much of the extracurricular shooting at the club is carried out by police during training exercises. As a result of the new bylaw, the Orono club has installed a new berm and noise baffles, which has reduced the sound considerably, and brought it into line with the new municipal standard.