

FRIENDS OF HUNTLEY HIGHLANDS

COMMENTS ON ONTARIO WETLANDS POLICY: EBR 012-4464

Introduction

The Friends of Huntley Highlands (FHH) is a community organization, based in Carp, to the west of Ottawa, which is working to preserve the natural features of the Carp Hills. Much of the area in the Carp Hills has been designated as a Provincially Significant Wetland Complex, so the FHH is pleased to learn that the Province is moving to improve and, we hope, strengthen the policy and enforcement on Provincially Significant Wetlands. The FHH is a member of the Ontario Nature Network, and has signed on to the submission being made to the Province by Ontario Nature. In addition, we are submitting the following comments from our group.

Policy Coherence

The current policy on wetlands is too fragmented to be effective. Environmental policy specific to wetland conservation does not appear to have sufficient weight in relation to other Provincial agriculture, transportation and planning Acts affecting land use. As part of developing a new policy on Wetlands, the Province should examine and ensure that other legislation is compatible with, and does not override wetlands policy, as currently seems to be the case. There should be one Provincial agency/department designated as having authority to oversee and implement wetland conservation policy and ensure a consistent approach throughout all Provincial departments.

Net Gain

A new policy framework should be based on the principle of 'Net Gain' rather than 'No Net Loss'. This is especially so in southern Ontario, where substantial losses to wetlands have already occurred. In southern and central Ontario, priority should be given to preserving existing wetlands, rather than to compensatory measures, as in many cases it will be essentially impossible to fully compensate for further loss of remaining wetland. Compensation measures should also consider the function as well as the size of the wetland concerned, and both elements should be considered in determining appropriate compensatory measures.

Data and Science

The Province needs a better process and greater resources allocated to identifying, mapping and evaluating current wetlands. A policy of either 'net gain' or 'no net loss' needs to be based on solid baseline data of current wetlands. Mapping and evaluation initiatives should be coordinated with Municipal and Federal government agencies engaged in similar exercises. The economic, social, and environmental benefits provided by wetlands e.g. flood control, carbon capture, and water table replenishment should be identified and quantified, to better demonstrate their value as social and economic assets.

Private Landowners

There should be better measures to compensate landowners for preserving wetlands. They should not bear the whole cost of protecting private wetlands. There needs to be ongoing consultation with landowners and better education about the value of preserving wetlands. Landowners will be essential partners in ensuring the effectiveness of a new policy.

Public Education

The Province should also be doing more to educate the public on the value of wetlands. This might be done by working with and supporting local environmental and nature groups and Conservation Authorities to help them to educate their communities about the environmental and economic worth of wetlands. 'Citizen scientists' can play a greater role in identifying and monitoring wetlands.

Monitoring and Enforcement

Monitoring and enforcing compliance with wetlands conservation policy is critical to preserving our wetlands. To ensure the success of a new policy, the Province needs to better address ongoing monitoring and enforcement of wetland conservation. The MNRF and Conservation Authorities need adequate resources to monitor and ensure compliance with Provincial wetland policy. Court proceedings are very expensive and Conservation Authorities are limited in the number they can undertake. There should also be a broader array of enforcement options.

Friends of Huntley Highlands
30/10/2015