**PROPOSED FMZ15 REGULATION CHANGES**

**Comments from Haliburton Forest & Wild Life Reserve Ltd.**
**Submitted by Cameron Ferguson, Operations Manager & Tegan Legge, General Manager**

**28th November 2022**

## Introduction & Background

Haliburton Forest encompasses over 100,000 acres of land in the northern portion of the Haliburton Highlands of FMZ15 with over 60 lakes, hundreds of ponds, swamps and wetlands within its property. A sustainable approach to land stewardship is taken to managing the terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems of this diverse landscape ensuring future generations can appreciate the same benefits enjoyed today. The property is certified as sustainable by the Forest Stewardship Council.

Haliburton Forest operates a successful and unique multi-use tourism and resource management business on the land. Tourism activities are those typical of a semi-wilderness area such as camping, canoeing, hiking, hunting and fishing among others. The property has been a destination for Brook and Lake Trout fishing for many years, which has seen an increase since the initiation of a fish stocking program through the Haliburton Forest Fishing Society.

This program is a self-funded initiative and does not rely on funds from public agencies. Today Haliburton Forest offers guided fishing experiences providing employment for local fishing guides as well as year-round access to the public for fishing activities.

The approach to fisheries management at Haliburton Forest is focused on conserving the natural fish populations and doing the right thing. This conservative focus continues today with the work of the Haliburton Forest Fishing Society, which strives to provide stocked lakes that offer a first-class fishing experience drawing attention and fishing pressure away from the Prime Natural Brook Trout Lakes. In the past Haliburton Forest was the centre for Lake Trout research conducted by the renowned John Casselman who recognised the summer peak in fishing pressure and its negative effects on the Haliburton Gold Lake Trout populations.

The successful implementation and continuation of provincial fishing regulation restrictions on those lakes containing Haliburton Gold Lake Trout, have allowed a generation of anglers to experience and observe this unique Lake Trout sub species. Conservation of vulnerable species and sustainable management of the resource is fundamental to Haliburton Forest's land stewardship philosophy.

Haliburton Forest has historically had and continues to have a good working relationship with the MNRF and will continue to foster that relationship. The company recognises the need for a conservative approach to fisheries management for a sustainable future and is open to constructive dialogue with the MNRF on these matters.

**Context for Comments**

Regarding the proposed regulation changes within FMZ15, Haliburton Forest will only comment on the regulation changes affecting Brook Trout and Lake Trout. Changes to fishing regulations for these species will have the greatest potential impact on the fisheries and recreational fishing opportunities within Haliburton Forest.

**General Questions & Concerns**

- To protect fish populations, we need to 1) protect fish habitat, and 2) protect the fish that are reproducing (large females). The proposed regulation changes do not address either of these fundamental points.
- It does not appear that the proposed regulation changes are based on new data. We believe the status quo is working and that changes to the regulations should be based on data. How much fishing pressure data was collected on the lakes within FMZ15 (in particular those lakes within Haliburton Forest) to assist in the creation of the proposed regulation changes?
- We are not convinced that MNRF really understands the changes in fishing pressure throughout the year within Haliburton Forest due to access conditions.
- It does not appear that the effects of changes in angler habit related to fishing pressure have been quantified or considered. Have the effects of changes in angler habit related to fishing pressure been considered? For example, fishing pressure being concentrated during stressful warmer months when lake access is easier.
- The rationale for the minimum size limit is not provided. What is the logic behind a minimum size limit? Why would a regulation focus on allowing harvesting the larger egg producing fish?
    - Scientific studies have shown that larger fish produce disproportionately more eggs than smaller fish – most of the eggs that are produced in a given lake come from the larger female fish. Therefore, setting a size limit that only allows anglers to keep fish that are >40 cm will cause anglers to remove fish that are doing most of the reproduction.
- Has the MNRF taken into account the greater likelihood of cold-water fish mortality from catch & release fishing practices during warmer months when fishing pressure will be concentrated to a higher degree due to the proposed regulation changes?
- Fishing for cold water species through summer can have a negative effect on the number of egg-producing mature females which are actively feeding from July to Sept when it is well known they are easier caught during this time. Research conducted at Haliburton Forest has shown this to be the case.

- A disproportionate number of smaller immature fish are caught throughout the winter months therefore having a limited impact on cold water fish reproduction compared to a larger impact summer fishing has on the larger more mature egg producers.
- The proposed regulation changes will have a serious negative impact on recreational fishing opportunities within Haliburton Forest and the surrounding community. It is foreseen that the changes will result in reduced opportunities for Your Outdoors, a Haliburton Forest business that provides year-round Canadian experiences to domestic and international visitors. These visitors not only provide Yours Outdoors with income but also stay and spend much needed money within our community, which is especially important throughout the winter months when traditionally tourism slows down and less money is coming in. Yours Outdoors offers guided ice fishing experiences that foster awareness, appreciation and action regarding fish biology, ecology, sustainability and conservation. The very knowledgeable guides who lead these experiences enjoy a 100% success rate, a testament to the stocking program where the guided fishing takes place. Many of these visitors also become members of Haliburton Forest's Fishing Society, resulting in further funds for our stocking initiatives.

**Brook Trout Regulation Changes**
**Haliburton Forest Feedback Considerations**

- Haliburton Forest recognises the need to provide protection to naturally reproducing Brook Trout populations. However, we do not necessarily agree with closing natural Brook Trout waters to winter fishing.
- Access to lakes within Haliburton Forest during winter is already somewhat restricted due to a pay for property access by snowmobile or ATV fee resulting in reduced fishing pressure. The proposed regulations seem an unnecessary addition to this access restriction in Haliburton Forest.
- Haliburton Forest suggests taking a step approach to conserving the species by implementing a reduced catch limit first and then monitor the success rate of this measure before implementing season restrictions. Perhaps having an open season restriction on certain natural Brook Trout Lakes in a rotation on alternating years is possible.
- Haliburton Forest suggests maintaining a winter open season with reduced catch limits on 3 lakes it currently stocks with Dickson Strain Brook Trout. These lakes include:
    - Sprucehen Lake – Eyre Township 17 T 691573 E 5003162 N
    - Bivouac Lake – Eyre Township 17 T 691575 E 5003161 N
    - Depot Lake – Eyre Township 17 T 691582 E 5003160 N
    - These lakes are currently under a stocking program funded privately by the Haliburton Forest Fishing Society. Anglers are currently asked by Haliburton Forest to fish conservatively.
- Haliburton Forest **strongly requests** for lakes within its property, that it currently stocks with Brook Trout under MNRF licence as P, G & T lakes with its own funds, be exempt from the regulations and be listed as “additional fishing opportunities”. These lakes include:

        - Blue Lake – Havelock Township 17T 692632 E 5010893 N
        - Dog Lake – Havelock Township 17 T 691878 E 5014257 N
        - Raden Lake – Eyre Township 17 T 694745 E 5018743 N
        - Snap Lake – Havelock Township 17 T 686704 E 5016953 N
        - Duck Lake – Eyre Township 17 T 693999 E 5024420 N
    - These stocked lakes are highly important to Haliburton Forest's fishing experience providing anglers with great fishing opportunities throughout the year as well as being fundamental in taking attention and pressure off the Prime Natural Brook Trout Lakes which we have worked hard to conserve.
    - An exception to the proposed regulations to allow Brook Trout fishing in these stocked Put, Grow & Take (P, G & T) lakes will provide much needed top class year-round additional fishing opportunities within the Haliburton Highlands at no cost to the taxpayer.
    - The majority of these stocked lakes listed above are stocked with Rainbow Trout as well as Brook Trout and will therefore receive fishing pressure from anglers targeting Rainbow Trout year-round. An exception to allow fishing for Brook Trout on these lakes will reduce incidences of unintentional poaching and death of Brook Trout caught by anglers that are targeting Rainbow Trout.

**Lake Trout Regulation Changes**
**Haliburton Forest Feedback Considerations**

- Haliburton Forest recognises the need to provide some form of protection to naturally occurring Lake Trout populations.
- However, 3 Lake Trout lakes within Haliburton Forest have had an open season restricted to Jan 1st – June 30th for many years. Positive effects on natural Lake Trout populations have been seen with viable natural populations of Haliburton Gold Lake Trout species in MacDonald Lake, Clear (Clean) Lake and Black (Eyre) Lake.
    - This restriction has worked for this highly unique sub species of Lake Trout. In the absence of new data or new analysis, which we do not believe have been collected or conducted by MNRF, we do not understand why there would be any basis for changing these regulations.
- Haliburton Forest **strongly suggests** maintaining the current open season restrictions, therefore providing a winter open season for Lake Trout on the lakes containing Haliburton Gold Lake Trout. These lakes are:
    - MacDonald Lake – Havelock Township 17 T 691547 E 5012132 N
    - Clear (Clean) Lake – Havelock Township 17 T 693750 E 5013363 N
    - Black (Eyre) Lake – Eyre Township 17 T 696111 E 5014798 N
- It must be noted that winter lake access is restricted due to a pay for property access by snowmobile or ATV only fee. Fishing pressure increases on these lakes from mid May due to easier campsite and visitor road access.
- It is a well-known fact that larger fish tend to be caught during the summer than during the winter. Additionally, female fish are more susceptible to being caught by fishermen during the summer months. This is because they begin producing eggs during July, and feed more aggressively than male fish between July and September to accommodate their

larger nutrient requirements. These two points mean that by eliminating the winter season but keeping the summer season open, the large female fish that are responsible for the majority of egg production are more likely to be caught. It would be better to keep the winter season open but close the summer season from July onwards, as this would spread the fishing pressure more evenly across all size-classes of fish, and between males and females.

- Haliburton Forest suggests having a restricted open season for Lake Trout fishing on certain natural Lake Trout lakes in a rotational system therefore providing fishing opportunity in a controlled manner with limited impact to Lake Trout populations.

Haliburton Forest, and by extension the Haliburton Forest Fishing Society, is interested in working with the MNRF on providing additional fishing opportunities in the Haliburton Highlands for anglers to off set the conservative approach to natural waters.

This could be the creation of artificial fisheries stocked with Lake Trout, Splake or Brook Trout with the intention of year-round fishing. Other possible collaboration efforts that Haliburton Forest is willing to work with the MNRF on is experimental management for Lake Trout and Brook Trout in which Haliburton Forest can actively be involved in monitoring and creel collection from dedicated anglers.

Haliburton Forest and the Haliburton Forest Fishing Society sincerely hope that the MNRF will take into consideration the points laid out in this document. The proposed regulation changes in part have the potential to negatively impact the business aspects of Haliburton Forest's tourism division as well as those partners and associates within Haliburton County. The impacts to the societal benefits of winter fishing must also be considered for people within FMZ15 who for some winter fishing is the only winter activity they can partake.

Haliburton Forest welcomes the MNRF to a discussion and communication on the matters outlined in this document. We look forward to your reply.

Sincerely,

Cameron Ferguson
Operations Manager
cferguson@haliburtonforest.com

Tegan Legge
General Manager
tlegge@haliburtonforest.com

Haliburton Forest & Wild Life Reserve Ltd
1095 Redkenn Road,
Haliburton, Ontario, K0M 1S0
800-631-2198