

The Ontario Conservation Accelerator congratulates the Government of Ontario for the recent announcement which proposes to expand provincial parks and conservation reserves across the province. The decision to expand public conservation lands by 25,500 acres (10,300 ha) is a critical step toward protecting biodiversity and creating new opportunities for sustainable outdoor recreation across the province.

The addition of these new sites under the *Provincial Parks and Conservation Reserves Act* marks a significant milestone for conservation in the province, continuing the efforts started under the *Ontario Living Legacy Land Use Strategy* almost 25 years ago. The Ontario Conservation Accelerator is supportive of widespread and innovative environmental conservation, and as such we celebrate this commitment, and look forward to collaborating with the government on other actions that recognize, celebrate, and protect Ontario's unique habitats for generations to come.

The Ontario Conservation Accelerator believes that all communities in Ontario should have reliable access to nature. Expanding protected areas can support this access through direct land-use opportunities, and indirectly benefit local communities through other means such as tourism or the arts. We hope that this initial announcement for expanding protected areas will be a catalyst for the creation of new protected areas which are needed across the province to ensure all communities have means to access nature. It is heartening to know that more individuals and families will now have the opportunity to explore and connect with nature, fostering a deeper understanding of the importance of conservation.

Furthermore, the benefits to biodiversity cannot be overstated. By expanding conservation lands, we are creating vital core areas that benefit local species and serve as essential stepping stones in the broader landscape's ecological connectivity. Expanded protected areas are essential to supporting healthy ecosystems and promoting resilience in the face of environmental challenges and climate change. This proactive approach to conservation will contribute immensely to preserving our natural heritage for future generations.

We commend the Ministry of Environment, Conservation and Parks for spearheading this effort and wholeheartedly support this initiative as it advances through public engagement. These efforts will not only enrich our provincial landscape but have also set an important precedent for balanced environmental protection. We look forward to the positive impacts of these expanded parks and conservation reserves in the years to come. If there are ways in which the Ontario Conservation Accelerator can support or enhance these initiatives, we would welcome the collaboration.

Yours sincerely,



Mike Hendren
Executive Director
Ontario Conservation Accelerator



Kristyn Ferguson
Managing Director
Ontario Conservation Accelerator