

## **Joint Comment on Ontario Bill 5: A Call to Protect Ontario's Biodiversity and Support Local Leadership**

The Georgian Bay Association, Georgian Bay Forever, and the Georgian Bay Land Trust jointly have serious concerns about the proposed Bill 5, the Protect Ontario by Unleashing Our Economy Act, as it stands.

This omnibus legislation dismantles key parts of Ontario's environmental protections and calls into question the province's commitment to its obligation to engage and consult with First Nations and Indigenous communities.

While we support the need to grow the Ontario Economy through responsible regional development, Bill 5 proposes sweeping deregulation that would threaten the health of Georgian Bay and undermine essential environmental protections across the province. Some provisions in the bill raise particular concerns, including:

- Replace the Endangered Species Act with a much weaker and more political framework and abandon long-term goals such as recovery and stewardship for protected species
- Allow development projects in "Special Economic Zones" to proceed without environmental assessments, municipal by-laws, or existing Ontario laws.
- Allow development to begin immediately after online registration rather than after environmental review
- Alter the Heritage Act to exempt projects from archaeological assessment

This is especially alarming for the Georgian Bay watershed because it is a world-class, UNESCO-designated biosphere, home to more than 50 species at risk. This irreplaceable refuge is also a diverse economy where healthy ecosystems support valuable tourism, recreation, and fisheries.

This legislation removes valuable opportunities for developers to consult with those most directly affected by development. It ignores potential losses to Indigenous cultural heritage in Ontario, and we recognize the Chiefs of Ontario's public expressions of concern with Bill 5.

Bill 5 would make it easy to ignore local knowledge and experience that matters so much in creating strong economies. Georgian Bay's local leaders are working hard and thoughtfully in their communities to develop this region for the long haul. For example, the creation of the Township of Archipelago was specially designed to serve people living in this unique landscape, and it is extremely successful. The town of Collingwood was one of the first areas to be taken off the list of the International Joint Commission's

Areas of Concern, thanks to local organizing and leadership. Collingwood is a thriving municipality with a healthy harbour; these don't need to be either/or equations.

For these reasons, we urge the Government of Ontario to heed the concerns of environmental leaders and revise Bill 5 to protect biodiversity and respect local and Indigenous leadership.

**Signed,**



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**Executive Director, Georgian Bay Forever**



**Meredith Denning**  
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### **About Georgian Bay Forever**

Georgian Bay Forever (GBF) is a registered Canadian charity dedicated to scientific research, public education, and collaboration to protect and restore the water of Georgian Bay and the ecosystems it supports. GBF funds and leads research on pollution, invasive species, climate resilience, and aquatic habitat preservation. Through partnerships with communities, Indigenous groups, and policymakers, GBF advocates for evidence-based solutions to environmental challenges. Our mission is to ensure the long-term health of Georgian Bay's waters for future generations.

**About the Georgian Bay Association**

The Georgian Bay Association (GBA) speaks for 18 community associations along the east and north shores of Georgian Bay, representing approximately 3,000 families. Our mandate is to work with our water-based communities and other stakeholders to ensure the careful stewardship of the greater Georgian Bay environment. We reach an estimated 30,000 residents every year and we have been advocating on behalf of our members for over a century.

**About the Georgian Bay Land Trust**

The Georgian Bay Land Trust (GBLT) is a conservation organization committed to protecting wilderness lands along the eastern shore of Georgian Bay and the North Channel. Through land acquisition, stewardship, and partnerships, GBLT preserves critical habitats for biodiversity, including over 50 species at risk. GBLT collaborates with Indigenous communities, local governments, and individuals to ensure long-term conservation and access to nature. Its work supports the ecological health, cultural heritage, and natural beauty of this globally significant landscape.