

August 6, 2025

Ontario Parks – Southwest Zone
659 Exeter Rd
London, Ontario
N6E 1L3

Re: Proposed legislative amendments to the Provincial Parks and Conservation Reserves Act, 2006 and Historical Parks Act to support the Town of Wasaga Beach's Tourism Enhancement Proposal (ERO Number: [025-0694](#))

We, the 13 undersigned organizations, are writing to express our concerns regarding the proposal to transfer portions of Wasaga Beach Provincial Park to the Town of Wasaga Beach. The maintenance of ecological integrity is the first priority guiding the planning and management of Ontario's system of provincial parks and conservation reserves. Proposing to transfer lands out of the provincial park system risks the ecological integrity of sensitive habitats and long-standing management approaches.

Nancy Island – Transfer to Historical Parks Act

We note the first component of this environmental registry posting is the transfer of Nancy Island from the *Provincial Parks and Conservation Reserves Act* (PPCRA) to the *Historical Parks Act* (HPA). Given the historical importance of Nancy Island we have no significant concerns with this component of the proposal, but note that unlike the PPCRA, the HPA contains no principles or objectives for the management of sites under its authority. We urge the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Gaming to articulate clear policies and standards for how sites regulated under the authority of the HPA will be managed.

Amendments to the PPCRA – Removal of Wasaga Beach Provincial Park Lands

Wasaga Beach Provincial Park is more than a popular recreational and tourism destination, it is also a diverse and active ecosystem that has been stewarded by Ontario Parks and locals since 1959.

The provincial park is home to freshwater dunes held together by marram grass, an ecosystem so rare, that it is considered globally imperilled.

Areas of the beach that consist of piping plover habitat, such as Beach Area 1, New Wasaga and Allenwood Beaches have been maintained by Ontario Parks to preserve species at risk habitat as required by the *Endangered Species Act, 2007*. Beach Area 1 hosted 54 of the 57 piping plover nests in Wasaga Beach since 2008. Despite the government's passing of Bill 5 to repeal the *Endangered Species Act, 2007* and replace it with the *Species Conservation Act* these nesting sites would still need to be protected.

Ontario Parks has the necessary expertise to ensure the beach areas are maintained to protect the ecological integrity of Wasaga Beach while accommodating tourism – as currently done. The Town of Wasaga Beach lacks the capacity or expertise to maintain these sensitive habitat features and protect species at risk.

Furthermore, the proposal on the environmental registry provides no details on what the town's objectives are with these lands or rationale on why this is necessary to enhance tourism in Wasaga Beach – an already popular destination. Additionally, other than Nancy Island, the proposal provides no

calculations for the total area being transferred and how much of the park area this proposal represents. The vagueness and lack of transparency in the proposal details prevents meaningful input on the potential impacts of a land transfer from provincial authority under the PPCRA to the Town of Wasaga Beach.

Importance of Provincial Parks

Wasaga Beach Provincial Park is often the most visited park in the province, receiving over 1.2 million visitors in 2023 and nearly 1.7 million in 2022¹. This generates significant revenue for Ontario Parks that allows it to carry out its mandate across the province. Transferring significant portions of the provincial park risks the long-term sustainability of the dune systems and sensitive habitats of this globally significant beach.

Given these tourism numbers, it is unclear why any of the beach needs to be transferred from Ontario Parks to the Town of Wasaga Beach without a clear plan or agreement to maintain the habitats and ecological integrity of the beach areas. There are enough suitable lands under the jurisdiction of the town to enhance tourism infrastructure without the areas currently administered by Ontario Parks.

Ontario's protected areas network is still shy of 11% of the province's total area, representing a significant gap from the 30% identified by conservation science that is needed to halt and reverse biodiversity loss. The province's own appointed protected areas working group found that 86% of Ontarians support the expansion of protected areas in the province². Reducing the amount of area under the administration of the PPCRA, however small, runs counter to the wishes of the majority of Ontarians.

As demonstrated, Wasaga Beach Provincial Park already is managed with tourism in mind while balancing ecological needs. Transferring the lands to town ownership is incompatible with maintaining these provincially significant resources, potentially depriving the people of Ontario from an important natural asset.

We strongly urge the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks to not proceed with removing all of Beach Areas 1, 2, New Wasaga and Allenwood Beach from authority under the PPCRA to the Town of Wasaga Beach.

Sincerely,

Tony Morris
*Conservation Policy and
Campaigns Director*
Ontario Nature



Ted Cheskey
President
Bruce Peninsula Bird
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Tim Gray
Executive Director
Environmental Defence



¹ Visitation to Provincial Parks, data catalogue. Accessed July 7, 2025 - [Visitation to Provincial Parks - Visitation to Provincial Parks - Ontario Data Catalogue](#).

² Support for the creation of more parks and protected areas - [2021-Ontario-ProtectedAreasWorkingGroup-recommendations-WildernessCommittee-TheNarwhal.pdf](#).

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