

August 10, 2025

Ontario Parks - Southwest Zone
659 Exeter Rd.
London, ON
N6E 1L3
Canada

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)

Dear Ontario Parks,

On behalf of the Ontario Nature Youth Council, many of whom are young birders across the province, I am writing to express our concerns regarding the proposal to transfer portions of Wasaga Beach Provincial Park to the Town of Wasaga Beach. This proposal sets a dangerous precedent of dispensing public assets managed primarily for ecological integrity.

The Ontario Nature Youth Council is a diverse provincial network of young people who are inspiring, connecting, and educating our communities while protecting wild species and wild spaces. With 96 Youth Council members from 44 communities across Ontario, we put our best selves forward as we contribute to lasting, positive change through a variety of conservation actions in our community and on a provincial level. Ontario Nature Youth Council members across the province have been educating their peers and the public about the importance of wetlands for Ontarians, biodiversity, and the well-being of current and future generations. Many of us are birders of varying experiences and nature-lovers who visit spaces like Wasaga Beach Provincial Park, parks and conservation areas.

I, Evening, saw my first piping plover in 2023 at Wasaga Beach, the only place I knew nearby where to reliably find them. I had always avoided Beach 1 as it is usually quite busy, but I was participating in a friendly birding competition with a couple of my friends, and I had always wanted to see them. I walked over to the taped off area where they were nesting and started scanning the sand. When I saw the little plover dart across the sand, I was first filled with joy and excitement, but it was quickly followed by sadness as I remembered that they are losing habitat and their numbers are dwindling.

Without the protection Ontario Parks provides, vital habitat for the piping plovers would be in jeopardy, further harming their already damaged populations. Ontario Parks has been and continues to balance tourism with ecological needs at Wasaga Beach Provincial Park. As a collective of youth who care for nature, we strongly agree that managing tourism while balancing ecological needs is important for maintaining provincially significant habitats and resources. Seeing the piping plovers was truly an incredible moment for me, but it was also a bit of an awakening. The piping plovers need our help. It is crucial that the beaches are protected as a sand dune habitat not just for the plovers, but the other species that rely on it. I want to make sure that future young birders like me have the opportunity to experience the joy of seeing piping plovers at Wasaga Beach.

This proposal reflects a troubling disconnect between government decision-making and the long-term environmental interests of Ontarians, particularly young people who will live with the consequences. Removal of freshwater dune habitat puts endangered species like piping plover at greater risk of no longer being in Ontario.

If Ontario wants to reach the commitment of 30% of land being protected by 2030, we should be preserving more environmentally sensitive habitats, not selling them off. Provincial park lands belong to all Ontarians and should remain public. If public and protected lands are handed over to developers for profit, what are we protecting at all? Passing of this proposal sets a precedent that the government is able to transfer lands out of the provincial park system, risking the ecological integrity of sensitive habitats and long-standing management approaches. This proposal, along with the passing of Bill 5, will set the precedent for future legislation that will allow for more ecosystems housing endangered and at-risk species to be damaged and destroyed, moving further from Canada's 2030 Nature Strategy of halting and reversing biodiversity loss.

We thank you for your time and trust that you will take our views into account for your decision as this proposal affects all fellow residents of Ontario, including our neighbouring species. We invite you to meet with us to hear our viewpoint, and should you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact the undersigned.

Yours sincerely in conservation and on behalf of birders and nature-lovers on the Ontario Nature Youth Council,

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