



May 18, 2005

Honourable Dalton McGuinty
Premier and President of The Executive Council
Room 281
Legislative Building
Queen's Park
Toronto, ON
M7A 1A1

Dear Premier:

Open Letter Re Protection of Ontario's Northern Boreal Region¹

We are writing to request that you honour and implement a promise you made in 2003 to protect the ecological integrity of Ontario's northern Boreal region. At 370,000 km² (bigger than Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and P.E.I. combined), Ontario's northern Boreal region is part of the largest continuous stretch of Canada's intact boreal forest, which is the second largest expanse of unbroken forest left on Earth.

Ontario's northern Boreal forests are home to 28 Aboriginal communities, many of whom maintain strong ties to the land. The region also supports important populations of species-at-risk, such as woodland caribou and wolverine. Populations of valuable species, such as beaver and American marten, as well as moose, wolf and lynx also thrive there. The northern Boreal region sustains crucial breeding habitat for countless songbirds and waterfowl. Its wild river and lake systems support more than 60 species of fish, including many that sustain subsistence and fly-in fisheries in the region. Hundreds of species of plants, including ferns, mosses, fungi, shrubs and herbs, thrive in the boreal region, providing critical ecological services, including climate regulation and carbon storage.

¹ The "northern Boreal" region of Ontario refers to the public lands north of those currently allocated for forestry -- which end at approximately 51° latitude.

Ontario's northern Boreal region, much of which has yet to be allocated to resource industries, provides an unparalleled opportunity to plan proactively for resource management, conservation and communities.

In 2003, as Leader of the Opposition, you promised to

institute meaningful, broad-scale land-use planning for Ontario's Northern Boreal Forest before any new major development . . . [that will] protect the ecological integrity of this natural treasure and help to provide a sustainable future for native people and northern communities".²

Unfortunately, Premier, this has not occurred. Today the ecological integrity and sustainable future of Ontario's northern Boreal forests are at greater risk than at any time in the past. New major developments or allocations are proposed or proceeding in Ontario's northern Boreal forests without coordinated planning among departments, and without considering the requirements of biodiversity conservation or the long-term socio-economic health of communities. These developments include the Victor Diamond Mine, coal-bed methane exploration, hydroelectric development and transmission lines, forestry allocations, ongoing mineral staking, exploration and development, and the roads and infrastructure to service them.

Allowing Ontario's northern Boreal forests to be developed without broad-scale land-use planning that considers biodiversity conservation and sustainable economies will fundamentally change the ecological, political and social landscape of this region. Such changes will permanently foreclose options for proactive planning for a sustainable economic future for the region's inhabitants, including protected areas establishment.

Allowing Ontario's northern Boreal forests to be developed without conservation-based planning also will permanently put species-at-risk such as Woodland caribou and wolverine, in greater danger, driving them closer to extinction. Populations of these animals already have been largely driven out from more southern regions by improperly planned logging, mining, hydroelectric and road development.

Finally, allowing Ontario's northern Boreal forests to be developed without conservation-based planning may generate conflict between communities, stakeholders and land users, creating uncertainty, cost and delay for resource industries, and challenges for the government.

² Letter from Dalton McGuinty, MPP, Leader of the Official Opposition, Leader of the Ontario Liberal Party, to Partnership for Public Lands, March 19, 2003.

Therefore, Premier, we respectfully urge you to keep your promise and declare an immediate moratorium to postpone all new exploration or development approvals in Ontario's northern Boreal region on public lands north of 51° until conservation-focused land use planning is completed that:

1. addresses the needs of biodiversity conservation and sustainable economies;
2. protects watersheds and maintains healthy water supplies for northern communities and all Ontarians;
3. results in the establishment of a network of ecologically representative and interconnected protected lands that:
 - i. prohibit industrial activities
 - ii. provide sanctuaries for species-at-risk and other native species
 - iii. act as ecological benchmarks, and
 - iv. allow aboriginal use and traditional harvesting activities; and,
 - v. involve First Nations meaningfully in their design and management;
4. provides northern communities with the resources to lead and implement planning activities within their traditional territories.

This is a sensitive and urgent matter. We believe your government is in a unique position to provide leadership and make a significant difference. To this end, we respectfully request you to direct your ministries to halt piecemeal development and implement a coordinated, comprehensive land use planning process.

We would appreciate an early opportunity to meet with you and relevant Ministers of your Cabinet to discuss the resolution of this emerging crisis and request your response by June 15th.

Sincerely,



Janet Sumner, Executive Director
CPAWS Wildlands League

ENDORSED BY:



Steven Price
Director, Forest and Trade Program
World Wildlife Fund



Joan Kuyek
Executive Director
Mining Watch Canada



Linda Pim
Acting Conservation Director
Ontario Nature



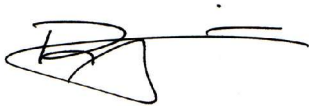
Elizabeth May
Executive Director
Sierra Club of Canada



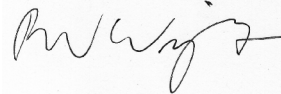
Victor Lorentz
Forest Campaigner
Earthroots



Gregor Beck, Director
Avian Science and Conservation
Bird Studies Canada



Rick Smith
Executive Director
Environmental Defence



Rob Wright
Counsel
Sierra Legal Defence Fund



Jean Langlois
Executive Director
Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society
– Ottawa Valley Chapter



Paul Muldoon, Executive Director
Canadian Environmental Law
Association