

For Immediate Release

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Ontario Abandons Ecological Integrity in Algonquin?

TORONTO – Plans to renew leases for recreational properties to 2038 in Algonquin Park are incompatible with protecting the ecological integrity of the park, warns CPAWS Wildlands League a leading conservation group.

The province is proposing to renew cottage leases and that “new lease conditions (e.g. limits on development) and eligibility requirements (e.g. fees and taxes paid up to date) would reduce environmental impact of the cottages while making sure that leaseholders are paying their fair share”. It was seeking comments from the public on its proposal through the *Environmental Bill of Rights* Registry. The comment period ended last week. No public hearings were planned as had been done the last time leases were extended.

“There are over 326 cottages covering approximately 120 ha of land. We’re worried that Ontario might be about to break its own laws. The proposal as it stands today makes no mention of needing to take this to the Legislature for endorsement,” stated Janet Sumner Executive Director for the group.

The phase-out policy has been on the books since 1954. Ontario Regulation 347/07 describes the expiry date for all cottage leases in Algonquin Park:

13. (2) No person shall occupy land for non-commercial residential purposes in Algonquin or Rondeau Provincial Park except under a lease granted before July 2, 1954 or a renewal or extension of such a lease that does not extend beyond December 31, 2017.

As well, the *Provincial Parks and Conservation Reserves Act* (PPCRA) mandates certain obligations be fulfilled by Ontario, before the government seeks to dispose of land within any provincial park or a conservation reserve. In particular, subsection 9(4) of the PPCRA requires the following three conditions be met when Cabinet is contemplating an order to disposed of 50 hectares (or 1 percent of the total protected area) or more:

- (a) the Minister first reports on the proposed disposition to the Assembly;
- (b) the Minister tables the proposed new boundaries of the provincial park or conservation reserve with the Assembly; and
- (c) the Assembly endorses the proposed new boundaries of the provincial park or conservation reserve.

“At the end of the day, the government is required to manage every park for ecological integrity, it’s the law,” says Sumner. “If private cottagers believe they aren’t a threat to the park’s health, then they should welcome a plan for Algonquin that addresses its overall health and ecological integrity,” Sumner added. The group notes that at least 2 cottages are for sale right now boasting of being located in the beloved park using their prime location for private gain.

Wildlands League is worried that this latest move by the government is symptomatic of a larger problem: the province is turning its back on ecological integrity—which is the stated priority of its own *Provincial Parks and Conservation Reserves Act*—an act that was widely applauded by Wildlands League and others when it was passed in 2006. The group adds that when recent government actions are examined altogether—proposed renewal of cottage leases in Algonquin, the failure of plans to lighten the footprint of logging in the park, the stubborn silence on the ecological harm of more than 5,000 km of logging roads in Algonquin and the failure to phase out cottage leases in Rondeau Park—they point to a deeply troubling provincial trend.



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