



April 17th, 2009

New coalition calls for new law to support the Green Economy in Ontario's Great Boreal forest

Today a coalition of five environmental groups is calling on the Provincial government to create a new land-use planning law for Ontario's Great Boreal Forest.

The coalition says the legislation should require clear rules for development, including a requirement of for the completion of land-use plans before industrial projects are approved. It should also enshrine the principle that local plans would be made in agreement with First Nations and require the permanent protection of more than half of the region for its climate adaption and wildlife values.

"We are committed to working with the provincial government, First Nations and industry to help ensure Ontario has world leading legislation" says Janet Sumner of CPAWS-Wildlands League.

New legislation was promised by Premier McGuinty in 2008 as part of his commitment to protect the region and launch land-use planning as part of a commitment to green economic development. The new law is expected to be introduced into the Ontario legislature in late May.

The Great Boreal forest of Ontario's north is currently almost completely undeveloped. Located north of approximately 50 degrees latitude and covering an area of covering 45 million hectares or 43% of the province's landmass, it is home to many Aboriginal communities who wish to plan for their futures. It also contains wild rivers, wetlands and an abundance of pristine forests that provide habitat for many species that are threatened or rare in other parts of Ontario. It is also one of the largest terrestrial carbon storehouses in the world and its conservation is cornerstone of the Premier's climate change strategy.

The coalition has set out benchmarks to judge the quality of pending legislation: The five key components of good legislation are:

- Create a well-resourced joint Planning Body to allow First Nations and the Province to work together and share implementation of planning.
- Principles for how Ontario will work in partnership with First Nations to determine the location, use and management of the 50% or more of the region that the Premier has committed to protect as conservation lands

- Set out how community plans will be developed and integrated with regional objectives.
- Describe how communities will realize long-term benefits from development and their role in management.
- A clear role for a Science Advisory Committee, including objectives for how it will inform land-use planning.
- Set clear rules for the development of roads, corridors and industrial activity outside of protected areas.

“Planning before development marks a fundamentally new direction for Ontario and Canada” says Rick Smith of Environmental Defence.

“Getting the legislation right means that we can produce world leading plans that protect investment, help ensure sustainable communities and protect Ontarians from some of the impacts of climate change” adds Catherine Grant of ForestEthics.

Three of the groups in the coalition (CPAWS-Wildlands League, ForestEthics and Ontario Nature) are members of the multi-stakeholder Far North Advisory Council. This council, comprising representatives of mining, forestry, hydro and conservation groups, and others recently submitted advice and input to the Minister of Natural Resources intended to inform the province’s plans for moving forward with legislation.

“Environment and economy need to be addressed at the same time in Ontario’s Great Boreal forest,” concludes Caroline Schultz of Ontario Nature. “We are very hopeful that the provincial government is poised to make that a legal requirement”.

About the Ontario Boreal Futures Coalition

The Ontario’s Boreal Futures Coalition includes [CPAWS Wildlands League](#), [Ecojustice](#), [Environmental Defence](#), [Environment North](#), [Forest Ethics](#) and [Ontario Nature](#). The Coalition is working to support establishment of new conservation-focused land-use planning legislation for the far northern boreal region of Ontario. We are working closely with First Nations, scientists and government to ensure that this new legislative framework realizes the Premier's commitment to protecting 50% or more of the region, better protecting species such as caribou, wolverine and sturgeon where development does occur and enabling and supporting First Nation involvement in the planning processes.

The Coalition will undertake a variety of education and outreach activities as part of its work. These include the launch and distribution of the “*New Boreal Times*”, publication, the launch of a new website that contains an interactive flyover of the region (www.borealopportunity.ca) and organizing public events and collaborative work with First Nations, industry, and government.

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Backgrounder

On July 14, 2008, Premier Dalton McGuinty made a historic announcement that Ontario will protect at least 225,000 square kilometres of Ontario's northern Boreal region (www.premier.gov.on.ca/news/Product.asp?ProductID=2353). This is the largest conservation commitment in Canadian history and will elevate Ontario to being a world leader in protecting terrestrial carbon and conserving the internationally significant Boreal ecosystem. On September 19th the Premier announced that the Province will develop new legislation to guide boreal protection and planning.

Quick Facts

- The Northern Boreal region is 43 per cent of Ontario's land mass
- It is home to 24,000 people living in 36 communities
- The region absorbs approximately 12.5 million tonnes of CO₂ from our atmosphere each year
- There are two operating mines in the region, Victor Diamond Mine and the Musselwhite Gold Mine
- There is considerable economic potential from additional mines and from hydroelectric development
- There is only one all season road in the region which terminates in Pickle Lake
- The region is a stronghold for Woodland Caribou, Polar Bear, Lake Sturgeon, Wolverine and other species at risk.
- Find more information on the values of the region at www.borealopportunity.ca