



For Immediate Release

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# Ontario Law Makes Good on Promise to Protect Northern Boreal Forest

## Role of communities needs to be front and centre in new law, coalition says

TORONTO – A coalition of leading environmental groups applaud legislation introduced today that would enshrine Premier Dalton McGuinty’s commitment to protect at least 225,000 square kilometres of the northern boreal forest. The *Far North Planning and Protection Act*, if passed, would help Ontario fight climate change, protect ecosystems and ensure First Nations have control over land-use decisions as they plan for cultural renewal and economic prosperity.

The draft legislation makes progress on commitments made last year by Premier McGuinty to protect the boreal forest and improve relationships with Aboriginal people. The coalition notes that for the first time in Ontario history, First Nations will lead planning for their traditional territories. It also welcomes a commitment in the legislation to create a new body to help with implementation and coordination of planning.

“The Premier has made good on his promise to the planet, and has set in motion a plan to protect more than 50 billion tonnes of carbon,” says Janet Sumner of CPAWS Wildlands League. “The success of this initiative depends on our investment in First Nations as they plan for prosperity, culture and ecosystems.”

“World class values deserve world class legislation,” adds Justin Duncan of Ecojustice. “This draft has the right ingredients and we look forward to working with others to perfect it.”

The Coalition has set out five benchmarks to judge the quality of the new legislation:

1. Clear statement of ecological planning goals and objectives to guide selection of conservation lands
2. Establishment of community planning bodies to lead development and approve land-use plans
3. Equal representation of Aboriginal people on a regional coordinating and implementation body
4. Adequate funding for community planning bodies to conduct their work
5. Establishment of a science advisory body to meet the purposes of the legislation

“The proposed legislation meets most of the tests for good legislation for the northern boreal,” says Rick Smith of Environmental Defence. “More work needs to be done to fully ensure the legislation will work in the real world but we are confident this will be done during the Committee hearing process this summer.”

The lack of funding commitments to support planning is a particular concern to the Coalition. In the absence of money for developing proactive plans there is a risk that communities will be forced to support development projects as the only means to get the money necessary for planning for their future.

“Plans that protect culture, landscapes and species need to be done now,” says Catherine Grant of ForestEthics. “Not only when somebody wants to build a mine, hydro dam or transmission line.”

The role of a regional planning body needs to be more clearly defined in the legislation as well, including the manner that it will involve aboriginal people.

“The promise of protection needs to become real through this legislation and it could set a standard for conservation that other provinces should match,” says Caroline Schultz of Ontario Nature. “Getting it right means the difference between development that is sustainable and that which will eventually destroy an irreplaceable region.”

Three members of the Coalition also sat on the Minister of Natural Resources Far North Advisory Council. They are pleased to see that several elements of the Council’s consensus report are reflected in the draft legislation.

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For more information please visit [www.borealopportunity.ca](http://www.borealopportunity.ca) and contact:

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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](http://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 19<sup>th</sup> the Premier announced that the Province will develop new legislation to guide boreal protection and planning.

### Quick Facts

- 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 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 a cornerstone of the Premier's climate change strategy.
- 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 CO<sub>2</sub> 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](http://www.borealopportunity.ca)

### 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 the 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](http://www.borealopportunity.ca)) and organizing public events and collaborative work with First Nations, industry, and government.

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.