

Letter: French River and Grundy Lake ERO

Subject: Urgent: Do Not Remove Protections from French River and Grundy Lake Provincial Parks (ERO 025-0424)

To:

Hon. Andrea Khanjin, Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks

Hon. Prabmeet Sarkaria, Minister of Transportation

Hon. Greg Rickford, Minister of Indigenous Affairs

Cc: Hon. Graydon Smith, Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry

Dear Ministers,

I am writing to express strong opposition to the proposed amendment under ERO 025-0424, which would remove protected lands from French River and Grundy Lake Provincial Parks to expand Highway 69.

This proposal undermines Ontario's environmental, climate, and reconciliation goals by threatening vital ecosystems, species at risk, and Indigenous rights.

1. Environmental and Climate Risks

French River and Grundy Lake Provincial Parks protect forests and wetlands that serve as natural carbon sinks, biodiversity hotspots, and climate buffers. Stripping protections from these lands:

- Fragments habitats and weakens ecosystem resilience,
- Releases stored carbon and intensifies flood risk,
- Contradicts Ontario's stated commitments to climate action and nature protection.

2. Threat to Species at Risk

These parks support numerous threatened and endangered species, including:

- Blanding's Turtle
- Eastern Whip-poor-will
- Eastern Hog-nosed Snake
- Moose, already stressed by habitat loss

These species require large, intact landscapes to survive. Continued legislative weakening of the Endangered Species Act has already diminished protections; this amendment would deepen that harm.

3. Breach of the Crown's Duty to Consult

This area falls within the Robinson-Huron Treaty territory and includes lands of deep significance to the Dokis, Henvey Inlet, Magnetawan, Wasauksing, and Shawanaga First Nations.

Any removal of protections from Crown land must involve clear, prior, and informed consent from all affected Nations. Proceeding without such consent violates the honour of the Crown and undermines the principles of truth and reconciliation.

4. Loss of Public Trust

Ontarians expect their provincial parks to be preserved not carved up for infrastructure. French River and Grundy Lake are not just recreational areas, but essential components of our ecological and cultural heritage. There are alternative highway solutions that would not sacrifice protected lands.

I urge your ministries to:

- Pursue alternatives such as twinning the existing highway alignment, adopting 2+1 road designs, improving freight management, and investing in wildlife crossings - approaches that enhance safety without sacrificing protected parkland;
- Conduct full, transparent consultations with all affected First Nations, in recognition of the Crown's legal and moral duty to seek free, prior, and informed consent;
- Uphold Ontario's commitments to nature protection, Indigenous reconciliation, and meaningful climate action.

Protecting these parks is not an obstacle to development — it is an investment in a livable, just, and sustainable future.

Sincerely,