

Dear Minister McCarthy,

Re: Formerly ERO 019-9306

Expanding Protected Areas in Ontario – Additional Sites Proposed to be Regulated under the Provincial Parks and Conservation Reserves Act, 2006

Summary of Concern

I support Ontario's commitment to expanding protected greenspace for its vital role in climate resilience, biodiversity, and public wellbeing. However, re-designating lands from stronger protective frameworks to provincial park status may unintentionally weaken long-term safeguards.

The parcels proposed for addition to Algonquin Provincial Park, for example, are already protected under existing provincial designations, such as conservation reserves or Crown lands managed for ecological integrity. While inclusion in a provincial park may appear to strengthen protection, in some cases it can replace more restrictive safeguards with weaker, more flexible provisions under the *Provincial Parks and Conservation Reserves Act* (. To avoid any net loss of protection, these lands should retain or exceed their current legal safeguards following re-designation.

The experiences at Wasaga Provincial Park and North Gwillimbury Forest illustrate this concern. At Wasaga, lands once considered under "full protection" are now being reconsidered for removal. In North Gwillimbury Forest, despite the Province's 2021 announcement that 360 hectares of wetland and forest would be added to the Greenbelt, parts remain in procedural limbo. These examples show that only transparent, legislated inclusion and ongoing oversight by strong, independent conservation authorities can guarantee permanent protection.

To ensure lasting conservation outcomes, parcels such as those proposed in Algonquin must retain explicit, permanent legal protections that prevent future development or any reduction in environmental safeguards. [[Environmental and social safeguards | Green Climate Fund](#)]

Recommendations

In this context, I offer the following comments and recommendations to help ensure that Ontario's efforts strengthen, rather than dilute, the province's overall network of protected lands, reinforcing both the integrity of the PPCRA and the credibility of Ontario's protected area system:

- Any lands returned from the Narrowed Area of Interest (NAI) or other designations must retain explicit, permanent legal protection.
- Total protection must be maintained or enhanced, with no reduction in existing conservation boundaries or ecological safeguards.

- Public input must be meaningfully incorporated at every stage to ensure transparency, accountability, and public trust.
- Conservation Authorities should have their oversight powers reinstated or work in tandem with Ontario Parks to manage the expanding network of protected greenspace and ensure that appropriate protections are implemented and enforced.
- The proposed sites organized by Ontario Parks administrative zones (Algonquin, Northeast, Northwest, Southeast, and Southwest) should be evaluated against these safeguards to prevent any unintended weakening of protection.

Sincerely,