



News Release

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MINISTRY FACES SIGNIFICANT CHALLENGES IN MEETING MANDATE TO PROTECT PARK SYSTEM: AUDITOR GENERAL

(TORONTO) The growth of provincial parks over the last 10 years, as well as expanded responsibilities, have significantly challenged the Ministry of Natural Resources' ability, within its funded resources, to protect Ontario's park system as required under the *Provincial Parks and Conservation Reserves Act, 2006*, Auditor General Bonnie Lysyk says in her *2013 Annual Report*.

"The Ministry lacks the baseline scientific data needed to ensure Ontario's provincial parks are protected," Lysyk said today after the Report was released. "During our audit, we noted that only one ecologist, aided by a seasonal assistant ecologist and a few park biologists, may be responsible for adequately maintaining the ecological integrity of between 20 to 50 provincial parks for future generations."

The Ministry is responsible for managing, operating and protecting provincial parks and conservation reserves, which contain significant elements of Ontario's natural and cultural heritage and provide opportunities for ecologically sustainable recreation.

Following are some of the Auditor General's other significant findings:

- Management plans that provide policies for the protection, development and management of wildlife and natural surroundings within parks noted significant damage to environmental conditions within parks but did not put forward meaningful strategies to address them.
- Significant portions of the provincial park system are subject to little or no enforcement of regulations on hunting and fishing, and on prohibited activities such as commercial timber harvesting and mining. Park staff say that illegal hunting, boundary encroachment by landowners, waste dumping and the cutting and removal of trees occur with regularity.
- Minimum park operating standards covering, among other things, waste management, sanitation, and cleaning and maintenance of buildings, facilities and grounds were established more than 20 years ago. Visits have since increased by more than 40%, and, therefore, the standards may no longer be appropriate.
- Assets within provincial parks such as buildings, roads, bridges, drinking water systems and septic systems listed as being in "poor" or "defective" condition require more than \$590 million to replace.
- There are nearly 600 private cottage properties held under lease in two provincial parks. Lease payments are significantly below fair market value and could generate approximately \$6.7 million more in revenue than the Ministry receives.

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