

# Media Release

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## **O.F.A.H. gets support from Ontario's Environmental Commissioner**

In a special report to the Provincial Legislature, Gordon Miller, Ontario's independent Environmental Commissioner, echoed what the O.F.A.H. has been telling the provincial government for years, namely, that the Ministry of Natural Resources Fish and Wildlife program is being starved to death by government cutbacks.

"Considerable evidence exists that the M.N.R. lacks the capacity to meet its current obligations to conduct fish and wildlife inventory, monitoring, assessment, and reporting activities, despite the efforts and expertise of its staff," states the report. "M.N.R.'s 2006/2007 operating budget remains approximately 18% lower than in 1992/1993... There are currently about 20% fewer C.O.'s in the field than there were 14 years ago. Over the 15 budget years examined, overall (government) operational spending increased 34 million dollars, a 67% increase. Yet, spending in M.O.E. and M.N.R. decreased. Together, they barely amount to 1% of last year's operational budget. This is far too little to get the job done," said Miller.

The report also confirms that anglers and hunters are paying a disproportionate amount of the costs through angling and hunting license revenues. "Although M.N.R. is managing our natural heritage on behalf of all Ontarians, the revenue from the Special Purpose Account now provides over 80 percent of the program's operating budget and has helped compensate for cuts made to the general revenue account," stated Miller in his report.

"The Commissioner's report serves to reinforce what we have been saying for years", said Andy Houser, O.F.A.H. Special Advisor on Conservation Issues. "Premier McGuinty promised the O.F.A.H. in 2003 that he would restore funding to the Ministry of Natural Resources to previous levels, but he has failed to keep his promise. Given the Premier's strong commitment to biodiversity and environmental issues, it's disappointing that the province has ignored suggestions made by the O.F.A.H. which could generate new revenue for fish and wildlife conservation, without requiring a huge shift in funding priorities. Given that the M.N.R. admits that hunting and fishing contributed more than \$2.6 billion in added value to the provincial economy in 2006, which is also noted in the Commissioner's report, surely the addition of \$35 million to the Fish and Wildlife budget should be achievable".

The O.F.A.H. has been asking the government to simply match the contributions of anglers and hunters to the S.P.A, similar to what the Environmental Commissioner has also suggested in his special report when he says "Surely, there is that much flexibility in the budget system (to double current spending on M.N.R. and M.O.E.)."

For additional information on the M.N.R. Fish and Wildlife Program funding crisis, go to [www.ofah.org/news](http://www.ofah.org/news) and click on *O.F.A.H. Presentation to the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs*.

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