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April 23, 2019  
The Honourable Doug Ford,  
M.L.A., Premier of the Province of Ontario.  
Legislative Building  
Queen's Park  
Toronto ON M7A 1A1

**Subject: The Community Fisheries and Wildlife Involvement Program**

Dear Mr. Ford,

In 1982, the Bill Davis government implemented the Community Fisheries Involvement Program (CFIP) and Community Wildlife Involvement Program (CWIP) to support community members and volunteers in efforts to initiate environmental projects that benefitted fisheries and wildlife in Ontario. In the first year alone, 3000 volunteer work days were donated to 22 projects across the province. Due to the success of the program, the Mike Harris government increased the funding to these programs to \$1,000,000.00, which according to the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters (OFAH) lead to 35,000 anglers, hunters, conservationists and outdoor enthusiasts donating 200,000 hours to 600 on the ground projects in the program's final year. In 2013, despite significant protest from numerous organizations, the program now renamed the Community Fisheries and Wildlife Involvement Program (CFWIP), was cancelled. The Liberal government's rationale at the time was to replace CFWIP with two new programs, the Land Stewardship and Habitat Restoration Program (LSHRP) and the Community Hatchery Program (CHP) which would be delivered by the OFAH.

LSHRP is a favourable standalone program as it allows for up to \$20,000.00 in funding per project with matching funds. Groups that are involved in larger capital projects with



multiple partners can benefit from this program, but the smaller, local groups that aim to complete small-scale grassroots projects are mostly excluded from this funding source. CFWIP provided a smaller dollar amount per project for basic equipment, materials and simple monitoring equipment, but only required that volunteers to be involved with no matching fund conditions. This lack of required matching funds allowed community groups to monitor their local environment, practice good stewardship and complete many small-scale fish and wildlife projects that cumulatively made a real difference in natural resource management, a core mandate of the MNRF.

A second aspect of CFWIP that was arguably more beneficial than the funding, was the simplification of permitting and the reduction of “red tape” for all volunteer groups that wanted to complete good work. Projects were screened by MNRF Biologists under the MNRF Class Environmental Assessment Act. For most fish habitat enhancement projects, screening was simple and could be completed in a few minutes as they were “prescreened”, meaning there were little to no risks in the implementation of the work. Under CFWIP, MNRF became partners of the organizations and volunteers working on projects. The groups were then considered to be Agents of the Crown and were not required to seek permits from their local Conservation Authorities to complete small restoration projects.

For small groups, clubs, and organizations wading through “red tape” to obtain permits from Conservation Authorities is a daunting task which has led to a drastic reduction in the number of groups delivering environmental stewardship activities. Every Conservation Authority provides permits for small scale habitat projects differently. A few may review the work much like the MNRF did and provide a letter supporting the work for free, while others will charge a \$600.00 or more permitting fee, even if the project can be completed for less than the cost of the permit. Others will request the group go through the steps of obtaining expensive and unnecessary engineered drawings for simple, small-scale projects, and then may still charge a permit fee on top of it all. These small-scale projects are completed by volunteers and environmental organizations for the benefit of the public good and due to the significant increase in amount of Red Tape, many groups have decided to no longer be involved in stewardship activities.

The simplifying of the permitting process through the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry and the elimination of “red tape” is what really made the CFWIP Program so successful and attracted tens of thousands of volunteers to be stewards of our

natural resources. The small investment in time from MNRF biologists allowed the people of Ontario to invest their time and efforts in improving our natural areas for all Ontarians to enjoy.

We are aware that the Government of Ontario is currently looking to reduce spending and find efficiencies to reduce the deficit. The CFWIP program will encourage volunteers to improve habitats, remove garbage and waste from our parks and natural areas, and help our rivers, lakes and fisheries they support with a relatively small investment. Should you find that providing funding for these projects is not a commitment you can make at this time, we ask that you restore the screening process of CFWIP using the MNRF Class Environmental Assessment Act for these projects and still support them by having the proponents act as Agents of the Crown.

Will the Government of Ontario commit to reinstating the Community Fisheries and Wildlife Improvement Program to allow the anglers, hunters, and conservationists of Ontario to once again take responsibility and invest their time and effort into enhancing our natural resources?

Will the Government of Ontario commit to supporting grassroots efforts by eliminating the “red tape” associated with the approval processes for small-scale projects and once again partner with volunteers and grassroots organizations to make a tangible difference in Ontario’s natural spaces?

We would be happy to sit down and talk about restoring this worthwhile initiative at your government's and your earliest convenience.

Sincerely,



Doug Forder,  
General Manager,  
Ontario Streams



Alex Meeker,  
Ontario Provincial Biologist,  
Trout Unlimited Canada



Linda Heron  
Chair, Ontario Rivers Alliance



John Kendell  
Credit River Anglers Association



Jim Robb,  
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Friends of the Rouge Watershed

John Leskew  
Orillia Fish and Game Conservation Club

CC: John Yakabuski, Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry  
Rod Phillips, Minister of Environment, Conservation and Parks

