



## Toronto Field Naturalists

2-2449 Yonge Street

Toronto, Ontario, M4P 2E7

416-593-2656

[office@torontofieldnaturalists.org](mailto:office@torontofieldnaturalists.org)

[www.torontofieldnaturalists.org](http://www.torontofieldnaturalists.org)

7 May 2019

The Honourable Minister Rod Phillips, Minister of Environment, Conservation and Parks  
The Honourable Minister Steve Clark, Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing  
Queen's Park, Ontario

Dear Ministers Phillips and Clark;

### **Please don't unravel Ontario's Endangered Species Laws**

For almost one hundred years, dedicated volunteers of the Toronto Field Naturalists (TFN) have been working to protect nature in the Toronto area. In concert with legal frameworks, communities have been protecting and restoring habitats, aiming for the return of vulnerable species of trees, birds, mammals, reptiles and wildflowers, not just in the GTA, but across Ontario. Today, as President of TFN, I must urge you to stop your government's unprecedented attacks on Ontario's natural heritage. In recent days, you have put in play three fundamental rewrites of existing laws, which together would undo decades of progress on nature restoration. These changes include the gutting of Ontario's Endangered Species Act (ERO # 013-5033); exempting developers from protecting most of Ontario's threatened and endangered species and their habitats (under omnibus Bill 108 ERO# 019-0021); and cutting away much of the natural heritage mandate of conservation authorities (ERO# 013-5018). Together, these changes would reverse painstaking, collaborative progress by hundreds of groups and innumerable volunteers, working over generations.

At TFN, we see every day how deeply people care about parklands, ravines and shorelines of the Greater Toronto Area. The people of Ontario know their own quality of life is directly tied to a healthy and intact natural world. They expect that natural world to be protected, not just far away in the north, but in walking reach of their own homes and schools. They value knowing that vulnerable species like Monarch butterflies and Trumpeter swans can return and even thrive in urban areas. And the public understands that nature must be well-protected in law, especially in fast-growing centres like Toronto, where the number of construction cranes (currently at 104) is higher than anywhere else in North America, and has been for years.

So it is highly alarming to see the legal framework for species protection now on the chopping block. With regard to the rewrite of the Endangered Species Act (ERO# 013-5033), the proposal contains so many deeply troubling elements that I can highlight just three top concerns:

- Developers whose projects would damage or destroy critical habitat would be allowed to simply pay into a fund rather than making their projects greener by accommodating vulnerable species.
- Species experts would find their best science advice on habitat protection overruled by politically convenient decisions.
- Species near the edge of their range in Ontario would lose their protection in law. Ontario would essentially be saying: "Let other jurisdictions step up and protect regionally rare animals and plants. Ontario no longer cares."

Ministers, Toronto Field Naturalists would be happy to offer you and your colleagues a personal tour of some of the remaining natural heritage gems here in the Toronto area. There are compelling stories to share of loss - and sometimes also recovery - of species. The Toronto region had a rich biodiversity, even in recent history. Today volunteer groups like ours work to bring back vulnerable species such as the Butternut tree and the Blanding's turtle. Since even today our region remains an annual flyway for billions of migratory birds, we are also restoring habitat for woodland songbirds. But we need our provincial government to work with us, not against us. I am confident you would come away from a tour with a new understanding why species at risk need stronger – not weaker – protection under Ontario's land use planning framework and the Endangered Species Act. Hard work and perseverance of volunteers have always been important, but supportive laws must be the foundation.

I ask you to use your authority as ministers; to stop this ill-considered assault on natural heritage; to listen, reflect and then follow your own better natures.

Sincerely,

Jason Ramsay-Brown  
President, Toronto Field Naturalists  
[president@torontofieldnaturalists.org](mailto:president@torontofieldnaturalists.org)

CC:

Hon. Doug Ford (Etobicoke North), Premier of Ontario  
Hon. Rima Berns-McGown (Beaches—East York)  
Hon. Marit Stiles (Davenport)  
Hon. Michael Coteau (Don Valley East)  
Hon. Kathleen Wynne (Don Valley West)  
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