

To: Public Input Coordinator  
Species Conservation Policy Branch – Wildlife Section  
300 Water Street  
5<sup>th</sup> Floor, North Tower  
Peterborough, ON  
K9J 3C7

18 January 2020

**Re: Bear Hunt in Ontario**

I would prefer our government put more effort into encouraging use of Provincial Parks and supporting ecotourism in Ontario than in encouraging hunting of bears – especially for hunters from out of province.

It is true that hunters bring income into the province. But they destroy the resource they use. There are all sorts of examples of ecotourism providing benefits to local economies, as much as hunters do. Hunting is declining and ecotourism is growing. With more visitors, it helps makes business operations more likely to be successful (for those who give tours, those who run accommodation, and those who rent places in AirBnB).

I have been part of an Ecotourism operation in Ecuador for 20 years with a group called the Jocotoco Foundation. With the removal of hunting in our Antisanilla reserve when we bought it in 2010, bears have now returned to the reserve and it has now become one of the best places in the world to see Andean Bears – and it is a very popular attraction: <https://www.jocotoco.org/wb#/EN/Antisanilla>

It is remarkable how poorly ecotourism, especially to Ontario's wonderful parks, is promoted within Ontario and also to the outside world. Unlike in the north-eastern US, there is almost no promotion during "Leaf Peeping" season (October). Most of our parks have little to no accommodation, and the accommodation that is there is horribly out of date. There is very poor coordination with local businesses to provide good standards of accommodation, food, and things to do, let alone a "welcoming atmosphere". With no promotion, there is little incentive for private individuals to make investments. The amount that people can charge for poor accommodation and underwhelming destinations does not provide much incentive for private initiatives.

As an example, Point Pelee has been known as a popular spring birding spot. There are high numbers of visitors, but nothing like the 60,000 plus that visit the 9 day spring birding festival at Magee Marsh near Toledo on the other side of Lake Erie.

There is a call, also from hunters, to open the hunting season for Sandhill Cranes and Tundra Swans. Why is there not greater promotion for tourism at places like Long Point in spring like there is for the Platte River in Nebraska, or spring

105 Summerhill Avenue, Toronto, M4T 1B1

waterfowl like Slimbridge in the UK. At Long Point, the provincial park is closed at some of the best times of the year for spring waterfowl and spring birding.

Why is there no program for viewing wolves or other wildlife in Algonquin the way there is in Yellowstone? All of the interpretive trails in Algonquin are fairly old, and few new ones have been set up in the last twenty years. And of course there are very few places to stay – surprising for a destination which is only 1.5 hours from an international airport. Algonquin already is a popular destination for Asians (there are large numbers of Japanese and Chinese people who travel to see our beautiful clean landscapes), but for them our hotels and food are very poor quality. The degree of interpretation available in our parks does not make Ontario a very attractive destination – either for its own citizens or for foreign travellers.

If Ontario is going to allow bear hunting, licenses should be very expensive (to actually cover the costs of OMNR) and it should be away from provincial parks or other places where there are members of the public. Hunters should not be allowed to bait bears or use dogs the way they do in some places.

But I think the better opportunity is to broaden the economic opportunities through ecotourism and outdoor activities. The best example I have seen is New Zealand, their network of parks, trails and the staff at the Department of Conservation are really terrific. There is a good complement of full time (not seasonal) staff who are knowledgeable about the parks, where to go, and what is there to see. New Zealand also has excellent guide books and has promoted lots of local support for tourism (hotels and services for tourists), and encourages a distinctive style of RV tourism – called “Freedom Camping” (which is also popular in southern Africa).

Overall, I think these types of activities provide a greater range of economic development opportunities than hunting. There are fewer hunters these days and there are likely to be fewer in the future. The activities that are growing are birding, wildlife view, photography, and other forms for experience based tourism.

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "David J. Agro" followed by a period.

David J. Agro