

ONTARIO FEDERATION OF ANGLERS & HUNTERS

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Ontario Conservation Centre

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Subject: ERO #019-1604 Fisheries Management Zone 6 Fisheries Management Plan Amendment for Lake Trout

The Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters (OFAH) is Ontario's largest, non-profit, fish and wildlife conservation-based organization, representing 100,000 members, subscribers and supporters, and 725 member clubs. We appreciate the opportunity to comment on the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry's (MNRF) proposed changes to the Lake Trout regulations in Fisheries Management Zone (FMZ) 6 to extend the winter angling season and remove certain exceptions in order to provide increased angling opportunities.

Based on indicators from the MNRF's Broad-scale Monitoring Program (BsM), Lake Trout populations appear to be stable across FMZ 6. We support the preferred option for Lake Trout by adopting the same regulation as FMZ 5: January 1 to September 30; not more than 1 fish greater than 56cm from September 1 to September 30. In addition, we agree with the changes to the existing regulatory exceptions to create more sustainable fishing opportunities for Lake Trout in the zone.

Using BsM data to help guide regulatory development, coupled with consultation and engagement with the zone's advisory council, the MNRF has identified additional fishing opportunities for the angling community. This is a good news story that demonstrates the effectiveness and importance of advisory councils. It is also a clear example of how the fisheries management planning process should work: an ever-evolving, iterative process that relies on science and data, and a participatory approach with stakeholders to inform decisions at the FMZ level.

Finding ways to increase sustainable angling opportunities, such as extending the winter angling season and removing seasonal exceptions, creates positive socio-economics benefits for anglers, businesses, and communities. This is a win for anglers and will be viewed favourably, but we would like for the MNRF to evaluate FMZs across the province to determine where other opportunities can be similarly established. Doing so will help promote angling, will get people interested and wanting to get out fishing, and will likely have positive outcomes for funding for the Fish and Wildlife Special Purpose Account.

ONTARIO FEDERATION OF ANGLERS AND HUNTERS

-2-

With the creation of FMZs over a decade ago, the MNRF made a commitment to enhance public involvement in recreational fisheries management decision making; advisory councils were established to meet that commitment. From this proposal and our participation, it appears that FMZ 6 has a relatively well-functioning advisory council. Unfortunately, this is not the case for every advisory council. The OFAH has representation on every council in Ontario and we have received feedback that identifies infrequent meetings, general inactivity, and outdated fisheries management plans (FMP) as primary concerns. In our opinion, this goes against the Ecological Framework for Fisheries Management in Ontario, particularly core components of fisheries management that include public involvement in management decisions. Every council must ensure there is continued consultation and engagement with the FMZ to: 1) facilitate stakeholder input to guide fisheries management; 2) ensure goals and objectives identified in the FMP are being met; 3) help to inform future decision making; 4) conduct performance evaluations of regulations; 5) identify key trends and emerging issues; and 6) guide FMZ-level stocking plans.

The current global pandemic has given us the opportunity to improve the way that groups can stay connected through online platforms. The OFAH sees the lessons learned throughout the past year as an opportunity for the MNRF to convene FMZ councils more frequently, reengage inactive councils, and establish the councils for FMZs that do not have them. The FMZ 6 Advisory Council should use this opportunity to continue to meet regularly and commit to monitor the outcomes of various actions, regulations, and other aspects of the FMP. We appreciate that the MNRF is considering ways to improve the fishing experience in FMZ 6, and thank you for the consideration of these comments.

Yours in Conservation,



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AW/jb

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