

January 4, 2022

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Sent via email to: wildlifepolicy@ontario.ca
and submitted online via the Environmental Registry of Ontario (ERO)

To Whom It May Concern,

Re: ERO #019-4637: Proposal to simplify and align provincial white-tailed deer hunting seasons

The Ontario Federation of Agriculture (OFA) proudly represents more than 38,000 farm family members across the province, supporting our members and the agri-food industry on issues, legislation and regulations governed by all levels of government. OFA works to ensure the agri-food sector and our rural communities are included, consulted and considered in any new and changing legislation that impacts the sustainability of our farm businesses. We are the leading agricultural advocate for Ontario farmers, their businesses and their communities.

OFA appreciates this opportunity to comment on ERO #019-4637: Proposal to simplify and align provincial white-tailed deer hunting seasons. Before commenting on the specifics of the White-tailed Deer Population Objective and Harvest Management Guidelines, OFA observes that there is only one Ontario landscape, which means that the complete range of activities and land uses found across Ontario; natural heritage, agricultural, rural, urban, etc. must share that landscape. Inherent in this concept is acknowledgement that Ontario's agricultural areas provide us not only with high quality, safe, affordable food, fibre and fuel, but also provide a broad range of environmental and ecological goods and services that benefit all Ontarians.

Ontario's agricultural lands are a scarce, finite and shrinking non-renewable resource. Based on census data from 2011 and 2016, Ontario's agricultural area declined by almost 320,000 acres; from 12.6 million to 12.3 million acres, which equates to 175 acres per day. Maintaining our agricultural lands for the production of food, fibre and fuel is vital. Legislation, regulations, policies, and programs need to acknowledge this.

Wildlife damage imposes a significant financial burden on some Ontario farmers; not all farmers suffer from wildlife predation equally. The impacts vary. A farm's location and the characteristics of the surrounding lands play a significant role. Similarly, farm type also drives predation losses. Based on the Ontario Soil and Crop Improvement Association's 2000 *Wildlife Impact*

Assessment for Ontario, subsequently updated in 2009 by the George Morris Centre, wildlife damage to both crops and livestock amounted to \$41M in 2007; equivalent to \$50M in 2019 dollars. This amount simply adjusts for inflation but does not reflect any increases in crop or livestock prices or increasing yields from new crop varieties or livestock genetics.

While Ontario does compensate farmers for livestock and poultry losses attributed to wildlife under the Ontario Wildlife Damage Compensation Program, there is no comparable compensation for wildlife damage to crops. Annual compensation payments for wildlife damage have ranged between \$800,000 and \$1.6 million, making the amount of wildlife damage borne by crop producers far larger than that incurred by livestock producers, and their “hurt” is further compounded by the reality that crop producers have no program compensating them for their losses equivalent to the Ontario Wildlife Damage Compensation Program. Crop Insurance only pays when yields fall below a predetermined threshold; between 70% and 90% of the farm operation’s calculated Average Farm Yield. Wildlife damage to crops is rarely large enough or sufficiently extensive enough to trigger a payment. These losses occur year after year, continually eroding farm yields and farm earnings. Profit margins for many crops are extremely slim, making 10% to 30% annual losses unsustainable.

OFA is largely in support of the proposed changes to deer hunting seasons in Ontario. Deer can cause considerable damage to agricultural crops, impact protected areas, and have the potential to transfer diseases to captive cervid populations. OFA supports sustainable white-tailed deer management, recognizing that high deer numbers in specific Wildlife Management Units may, in part, reflect the availability of agricultural crops as a food source. The negative impacts on farms and farmers from crop predation and damage can be addressed by curtailing deer populations in areas where agriculture is the principal land use. This would lessen the likelihood that deer will rely on agricultural crops as a key food source. OFA recognizes the role of regulated hunting in the overall management of deer populations. OFA continues to support the Ministry of Northern Development, Mines, Natural Resources and Forestry’s work with partners to minimize the risk of disease and pathogen transmission, including Chronic Wasting Disease between captive and wild cervid populations.

OFA would like to take this opportunity to restate its perspective on Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD). CWD is highly infectious, untreatable, and fatal to members of the cervid family, including white-tailed deer. While not currently found in Ontario, CWD has the potential to severely impact wild and farmed cervid populations and threatens the sustainability of native wildlife and the viability of the captive cervid sector if it becomes established in the province. Hunting plays a critical role in reducing the risks associated with CWD; Baiting and feeding of wild cervids brings unnaturally large numbers of deer into close contact with each other, possibly creating the conditions necessary for the development and spread of CWD. Using plant-based or synthetic lures or bait is important; Attractants and lures made from cervids are illegal to have and use in Ontario, as they may contain infectious material that could introduce CWD into the province. Hunters can help with early detection of CWD by reporting sick, strange-acting, or deceased wildlife by contacting the Ministry of Northern Development, Mines, Natural Resources and Forestry. OFA requests that provincial government communicate the severity and potential impact of CWD prior to hunting seasons, and the role hunters/hunting play in maintaining the health of wild and farmed cervid populations and in keeping Ontario a CWD-free province.

While OFA is in support of the proposed changes to deer hunting seasons in Ontario, we would like to reiterate that the majority of lands across Southern Ontario is privately owned. Hunting deer on private property without the owner or occupant’s permission is illegal. The owner or occupant’s permission is required before the public may access privately-owned land.

Provisions pertaining to agricultural lands in the *Trespass to Property Act* address “prohibition of entry” and states:

3. (1) *Entry on premises may be prohibited by notice to that effect and entry is prohibited without any notice on premises,*
- a) *that is a garden, field or other land that is under cultivation, including a lawn, orchard, vineyard and premises on which trees have been planted and have not attained an average height of more than two metres and woodlots on land used primarily for agricultural purposes; or*
 - b) *that is enclosed in a manner that indicates the occupier’s intention to keep persons off the premises or to keep animals on the premises.*

Many members of the general public are unaware of the above provisions with respect to agricultural lands. Lands enclosed by a fence, or where a crop is growing, do not need to be signed or posted in any way to indicate the owner or occupier’s intentions. OFA requests that the provincial government undertake a public communication campaign to make Ontarians aware of these provisions, and that the possession of a Hunting or Fishing Licence does not provide the holder with any right to enter privately-owned lands without the owner or occupant’s permission.

OFA appreciates this opportunity to provide an agricultural-based perspective on ERO #019-4637: Proposal to simplify and align provincial white-tailed deer hunting seasons.

Sincerely,



Peggy Brekveld
President

cc: OFA Board of Directors