

ONTARIO FEDERATION OF ANGLERS & HUNTERS

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Ontario Conservation Centre

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February 24, 2022

Ms. Maria Vavro
Conservation and Source Protection Branch
Ministry of Environment, Conservation and Parks
40 St Clair Ave W, 14th Floor
Toronto, Ontario
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Dear Ms. Vavro:

Subject: ERO # 019-4610 Regulatory and policy proposals (Phase 2) under the Conservation Authorities Act

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 have reviewed the regulatory and policy proposals (Phase 2) under the Conservation Authorities Act (CAA) and offer the following comments.

The OFAH has concerns about the implementation of the proposed minister's published list of classes of programs and services for which a CA may charge a fee. While the minister can determine what types of programs and services a CA can charge a fee for, the actual fee amount will be determined by the CA. There are existing inequities in the fees that CAs charge – both across different activities within a CA, and across different CAs for the same activity. This new fee structure regulation will do nothing to assist in correcting these inequalities. Within CAs, there are issues with certain activities having higher user fees than other activities with no obvious justification. As part of the requirements under this regulation, we would like the reasoning for fees to be clearly outlined. Will this clarity be provided in the draft budget that each CA will be required to present to specified municipalities? For example, birders often get free access to CA land for their recreational use while hunters must pay a fee. Both are accessing the property in the same way, and the hunters have already paid the province for the opportunity to hunt. Additionally, the fees for the same activity may differ significantly from one CA to another. While we understand there will inevitably be some variation, there should be a regulated structure for a fee range associated with similar activities across all CAs. We fully understand why CAs would need to charge user fees, but we would like there to be transparency and justification for the fees.

Under this regulation, CAs would only be able to charge a fee if the user-pay principle applied. This means that the fee is paid by the entity that specifically benefits from an activity that doesn't generate a public good or service (as a municipal levy is to be used to finance those activities). The OFAH foresees situations where hunting could be either a user-pay activity or an activity that provides a public good or service. If a property suffers ecological damage from over-abundant wildlife, such as white-tailed deer or Canada Geese, hunting could provide a service to the CA in controlling these species. How would an activity like this function under this regulation, and how would the fee be determined in such cases? It is our opinion that managing over-abundant wildlife populations should not be classified under the user-pay principle, and therefore shouldn't qualify for a fee. This should fall under a core program that is eligible for municipal levies. This could result in a situation where a user fee for deer hunting is lifted in the event that deer become an ecological issue on the CA property.

Regardless of how the cost is covered, whether through fees or municipal levies, the OFAH recommends that CAs recognize the existing conservation benefits of regulated hunting, fishing, and trapping in all management planning, and explore ways to enhance opportunities for these activities on CA lands. We believe that these conservation tools fit within the mandate of managing CA-owned lands. However, there are many CAs where fishing, hunting, and trapping opportunities have been restricted on all or some of their properties without providing compelling evidence as to why these activities are not compatible with other uses. CAs have an opportunity to benefit from these traditional heritage activities on their lands by increasing the number and diversity of recreational opportunities, financially support other CA activities, better engage local residents, protect ecological integrity, and generate a multitude of socio-economic benefits. The proposed regulations would allow for CAs to institute user fees to run hunting and fishing access if their respective municipality doesn't agree to fund those programs. In our experience, municipal support for fishing and hunting can fluctuate considerably depending on the views of mayor and council, so the ability to allow fishing- and hunting-related activities to continue on CA lands is important.

Like fishing and hunting, training and trialing of sporting dogs is a low-impact activity that could be permitted on many CA lands. Training and trialing would simply require open space to allow sporting dogs to learn essential skills to track and pursue game animals. With many examples of areas that safely and respectfully allow multiple uses like angling, hunting, and training and trialing of dogs in Ontario, there are many potential suitable options available for these activities on CA lands that don't currently permit them. In addition to the already established benefits of permitting these activities, they could also provide additional revenue to the CA that could then be used for non-mandatory programs. We look forward to working with the government and CAs to ensure that these important heritage activities can continue to contribute to the sustainable management of natural resources on CA properties.

With changes to how CAs can use money levied from municipalities, we understand the need for flexible user fees to allow for CAs to continue to deliver programs that are not considered "core mandates"; however, the proposed regulations do not provide enough clarity on all aspects of the creation and use of user fees. Thank you for considering our comments.

Yours in Conservation,



Lauren Tonelli
Resource Management Specialist

LT/jb

cc: OFAH Board of Directors
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