

MANAGING NEW CHALLENGES

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE 2013/2014 ANNUAL REPORT



Environmental
Commissioner
of Ontario

In This Year's Report...

- Bees and Neonicotinoids
- Sustainable Farming
- Logging Algonquin Park
- Environmental Enforcement
- Chemical Valley Pollution
- Financing Drinking Water

These are just a few topics covered in the ECO's 2013/2014 Annual Report, *Managing New Challenges*, available online at www.eco.on.ca and www.ecoissues.ca.



The Environmental Commissioner of Ontario (ECO) is an independent officer of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario. Each year, the ECO reviews and reports on Ontario environmental issues and government's compliance with the *Environmental Bill of Rights, 1993 (EBR)*. Like other government oversight officers, the Commissioner reports to the Legislative Assembly, rather than to the governing party or provincial ministries.



Plight of the Pollinators

There is growing global alarm over declining populations of honey bees and other pollinators. In Ontario, most fruits, vegetables, forages and oilseeds rely on pollination. There is now abundant evidence linking neonicotinoid-class pesticides to bee kills. If new provincial guidelines and federal dust mitigation requirements prove insufficiently protective, greater restrictions on neonicotinoids may be necessary for the 2015 planting season. Moreover, protecting pollinators requires a comprehensive and long-term approach that addresses factors such as habitat loss, nutrition and exposure to other agrochemicals. The ECO recommends that government conduct focused research and ongoing monitoring to develop an effective action plan. *Read more in Part 2.2 of the ECO's 2013/2014 Annual Report.*



Healthy Soils Yield Benefits for Ontario Farmers

One teaspoon of native grassland soil can contain up to a billion bacteria, several kilometres of fungal threads (called hyphae), and thousands of protozoa, as well as many of the other microscopic organisms that make up the "soil food web." This complex and dynamic ecosystem functions to cycle nutrients, aggregate soil, reduce toxicity, and suppress pests and disease. Although soil health has generally been a low priority in modern agriculture, this is beginning to change as evidence of the benefits of healthy soils mounts. The ECO profiles three Ontario farmers who are reaping many of these benefits through a strong focus on soil health. By identifying such leaders and by documenting and promoting their methods, the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs could significantly bolster its current educational and environmental programs. *Read more in Part 2.4 of the ECO's 2013/2014 Annual Report.*

Cutting into Ecological Integrity: Commercial Logging in Algonquin Provincial Park

Algonquin Provincial Park is the only protected area in Ontario in which commercial timber harvesting is allowed. The Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry recently changed the park's management plan, slightly reducing how much of Algonquin can be logged to about two-thirds of the park. The ECO is deeply troubled that Ontario's flagship park continues to receive the lowest level of protection of all the province's protected areas. The ECO recommends that the government publicly commit to ending the logging of Algonquin Provincial Park. *Read more in Part 3.4 of the ECO's 2013/2014 Annual Report.*





MOECC Compliance: Spare the Rod, Spoil the Environment

Every year, the ECO hears from hundreds of Ontarians concerned about pollution from local industries affecting the environment. Many complain that the Ministry of the Environment and Climate Change is inadequately addressing such problems. The ministry relies heavily on a voluntary approach to compliance with environmental laws. The result in some cases is that companies are allowed to break the law for years on end without hard ministry intervention. The ECO urges the ministry to use a firm hand when circumstances merit, and to escalate matters with harsher action when violators delay on voluntary actions. *Read more in Part 4.1 of the ECO's 2013/2014 Annual Report.*



MOECC Continues to Fail the Aamjiwnaang First Nation

The Aamjiwnaang First Nation community, located in Sarnia, has suffered from significant industrial air pollution for decades. In May 2013, two members of the First Nation submitted an *EBR* application requesting an investigation into alleged contraventions of the *Environmental Protection Act* by a neighbouring refinery. The Ministry of the Environment and Climate Change has insufficiently dealt with the serious ongoing effects of the pollution that plagues this community. The ECO believes that greater efforts must be made to eliminate the effects of nearby facilities on the Aamjiwnaang First Nation and the environment. *Read more in Part 4.2 of the ECO's 2013/2014 Annual Report.*

Fourteen Years after Walkerton: Drinking Water Systems Not at Cost Recovery

Following the contamination of Walkerton's drinking water in May 2000, the Ontario government appointed a commission to inquire into the deadly incident. Among its many recommendations, the Walkerton Commission made two focused on ensuring that municipal drinking water providers can adequately finance the total costs of their systems. A municipality that can self-sufficiently recoup the full costs of its drinking water system can more reliably provide clean, safe drinking water to its residents into the future. The ECO asked all 293 Ontario municipalities holding drinking water licences about their financial planning and cost recovery status. Their responses indicate that many municipalities are still not assessing and recovering the full costs of their drinking water systems, putting the sustainability of these systems at risk. Fourteen years after the Walkerton tragedy, the ECO recommends that the Ministry of the Environment and Climate Change require municipalities to recover the full costs of their drinking water systems. *Read more in Part 5.5 of the ECO's 2013/2014 Annual Report.*



The Environmental Bill of Rights, 1993 (EBR) lays out a common goal for Ontario: to protect, conserve and restore the natural environment for present and future generations. The provincial government has the primary responsibility for achieving this goal, but the *EBR* provides the people of Ontario with the means to ensure it is achieved in a timely, effective, open and fair manner.

The Environmental Registry (www.ebr.gov.on.ca) is the primary mechanism for the public to participate in environmental decision making in Ontario. Under the *EBR*, 15 provincial ministries are required to post notices of environmentally significant proposals on the Environmental Registry. The public has the right to comment on the proposals, and ministries must consider these comments when they make their final decisions and must explain how the comments affected their decisions.

For more information on the ECO, the Environmental Registry, or how you can exercise your rights under the *EBR*, please visit our website at www.eco.on.ca.



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