

Submission for Bill 229 Protect, Support and Recover from COVID-19 Act (Budget Measures), 2020

The Ontario Professional Foresters Association (OPFA), under the authority of the Professional Foresters Act RSO 2000 and its regulation, is the regulator of professional foresters in Ontario. Professional foresters advise landowners and their clients of the known short and long term results of forest activities including impacts if any on the habitat of species at risk. As the only provincially regulated profession involved in the manipulation of forest cover of provincial Crown land, professional foresters play a key role in forest management planning and development of access, harvest, regeneration and maintenance including the protection of wildlife habitat of provincial Crown forests. Professional foresters also work as employees or owner-operators of small businesses serving private landowners, Conservation Authorities, forest products companies, First Nations, all levels of government, and a variety of management consulting companies.

As the Regulator of professional foresters, the OPFA ensures that its registrants possess the skills to manage Ontario's urban, private and crown land forests by ensuring registrants are current in their competencies through continuing education and abide by the laws in Ontario. The OPFA does update the competencies its registrants must possess so that they can better serve the people of Ontario. For example, the OPFA approved an explicit standalone professional competency standard related to Indigenous jurisdiction in Canada in 2019. Three years ago it developed specific professional standards for urban forestry, ecosystem restoration, natural resources and ecosystem management, forest operations and forest management. As a provincially regulated profession, our registrants are also accountable to the people of Ontario as the public can have their complaints against a registrant addressed by the OPFA through a process defined by provincial law at no cost to taxpayers.

OPFA registrants are aware that many people of Ontario are concerned that the proposed changes described in Bill 229 may result in environmental issues. The OPFA does not offer an opinion on the proposed Bill 229. However, we would like to inform the Standing Committee that our registrants are competent in professional forestry including the protection, maintenance and restoration of wildlife habitat and other aspects of professional forestry defined in Section 3(1) of the Professional Foresters Act. As such, professional foresters are already serving and will continue to serve the public interest as required by Section 5(1) of the Professional Foresters Act. They will ensure that they use their skills and training to meet the objectives of their clients while first ensuring the public interest is served and protected.

Ontario, its people, and businesses can benefit by employing OPFA registrants as Ontario fully embraces a professional reliance model in forestry, similar to that which Ontario uses for its other regulated professionals. This would enable OPFA registrants to develop and implement forest plans and prescriptions that fit the unique environmental, social and economic circumstances we find in the different regions across Ontario. The public's interest would be protected as that is the object of the legislation that governs professional foresters. Further, the Government of Ontario has oversight over the OPFA through its direct reporting to the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry, the Ontario Fairness Commissioner, and the use of members of the public to serve on our governing Council.

The one limitation to Ontario's benefiting more fully from the services of professional foresters is the listing of unregulated occupations being exempt from having to be registrants of the OPFA (O Reg 145/01 Section 4). The OPFA supports the removal of these exemptions to better enable the OPFA to regulate its members to protect the public interest.

Submitted by

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