

October 21, 2019

Planning Consultation
Provincial Planning Policy Branch
777 Bay Street, 13th floor
Toronto, ON
M5G 2E5

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,

Re: Provincial Policy Statement Review – ERO #019-0279

Friends of Muskoka (FOM) appreciates this opportunity to comment on the proposed changes to the Provincial Policy Statement (PPS).

FOM is a not-for-profit corporation with approximately 4,000 supporters across the District of Muskoka, including year-round residents and seasonal residents. We are a volunteer organization, working to preserve and protect the natural environment and unique character of Muskoka by promoting responsible use and development of its land and lakes.

We have reviewed comments made by others including submissions from the Councils of municipalities in Muskoka and other NGOs such as Ontario Nature and are in agreement with their positions.

We are pleased to see that a major change to the PPS is the requirement for municipalities to prepare for the impacts of a changing climate and wholeheartedly support the need for this policy direction. We hope that the Province can share best practices and standards in this regard with municipalities that might not have the knowledge or expertise to implement this requirement.

We are concerned, however, that many of the proposed changes will diminish important protections for the natural environment by unduly favouring aggregate extraction and development. Our comments follow.

1. Refrain from encouraging private communal services in environmentally sensitive rural areas such as Muskoka

We are concerned that the draft policies promote private communal services as a viable and preferred alternative to municipally owned water and wastewater services. We appreciate that

this is being done to facilitate housing development in rural areas. However, there are environment and health risks with private communal septic systems; they require regular maintenance by the owners who often don't have an incentive to invest in them, and the result is that they often fail. An example is the JW Marriott's private communal system that the Ministry of Environment took action against this summer because of operational issues that have been experienced since 2015. The Province should recognize this risk and refrain from encouraging more of these private communal systems in environmentally sensitive rural areas such as Muskoka.

2. Retain the recognition that municipalities may impose higher standards than those set out in the PPS

We also are concerned that the draft policies remove the express recognition that municipalities may impose higher standards than those set out in the PPS. Municipalities require flexibility to establish higher standards if needed to address their local priorities and objectives, especially in areas such as Muskoka where the health of our lakes is the key driver of our economic success.

3. Refrain from permitting mineral aggregate extraction in natural heritage areas (that are not provincially significant)

We are concerned that the draft policies would permit mineral aggregate extraction in natural heritage areas such as forests and wetlands (that are not provincially significant), “provided that the long-term rehabilitation can demonstrate no negative impacts on the natural features or their ecological functions.” Given the duration of extractions and the lag time to restore natural features, especially forests, avoidance should still be the first principle of resource development. In addition, as noted by Ontario Nature in its written submission, legal requirements to rehabilitate sites are often poorly enforced and routinely ignored, and sites are rarely returned to their original state. Allowing mineral aggregate extraction to proceed in natural areas just because they are not provincially significant is inconsistent with the Province's stated Vision of protecting natural resources, and is also inconsistent with voters' desire to protect our natural environment.

4. Require that aggregates companies demonstrate needs for their products

The PPS prohibits municipalities from requiring aggregates companies to demonstrate a need for their products when applying for pit or quarry licences. This provision unduly favours the aggregates industry to the detriment of the environment. The PPS should require that aggregates companies provide satisfactory evidence through a demand/supply analysis that there is a demonstrable need for the proposed extraction.

5. Retain and enhance protections for wetlands

Finally, we are concerned that the draft policies include vague wording that gives municipalities the discretion for how to manage and restore wetlands that are not provincially significant. Given that wetlands are vital to maintaining water quality and water supply, and enhance landscape resilience in this era of climate change, the PPS should include clear requirements for municipalities to achieve net gain in wetland area, quality and function. All wetlands not yet evaluated for provincial significance should be off limits to development and offsetting.

We hope you will consider our comments in your PPS Review.

Sincerely,



Laurie Thomson,
President, Friends of Muskoka

cc.

- Honourable Doug Ford, Premier of Ontario
- Honourable Norm Miller, MPP Parry Sound - Muskoka
- David Pink, Director of Planning, Township of Muskoka Lakes
- Samantha Hastings, Commissioner Community and Planning Services, District of Muskoka