



24 November 2022

The Honorable Graydon Smith
Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry
Room 6630, 5th Floor, 99 Wellesley Street
Toronto, Ontario
M7A 1W3

Regarding:
ERO 019-6160 Proposed Updates to the Ontario Wetland Evaluation System

Dear Minister Smith,

Birds Canada is a non-profit charity that aims to drive action to better understand, appreciate, and conserve birds in Canada. We are writing to express our significant concerns regarding the extensive suite of changes proposed under ERO 019-6160 of Bill 23 or the More Homes Built Faster Act, 2022. We believe the proposed changes will harm native Ontario wildlife species and their habitats and will undermine the province's commitments and accomplishments for biodiversity conservation and climate change mitigation and adaptation. We urge the Government of Ontario to provide cities, towns, and rural communities with a mix of ownership and rental housing types that meet the needs of all Ontarians **without** implementing the changes proposed in ERO 019-6160. *We strongly oppose nearly all of the proposed changes under ERO 019-6160 for the reasons summarized below.*

ERO 019-6160 removes or limits the oversight or approval roles of Conservation Authorities (CA) and the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry (OMNRF) in wetland evaluation decisions and removes important details from the province's wetland evaluation manuals. We think this is a mistake because oversight and approval by CAs and the OMNRF is critical for assigning the most appropriate wetland designations given the unique, specialized, and extensive knowledge of staff within these organizations. We are also concerned that ERO 019-6160 removes important details from the wetland evaluation manuals that will mean fewer wetlands will receive the protection that they need and deserve. We think this will be especially true for small wetlands and wetlands that are part of wetland complexes, notably in southern Ontario where wetlands continue to be lost. Reducing the effectiveness of wetland evaluation in this manner is especially troubling because we know from our own research at Birds Canada that many different species of wetland-dependent wildlife, such as marsh-breeding birds, are declining in southern Ontario due to loss of wetlands, particularly small wetlands as a result of urban sprawl (Tozer, 2016. Marsh bird occupancy dynamics, trends, and conservation in the southern Great Lakes basin: 1996 to 2013. *Journal of Great Lakes Research* 42, 136–145). In addition to their importance for wildlife and species at risk, wetlands are essential to watershed integrity, helping to mitigate against flooding during extreme weather events, improving water quality, sequestering carbon and benefiting air quality, providing connectivity within natural heritage systems, as well as providing important recreational spaces (Beck, 2022. *Watersheds: A Practical Handbook for Healthy Water, Second Edition*. Firefly Books). We urge the Government of Ontario to maintain or increase the oversight or development approval roles of CAs and OMNRF in wetland evaluation decisions. We also believe that

the roles of CAs and the OMNRF in the wetland evaluation process should be maintained or enhanced. Doing so will help ensure that Ontario conserves its valuable wetlands and the numerous associated ecosystem services in the best and most effective manner. The Government of Ontario should not remove or limit the oversight or approval power of CAs and OMNRF in wetland evaluation decisions and it should not remove important details from the province's wetland evaluation manuals as proposed in ERO 019-6160.

Birds Canada is extremely concerned that ERO 019-6160 moves Ontario backwards and not forwards with respect to housing, biodiversity conservation, climate change mitigation and adaptation, and the land-use planning process in general. We urge the Ontario Government to amend ERO 019-6160 to achieve the following:

- Maintain or increase, not remove or limit, the oversight and approval power of Conservation Authorities and the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry in wetland evaluation decisions; and
- Maintain and further enhance, not remove, various important details in the province's wetland evaluation manuals.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on ERO 019-6160.

Sincerely,



Laura Irvine
Director, Ontario Programs



Douglas C. Tozer, PhD
Director, Waterbirds and Wetlands

c.c. Gregor Beck, Senior Strategist