

Friday June 6, 2014

Ontario Rivers Alliance – 2014 Election Letter

Ontario NDP Response

The Ontario NDP has a strong record of standing up for environmental conservation. We created the *Environmental Bill of Rights* in the 1990s, which established the Environmental Commissioner and the Environmental Registry, and have stood up for transit and against urban sprawl. We introduced Anti-SLAPP legislation to bring an end to developer lawsuits trying to silence opposition to new projects. Our environment critic, MPP Peter Tabuns, is the former executive director of Greenpeace Canada. We supported the province's *Endangered Species Act* in 2007, the Biodiversity Strategy, and the *Great Lakes Strategy* with its goal to protect and restore the ecological health of the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River basin, and to create opportunities for individuals and communities to become involved.

Although at first glance, the Liberal government has passed a number of well-intentioned laws in recent years, the Ministry of Natural Resources, one of the ministries responsible for environmental protection, now has 46 pieces of legislation to enforce but very little ability to enforce them. Liberals have made far-reaching changes to MNR under the guise of the "transformation initiative" which, according to the Environmental Commissioner, is "deliberately dismantling environmental protection" through budget cuts and regulatory changes.

On public participation, the Ontario NDP believes that communities should have more say into how the environment is managed and resource development occurs. We will ensure proper community consultation through provincial Environmental Assessments that are authorized to look at broader cumulative impacts of resource projects. The Ontario NDP is committing an additional \$2 million per year to ensure proper community consultation through provincial Environmental Assessments of pipeline projects that impact communities. While the Liberals prefer to deflect and claim they do not have jurisdiction over pipelines, we understand that only Ontario has the final responsibility for protecting our water, our land, and our air. If the federal government will not do its job, we must step up.

On green energy, the Ontario NDP is supportive of renewable power but believe that the Liberals have made a mess of the process of pursuing small hydro projects. They've signed backroom contracts with private companies and imposed large projects without adequate consultation and without ensuring that local communities benefit.

The Ontario NDP would give priority to small, community based energy projects developed by and for local communities. We would also ensure that larger wind and solar projects have greater transparency and accountability and more meaningful public input into proposed projects (e.g. providing better information about projects, increasing time for public comment, providing more support for community participation, protecting the public's right to appeal projects).

We would honour existing contracts but would make major changes to how the Green energy program works. We need to make sure that new projects meet regional needs, rationalize transmission capacity, and give preference to First Nations, municipalities, co-ops or other project sponsors.

To improve environmental protection, including protection of river ecosystems, the Ontario NDP supports and will honour commitments like the province's Biodiversity Strategy and Great Lakes Strategy. The Ontario NDP would review MNR and MOE with a view to ensuring that they can deliver on their responsibilities. We believe we should listen to local residents and make big polluters take responsibility for their waste and emissions. We would make sure that decisions are backed by the best scientific evidence, that environmental legislation can be enforced by enough public servants in the field, and that government has the capacity to engage members of the public and civil society to participate.

Thank you for your advocacy on these issues.