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Media Release

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Ontario Government Proposal Will Not Protect Jobs Lack of Socio-Economic Impact Assessments associated with Caribou Conservation Plan Continues to Raise Concerns/Jeopardize Northern Communities

The Ontario Forest Industries Association (OFIA) welcomes the public and stakeholder consultations announced on January 24, 2011 regarding the Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR) proposed approach to a Caribou Habitat Regulation under Ontario's Endangered Species Act (ESA).

"We look forward to participating in the town hall meetings because up until now there has been no consideration of the negative economic impacts that the Endangered Species Act and its associated policies, including the Caribou Conservation Plan will have on Ontario's forest sector and the over 260 communities that it supports" says Jamie Lim, President and CEO.

Of particular concern to the OFIA is the fact that Ontario's forest sector already provides for caribou and caribou habitat under the platinum standard Crown Forest Sustainability Act (CFSA), a fact that is not recognized under the ESA. "At a time when Ontario is supposed to be 'Open for Business' we continue to see unnecessary duplication of policy and business killing red tape" says Lim. "This will increase costs and threaten jobs at a time when industry can least afford it".

The forest industry already has a track record of providing for caribou. Beginning in 1994, the forest sector worked with MNR under the provisions of the CFSA to adopt a system that manages for caribou in order to restore and enhance habitat where caribou occur in the managed forest. This system, which sets aside land for up to 70 years as core caribou habitat and ensures there is always sufficient habitat, resulted in the loss of up to 30% of the available fibre in some areas, and there is growing evidence that the approach is working.

In fact, it was recognition of the CFSA's effectiveness in protecting caribou that resulted in a written commitment from David Ramsay, Minister of Natural Resources, in May 2007 that the government would develop a regulation that would spare Forest Management Plans (FMPs) developed under the CFSA from the unnecessary and duplicative prohibitions of the ESA.

"Monday's proposal regarding caribou by MNR falls well short of satisfying the government's promise to the forest sector and forest dependant communities"

says Scott Jackson, Manager of Forest Policy at the OFIA, adding that the expectation that government will live up to its commitment is a key component of the OFIA's pre-budget submission.

Monday's MNR proposal requires the forest sector to adhere to the additional prohibitions of the Caribou Conservation Plan (CCP), a document developed under the ESA, or cease operations. As a result, the proposal has raised significant concerns within the forest sector.

"Despite our repeated recommendations, the Caribou Conservation Plan has never been subjected to a transparent socio-economic impact assessment" says Lim. "This is an entirely unacceptable approach for government to take. We are already beginning to see the impacts of the CCP in some parts of the province, mainly a reduction in available fibre supply. You don't need a crystal ball to understand that a loss of fibre means the loss of existing and new jobs in Ontario."

"The CCP, much like the ESA, represents a restrictive approach that has never been field tested with regards to on-the-ground impacts" says Jackson, concluding that "you can not reliably build a bright future for the forest sector on a piece of unproven policy."

Lim concludes "Our approach to forestry and forest policy in Ontario has been to engage those grassroots stakeholders whose livelihoods are directly impacted by the decisions of government. We therefore encourage all affected stakeholders to make their concerns known at MNR's planned town hall meetings".

Note: the OFIA is not a signatory to the Canadian Boreal Forest Agreement (CBFA), which has also received media coverage on this issue.

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