



ONTARIO FOREST INDUSTRIES ASSOCIATION

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## **Ontario Forest Industries Association (OFIA) Op-ed Piece**

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### **Pew Environment Group Wrong – Ontario Jobs Matter, Even in the Short Term**

Last week, the Pew Environment Group, a Seattle based special interest group, sent Premier McGuinty their campaign report advocating a stop to economic development in Ontario's north – a part of the province that has experienced a significant economic downturn and which is subject to some of the highest regional unemployment rates in the province. The 12-page campaign report titled *Keeping woodland caribou in the boreal forest* uses inflammatory language, oversimplification, and rhetoric to support their assertion that Ontarians should be “tempering societal expectations” regarding prosperity and employment opportunities in favour of a decade old political agenda – the permanent protection of Ontario's boreal forest in parks that are off limits to development.

The cornerstone of the special interest report is the unsubstantiated allegation that parks are needed because natural resource activities (primarily forestry) and woodland caribou cannot co-exist in Ontario's boreal forests. A review of the facts indicates that nothing could be further from the truth.

Despite the emerging evidence that the forest management practices for caribou are working, it has never been about business as usual. Ontario's forest sector could not stand still if it wanted to. Our sector's class approval under Ontario's Environmental Assessment Act requires that management standards be science-based and continuously updated.

Ontario's forest sector has been managing sustainably for caribou and caribou habitat since the early 1990s under the world-class Crown Forest Sustainability Act (CFSA). When science started to show that caribou required a different management strategy than moose or deer, new, science based management and harvesting practices were developed to address this issue. Now, after almost twenty years of caribou management, the government's monitoring results are showing the change in practices has been effective. The Ministry of Natural Resources own data show that caribou are either remaining on landscapes

where harvesting has occurred or are re-occupying previously harvested stands, and in some instances that ranges are expanding further south than the ranges occupied by caribou in the 1950s. According to the National Council for Air and Stream Improvement (NCASI), 71% of Canada's forest-dwelling woodland caribou are in herds with stable or increasing numbers of animals, and only 5.5% are known to be in declining herds.

Members of the Ontario Forest Industries Association (OFIA) have long recognized that sustaining the economic viability of the forest industry as well as managing habitat for non-timber values such as woodland caribou are equally important – it is about balance. Unfortunately, this is a sentiment that seems to be lost in the Pew Environment Group report.

Sustainable development, as noted by the Ontario government is guided by a principle that considers social, economic, and environmental concerns in the context of long term caribou survival. In suggesting that the Ontario government abandon sustainable development the American based Pew Environment Group is asserting that citizens and communities of Northern Ontario be expected to “temper societal expectations particularly in the short term.”

We believe the Pew Environment Group request of Ontario citizens is unreasonable and inappropriate. We believe in balance.

To help to identify a workable balance, the OFIA conducted a socio-economic impact study that assessed the potential impacts of the provincial government's anticipated Habitat Regulation for Forest-Dwelling Woodland Caribou – a document that would have paved the way for the permanent withdrawal from management of extensive tracts of the boreal forest. The March 2010 study, based on government assumptions and positions, showed that the proposed regulation would remove up to 33% of northern Ontario's industrial fibre supply resulting in the loss of thousands of jobs and threatening the survival of numerous northern communities. This study underscored the need to consider all factors - ecological, social and economic - when making policy decisions that will have very real impacts on the hard working people of Ontario.

The time has come to ensure that policy decisions are based on facts and credible information that best serve the people of Ontario. With balanced public policy, Ontario will continue to be the number one jurisdiction in North America for sustainable forest management – that means addressing issues of conservation and economic stability as equally important objectives.