

Questionnaire Response: Ontario Nature

1. Neonicotinoid pesticides. Will your party: support a ban on neonicotinoid pesticides?

Pollinator health is a significant issue for the agricultural sector and for the ongoing environmental and economic strength of the province. There are approximately 3,000 registered beekeepers with approximately 100,000 honey bee colonies in Ontario. Honey production is a \$25 million industry and pollination services is an approximately \$1.5 million industry, with an estimated value of \$170 million to Ontario agriculture. The Ontario Liberal Party understands the significant value of the provincial beekeeping industry.

The other important part of the equation are the growers — over 28,000 grain farmers producing over \$3 billion of corn and soybeans on 1.8 million hectares (4.5 million acres). These farmers are concerned about being able to effectively and efficiently control pests that damage corn and soybean crops and potentially reduce yield.

Ontario Liberals are very concerned about the indiscriminate and blanket use of neonicotinoid-treated seed and the potential implications for the environment and pollinator health. Therefore, the Wynne government commits to working with the agricultural and beekeeping sectors to (1) ensure full and equitable access to non-neonicotinoid treated seed for growers, and (2) establish a system that allows for targeted use of neonicotinoids only in production areas or production circumstances where these pesticides are actually shown to be required. Ontario Liberals believe that by moving away from the application of neonicotinoid-treated seed as the default for planting in Ontario, and instead promoting targeted use, we will be able to build common ground between the interests of grain growers and beekeepers in the province.

More immediately, it is vital that beekeepers have the wherewithal to continue their operations after experiencing incidences of high bee mortality. For this reason, the Wynne government established a beekeeper support program this spring to compensate beekeepers for any disaster-level losses experienced over the year. More details on the compensation program are available at www.agricorp.com/bees. In addition, we will implement an insurance program to help provincial beekeepers recover acute bee losses.

As we look for solutions that are specific to Ontario, it's also necessary that we ensure that the federal government shows leadership on this issue. That is why as Minister of Agriculture and Food, Premier Wynne wrote to Federal Health Minister Aglukkaq and Federal Agriculture Minister Ritz last year to express concern regarding the impact of neonicotinoids on pollinators. Premier Wynne reached out to Ottawa to urge the federal Pest Management Regulatory Agency to expedite their studies on the issue so that

answers could be made available earlier than the current target date of 2018. It will also be important to monitor the activities of the federal government's National Bee Health Committee established in March 2014, and to ensure that Ontario's perspectives are well represented in those discussions.

2. Will your party invest in research about pollinator-friendly farming practices and the economic value of pollinators for farmers and their crops?

The Ontario Liberal government has provided \$1.2 million to support research initiatives on bee health and best management practices in planting that would mitigate the impact on pollinators. Ontario Liberals understand that the issues are complex and that all affected stakeholders seek science-based solutions.

Last year, Premier Wynne, as Minister of Agriculture and Food, established a Bee Health Working Group in July 2013. The working group brought together a broad range of stakeholders, including growers, beekeepers, scientists, industry representatives, and government representatives (federal and provincial). The working group developed a range of options to mitigate the risk to honey bees from exposure to neonicotinoid seed treatments on corn and soybeans, issuing its report earlier in March.

Most of the options put forward have been implemented, either by industry or government taking the lead. Most importantly, that work has influenced change in the practices of seed companies and producers during planting, with a focus on employing new technologies and practices that would mitigate the impact on bee health.

Going forward, Ontario Liberals are committed to continuing this level of discussion, and working with affected stakeholders by establishing a broader pollinator working group that would focus on developing a roadmap for a provincial Pollinator Health strategy. Vital to these discussions will be ongoing research, to ensure that the path forward is informed by fact and the latest scientific understanding available.

3 (a) Species at risk. Will your party: develop robust incentive and recognition programs in cooperation with the farming community to protect, enhance and restore habitat for endangered species?

Before the NDP forced an election, the Wynne government enacted changes to the schedule of noxious weeds under the Weed Control Act to help support the monarch butterfly population. Amendments were approved in late April and filed with the Registrar of Regulations in early May to remove milkweed from the schedule and add two invasive plants: dog-strangling vine and black dog-strangling vine. Removing milkweed from the schedule of noxious weeds will help ensure that this important habitat and food source for the monarch butterfly – a pollinator -- is allowed to thrive. Adding dog-strangling vine and black dog-strangling vine to the list is also important –

they are aggressive, invasive plants that can interrupt the monarch butterfly's life cycle and harm biodiversity.

Further amendments were also slated to be brought forward to remove the following three plants from the schedule of noxious weeds: goat's beard, scotch thistle and wild carrot. These species represent sources of food for pollinators, including bees. These regulatory changes are just some of the initiatives for ongoing consideration as part of a broader provincial Pollinator Health strategy that Ontario Liberals are committed to developing to address biodiversity and the protection and restoration of pollinator habitats.

Ontario Liberals acknowledge the strong commitment of farmers as stewards of the land and the environment. There are many farmers in Ontario that have demonstrated leadership as successful entrepreneurs through innovative, environmentally sustainable business practices. One program that has stood out in this regard has been the Alternative Land Use Services (ALUS) initiative. Ontario Liberals commit to partnering with ALUS-Ontario to extend pilot projects across the province that support best management practices and protect, enhance and restore wildlife habitats.

3 (b) Species at risk in Ontario, including once-common species like barn swallow and monarch butterfly.

Will your party uphold the spirit and intent of the Endangered Species Act by revoking the exemptions handed out to the forestry, mining, hydro, pits and quarries and subdivision development industries in 2013?

In 2007, Ontario Liberals introduced the *Endangered Species Act*, the first law of its kind in the province and one of the strongest measures to protect endangered species in North America.

Under our Act, species like the peregrine falcon and the piping plover have recovered. If given another mandate, we commit to working with scientists, environmental organizations, and industry to identify a science-based approach to applying the ESA to logging activities in advance of the expiration of the exemption in 2018.

4. Public review of the Greenbelt, Niagara Escarpment and the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation plans.

Will your party: Ensure that the environmental protection measures that these plans provide are upheld and improved during the 2015 review?

Ontario Liberals are committed to protecting ecologically sensitive and agricultural land. That is why we created the Greenbelt Plan in 2005, which provides protection for environmentally sensitive land and farmland in the Greater Golden Horseshoe area from

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urban development. Our government has grown the Greenbelt to protect nearly 2 million acres of Ontario's green space. Studies suggest that the Greenbelt provides a direct economic impact of over \$3 billion annually province wide.

If given another mandate to govern, a Kathleen Wynne administration will work to build upon the success of the Greenbelt by ensuring strong, coordinated environmental protections in all three provincial land-use plans.

We will strengthen and coordinate environmental protections to ensure the plans are achieving their goals. The comprehensive, coordinated 10-year review of the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan, Greenbelt Plan and the Niagara Escarpment Plan will provide us with valuable input from municipalities, community groups and the public, to ensure that our plan remains accountable to the people of Ontario.

The Ontario Liberal Party is the only party that has prioritized the protection and expansion of the Greenbelt in our Plan for Ontario.

As part of our review of the Greenbelt, we will work with communities and expand the outer boundary of the Greenbelt over the next six years, using established processes continuing our legacy of protecting Ontario's irreplaceable ecological and agricultural lands from urban sprawl. We will ensure that the Greenbelt Act is effectively meeting the goal of protecting ecologically sensitive and agricultural lands.

5. Ring of Fire

Ontario Liberals support smart, sustainable, and collaborative development in the Ring of Fire. We recognize that development in this environmentally-sensitive region must be protective of the environment and done in full consultation with the affected Aboriginal communities and the public.

The Wynne government recently announced that an agreement on the regional framework was signed by all nine Chiefs of the Matawa-member First Nation communities. It consists of the principles, objectives, implementation considerations, and general provisions that will serve to guide future discussions.

This regional process will specifically address regional infrastructure needs supporting communities, in addition to regional long-term environmental monitoring, socio-economic supports, resource revenue sharing, and enhancements to participation in environmental assessment processes.

The Ontario Liberal Party is committed to immediately commencing detailed discussions on enhancements to environmental assessment participation through the community-based regional process.

Ontario Liberals are the only party committed to maintaining and implementing the Far North Act; meanwhile the NDP and PCs have both said they would repeal it. The objectives of the Act include:

1. A significant role for First Nations in the planning.
2. The protection of areas of cultural value in the Far North and the protection of ecological systems in the Far North by including at least 225,000 square kilometres of the Far North in an interconnected network of protected areas designated in community based land use plans.
3. The maintenance of biological diversity, ecological processes and ecological functions, including the storage and sequestration of carbon in the Far North.
4. Enabling sustainable economic development that benefits the First Nations.

The Wynne government announced last November the creation of a development corporation. It will bring together private and public partners, including key mining companies, First Nations, and the provincial government, to lead the strategic infrastructure development for the Ring of Fire region. The planning of this infrastructure will consider measures needed to protect the ecological functions of the region and maintain clean, abundant water.

6. In southern Ontario alone, the benefits provided by our forests, wetlands, lakes and rivers are valued at over \$84 billion per year. These benefits include flood control, soil formation, water filtration and pollination. Will your party work with private landowners, conservation authorities and municipalities to sustain these benefits for present and future generations by conserving at least 17% of the lands and waters in Ontario by 2020, as called for in Ontario's Biodiversity Strategy?

Our Biodiversity Strategy and other measures will allow us to protect Ontario's land base and to achieve the target of 17 per cent land base protection by 2020.

The Ontario Liberal government developed Ontario's first Biodiversity Strategy in 2005 (renewed in 2011) and established the Ontario Biodiversity Council. Ontario has the most current biodiversity strategy of any Canadian jurisdiction, and is the first province to align our Biodiversity Strategy with the United Nations Convention on Biodiversity's Aichi Targets, adopted at the global biodiversity conference in 2010.

In support of our Biodiversity Strategy, the Ontario Liberal government introduced, passed, and is now implementing strong legislation to enhance protection of biodiversity in Ontario, including the *Far North Act*, the *Greenbelt Act and Plan*, the *Provincial Park and Conservation Reserves Act*, the *Endangered Species Act*, and the *Safeguarding and Sustaining Ontario's Water Act*.

If given another mandate to govern, a Kathleen Wynne administration will take additional steps to protect biodiversity, including:

- Expanding the Greenbelt and ensuring the Greenbelt Act and the three plans (Niagara Escarpment, Greenbelt and Oak Ridges Moraine) are effective meeting the goal of protecting ecologically-sensitive and agriculture lands when reviewed in 2015.
- Create a Farms Forever Program to help land owners protect prime agricultural land close to major urban centres, we will create a Farms Forever Program which will support the establishment of agricultural easements. This will help support the local sourcing of food and strengthen Ontario's strong agri-food sector.
- Protecting the Great Lakes so we can tackle algae problems in the Great Lakes. By continuing to work with agricultural sector, we will develop financial incentives to reduce nutrient runoff.
- We will work with municipalities to improve sewage and stormwater management. We will also work with Ontario Parks to make Great Lakes beaches cleaner and safer. We will also re-introduce a strong Great Lakes Protection Act.
- Funding the Ottawa River Action Plan so we can contribute the provincial share of funding required to ensure the Ottawa River is clean and its beaches are safe for swimming.
- Promote urban forestry so we can work with municipalities and our other partners to promote urban forestry and plant one million trees, as part of our commitment to plant 50 million trees province-wide.
- Municipal Park Plans require municipalities to work with school boards to develop Park Plans to protect green space in growing communities.

These measures will further help protect greenspace, aquatic ecosystems, and biodiversity.