



Toolkit for Provincial Election

Last Updated: January 29, 2025

This toolkit is for Ontario Nature’s Nature Network groups, members and supporters. The resources in the toolkit can be used to help elevate biodiversity and conservation issues during the provincial election campaign. Please use the messaging and resources in this toolkit for your own election engagement efforts.

Each section of this toolkit will have a green box describing what the section is for and how you can use it.

Contents

1. Election Strategy	2
2. Top Policy Asks	3
3. Key Messaging	4
4. Questions for Candidates or Political Parties	6
5. Resources for Top Policy Asks	8
6. Polling Data on Nature-Related Topics.....	10
7. Additional Coalition Resources	13
8. Election Rules.....	14

1. Election Strategy

Section description: this is background information on how Ontario Nature's overall election strategy was developed to provide context for the rest of the toolkit.

Issue

- Environmental issues are unlikely to be prominent without a strong push from the environmental community.

What We Hope to Achieve

- Ontario Nature, the Nature Network and our members can raise the profile of conservation and biodiversity issues during the election.
- Connect environmental matters to other key issues like affordability and livability.
- Take a non-partisan approach to advocate for sensible conservation and biodiversity policies amongst the electorate and each of the major parties.

What You Can Do

- Use this toolkit to reach out to your local candidates and ask about their commitment to addressing conservation and biodiversity issues.
- Talk to friends, colleagues, neighbours and family about their priorities and raise awareness about the importance of voting for nature.
- Keep nature in mind when you head to the polls and vote for candidates who you feel will best protect Ontario's wild species and wild spaces.

Every vote matters! Make your voice heard!

2. Top Policy Asks

Section description: in the fall of 2024, Ontario Nature surveyed its board, staff, Nature Network groups and members on policy priorities for the next provincial government.

You are welcome to use the top policy asks identified below for your own communication materials. See Section 5 of this toolkit for resources with more information about some of these policy asks.

Commit to a strategy to halt and reverse biodiversity decline in alignment with national and international targets by:

- Protecting 30 percent of lands and waters by 2030
- Restoring and enhancing protections for Ontario's species at risk
- Enabling and respecting Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas, and other Indigenous-led conservation efforts
- Increasing climate adaptation funding to nature-based solutions (e.g., wetland restoration, tree planting)
- Permanently protecting large intact forest areas of public lands from industrial resource extraction (e.g., mining and forestry)

Ensure Ontario's provincial planning framework protects our ecosystems and biodiversity by:

- Restoring the powers of the Conservation Authorities
- Reversing changes to the *Planning Act* and the overall planning policy framework that encourage sprawl and weaken protections for natural heritage
- Cancelling Highway 413 and the Bradford Bypass, instead investing in public and active transportation and increased density in existing urban boundaries
- Reversing changes that limit the protections of all wetlands and that make it easier for them to lose their provincially significant status
- Protecting, strengthening and expanding the Greenbelt

3. Key Messaging

Section description: you can use the messaging as you wish through different communications tools (e.g., social media, blogs, articles, backgrounders) to help get nature on the agenda this election. You can combine or separate messages into smaller soundbites depending on the use.

Option 1:

Vote for nature this election to:

- protect 30 percent of lands and waters by 2030
- restore and enhance protections for species at risk
- reverse changes to provincial planning legislation that weaken environmental protections
- restore the powers of Conservation Authorities

Option 2:

A vote for nature in this provincial election means a vote to:

- halt and reverse biodiversity loss
- restore and enhance protections for Ontario's species at risk
- protect our vital natural heritage, ecosystems and biodiversity

Option 3:

What does a vote for nature mean for you this provincial election?

- Climate-resilient communities that are less vulnerable to flooding
- Access to nearby natural areas where you can play and connect with nature
- A reliable supply of clean air and water, now and in the future
- Healthy natural areas for wild species to thrive



Messaging Connected to Key Political Issues:

Housing Crisis –

Myth: solving the housing and affordability crises means some natural areas and farmland must be sacrificed to development.

Reality: sprawl is a costly form of development that makes Ontario less affordable, less food secure and less prepared for a changing climate.

- Destroying natural areas increases the risk of flooding.
- Sprawling developments need new roads and utilities, which requires more money than building in existing urban areas.
- Local farmland feeds Ontario and reduces the need for unsecure imports.

Solution:

- **Ontario must grow with sustainability and long-term prosperity in mind to address interrelated challenges of affordability, climate change, biodiversity loss and food security.**
- **Protect farmland and natural areas in heavily developed regions and build more housing in existing urban areas.**

Highways –

Myth: adding more lanes and building new highways will solve congestion.

Reality: building new lanes and highways simply increases congestion as more car dependent development occurs and more people drive. This is known as [induced demand](#).

- Costly highways will destroy hundreds of hectares of prime farmland and natural areas.
- New highways will not solve traffic congestion in the long run.
- The Bradford Bypass and Highway 413 will cut through the Greenbelt, cost billions of dollars and take years to complete.

Solution:

- **Create vibrant and walkable communities with fast and reliable public transit, and active transportation networks. This approach will benefit local economies, health and well-being.**

- **Build housing near where people actually want to live, work and play so they don't have to spend hours commuting by car.**

4. Questions for Candidates or Political Parties

Section description: these questions can be used to ask local candidates, party leaders or political parties their positions on the Top Policy Asks of this toolkit (see Section 2).

General questions:

- If elected, what will you do to halt and reverse biodiversity loss?
- If elected, how will you ensure Ontario's planning framework protects natural areas and farmland?

Detailed questions:

- Canada has committed to the target protecting 30% of its lands and waters by 2030 and is a signatory to the [Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework](#). Yet, Ontario has not committed to this target and only has around 11% of its lands and waters protected. If elected, what will you do to ensure Ontario protects 30% of its lands and waters by 2030?
- We are in a global biodiversity crisis and more than 240 species are at risk in Ontario. Yet, the government has severely weakened the provincial *Endangered Species Act* in recent years. If elected, how will you commit to restoring and enhancing protections for species at risk?
- Wetlands are incredibly important ecosystems that provide many benefits. Ontario has already lost more than 70% of its wetlands. If elected, what will you do to ensure that Ontario does not lose any more wetlands?
- The government's own panel on housing affordability concluded that sprawl is not the way to solve the housing crisis. Yet, Ontario's *Planning Act* and Provincial Planning Statement has been repeatedly altered to promote sprawl, while doing little to address affordable housing needs. If elected, how will you ensure development addresses our housing crisis without destroying natural areas and precious farmland?
- Conservation Authorities are experts on natural heritage and managing flood risks. Yet, many changes to the *Conservation Authorities Act* have weakened or removed their powers putting our environment and Ontarians at risk. If elected,



will you restore the powers of the Conservation Authorities and the essential services that they provide?

Sample Letter or Email Template to Candidates, Members of Provincial Parliament (MPP):

Dear [*Candidate or formal title for MPP, Minister or Premier*]:

I [*or we, if on behalf of a group*] would like to thank you for your commitment to public service by [*serving or running*] as the MPP for [*riding*].

While we face many issues, one of the most critical is ensuring that nature can thrive under the twin pressures of climate change and biodiversity loss. We depend on the many benefits that nature provides for our long-term prosperity. [*//we*] would like to hear how, if elected, you and your party will address this issue.

Specifically,

[*enter any/all questions from above*]

[*//we*] would appreciate a timely response to these questions. [*We would like to share responses with our ## members, if applicable*].

Sincerely,

[*Name, group representing, email and mailing address*]



5. Resources for Top Policy Asks

Section description: these resources provide more information on the Top Policy Asks in Section 2. They can help you learn more about these topics and engage with others. Note: additional resources are only included for some of the Top Policy Asks.

Recent general resources

[Federal-Provincial-Territorial-Cooperation-for-Nature](#)

[Transformative Change for Biodiversity Urgently Needed – Ontario Nature](#)

[Auditor General Reports Sound Alarm Bells for Ontario’s Environment – Ontario Nature](#)

Protecting 30% of lands and waters by 2030

[Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework](#)

[Canada’s Nature Accountability Bill and 2030 Nature Strategy](#)

[A New Approach: Advancing Protected and Conserved Areas in Ontario](#)

[Expanding Protected Areas in Ontario – Site Proposed to be Regulated Under the Provincial Parks and Conservation Reserves Act, 2006 \(ERO Number: 019-8618\)](#)

[The Past, Present and Future of Protected Areas in Ontario – Ontario Nature](#)

Restoring provincial wetland protections

[Action Alert to Restore Provincial Wetland Protections in Ontario](#)

[Restoring Provincial Wetland Protections in Ontario](#)

[Proposed Gutting of the Ontario Wetland Evaluation System – Ontario Nature](#)

Restoring the powers of the Conservation Authorities

[New Minister’s Permit and Review powers under the Conservation Authorities Act](#)

[Conservation Authorities Act changes weaken watershed oversight – *The Narwhal*](#)

Restoring Ontario’s planning framework

[Vote on quality of life – Association of Municipalities of Ontario](#)



[Ontario's New Provincial Planning Statement: A Step Backward for Sustainable Growth – Ontario Nature](#)

[Minister Zoning Orders – Ontario Nature Video](#)

Restoring protections for species at risk

[Restoring Ontario's Endangered Species Act – Ontario Nature](#)

[Action Alert to Restore the *Endangered Species Act*](#)

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6. Polling Data on Nature-Related Topics

Section description: this polling data can be used to inform your messaging, discussions around the election and engagement with local candidates.

[Public concern about Climate Change Drops 14-points since last year. Why? \(October 2024\)](#)

- 62% of Canadians are concerned with climate change (formerly 76% in October 2023)
 - 23% very concerned
 - 19% concerned
 - 22% moderately concerned
- 70% of Canadians more focused on immediate concerns (cost of living, housing) over climate change
- 55% of Canadians believe the government should balance economic growth and climate action

[Biodiversity Awareness Survey \(May 2024\)](#)

- 88% of Ontario respondents agree that the province should invest in the protection, restoration, and sustainable use of biodiversity for climate, human health, and safety and economic benefits
- 82% of respondents express their support for government commitments to protecting or conserving 30% of land and sea in Canada by 2030
- 79% of Ontario respondents indicate awareness of the term 'biodiversity'
- > 60% of respondents strongly agree that biodiversity plays an important role in maintaining health and well-being
- 78% of respondents agree that large scale habitat loss is one of the major causes of climate change
- 80% of respondents agree that investing in the large-scale protection and restoration of habitat helps protect from the impacts of climate change
- 71% of respondents agree they would be willing to pay more for biodiversity friendly products



[EKOS Poll Report](#) (December 2023)¹

- 74% of Ontario respondents agree that the Greenbelt is no place for new highways
- 73% of respondents agreed they would likely support a government if it kept highways out of the Greenbelt
- 81% of respondents agree with farmers' opposition to Highway 413
- 82% of respondents agree that the province should fund more public transit
- 79% of respondents agree that public transit should receive more funding to relieve traffic congestion

[Opinions on Housing and Climate: Do Canadians Want a Climate-Centered Fix to Housing?](#) (September 2023)

- 3 in 4 Canadians are concerned about climate change (76% concerned out of 3,959 national sample size)
 - 36% very concerned
 - 40% concerned
- 9 in 10 of Canadians are concerned about housing affordability (85% of sample) with spikes in younger age groups (67% 18-29 and 58% 30-44)
 - 52% very concerned
 - 33% concerned
- 62% of Canadians expressed that housing affordability must be addressed without compromising climate goals
 - 28% strongly agree
 - 34% agree
- 3 in 4 Canadians believe housing construction with minimal pollution is important (78%)
 - 29% very important
 - 26% important
 - 23% moderately important

[Ontario Protected Areas Working Group](#) (2021)

- 86% of Ontario respondents support creating more parks and protected areas, with broad support across male and female respondents, and across all regions and all-party lines in Ontario

¹ Note the link is to a media article with some of the poll results relevant to Brampton and not the full results shown here.



- 51% of respondents show support for Indigenous government and groups in creating new parks and protected areas, with broad support across males and females (except males 55+), and across all regions and party lines in Ontario
- 44% of respondents show support for Indigenous governments and groups in managing more parks and protected areas, with broad support across male and female respondents (except males 55+), and most regions (even splits in eastern Ontario) and across party lines

7. Additional Coalition Resources

Section description: these resources are from some of the coalitions that Ontario Nature is a member of and can be used to support other messaging and election engagement efforts.

The Alliance for a Liveable Ontario – An alliance of various groups from a variety of sectors (e.g. housing advocates, agricultural associations, environmental groups) that want to build vibrant, affordable and climate resilient communities.

- See link above for election prep toolkit
- Check out the Five Ways Home reports and reports – [Five Ways Home](#)
 - Share this short video on how to solve the housing crisis – [Five Ways to Make Homes more Affordable](#)

Green Prosperity – A collaboration of Ontario’s leading environmental organizations to put forward an action agenda for a better and more sustainable province.

- See six page pdf of policy priorities to prepare Ontario for a changing future – [Ontario-future-final-compressed.pdf](#)
 - Vision is focused on:
 - Affordability
 - Liveability
 - Prosperity

Ontario Greenbelt Alliance – A defender of Ontario’s Greenbelt, whose vision is:

- Protect – no land removals, no major highway projects and no land swaps.
- Strengthen – create stronger regulations to stop destructive practices in the Greenbelt. Set rehabilitation targets.
- Expand – add more lands to Greenbelt protection based on science.

Trillium Declaration – A group of concerned Ontarians got together to develop a declaration to work together to address the priority provincial actions. Please use the link to sign the declaration if you agree with the actions identified.

8. Election Rules

Section description: this information gives an overview of rules around elections for charities and political advertising. It is intended to explain what you can do as an organization. **Note:** as an individual voter you are not bound to the same rules unless you are representing an organization. If your group is **not** a registered charity, some of this does not apply. This is our guidance, not legal advice.

Charities and Political Activity

- The *Income Tax Act* permits a charity to fully engage in public policy dialogue and activities that further its stated charitable purpose.
- CRA considers [public policy dialogue](#) and activities to include:
 - Providing information to inform members about public policy
 - Research into public policy
 - Disseminating opinions related to its purpose (based on evidence and not contrary to limits on freedom of expression)
 - Advocate to retain, oppose, or change a law, policy, decision of any level of government
 - Mobilize others to call on officials to support or oppose a law, policy or decision
 - Communicating on social media about public policy
- Charities cannot directly or indirectly support or oppose a political party or an individual candidate – this is considered partisanship, which registered charities cannot do! Directly means external messaging explicitly supports or opposes a party / candidate, or resources are transferred (i.e. money). Indirectly means internal messaging or records show an activity was carried out in support or opposition of a party or candidate.

Political Advertising

- Elections Ontario requires [third parties](#) to register if they intend to spend \$500 or more during an election as political advertising.



- A third party is a person or entity other than a registered candidate, constituency association or party (e.g., Ontario Nature).
- Political advertising is defined as advertising or communications in any medium with the purpose of promoting or opposing any candidate or party and includes advertising that takes a position on an issue that can reasonably be regarded as closely associated with a party, its leader, or a candidate.
 - Determining whether an issue is ‘closely associated’ will depend on which issues are likely to be addressed during the election campaign. A party’s own advertising, platform and talking points will be relevant considerations.
- The election period begins when the writ is issued and ends on polling day.
- Blackout period – polling day and the day before = no political advertising.

What does this all mean?

Sharing posts on social media, asking candidates questions, sending letters are all reasonable activities if it is not paid advertising (i.e., you spend more than \$500). If you intend to spend more than \$500 you need to register with Elections Ontario (if you are a registered charity).