

Comment on Bill 23 – Ontario Wetlands Evaluation System Greenspace Alliance of Canada’s Capital

Provincially Significant Wetlands enjoy the highest level of protection against development and any other alterations. The Ontario Wetlands Evaluation System is used to determine if a wetland is provincially significant or not. Bill 23 proposes a number of changes to this evaluation system.

If the proposed changes to the Ontario Wetland Evaluation System (OWES) go ahead, here is what will happen.

Rather than evaluating a wetland complex as whole, existing provincially significant wetland complexes will be broken apart, with each small wetland re-evaluated separately.

The threshold for significance remains the same, so an individual wetland must attain the same score as the much larger wetland complex to remain significant.

It will be almost impossible for these individual components of large wetland complexes to be evaluated as provincially significant.

As a result, Provincially Significant Wetlands will be gradually dismantled and will lose their protection. It will then be possible to drain and fill them, making them available for development, thus leading to their eventual disappearance. This is an unacceptable ecological cost to bear, causing great harm to local ecosystems, populations and economies.

We demand that wetland complexes be mandatorily evaluated as a whole and not piece-meal as proposed.

Further, if implemented as proposed, the Province will have no role in reviewing or approving wetland evaluations, will no longer keep wetland evaluation files nor maintain significant wetland mapping or provide information for use in wetland evaluations.

These responsibilities will be delegated to the municipalities, without additional budgets or provincial assistance, and the municipalities will have NO authority to review and approve wetland evaluations submitted by landowners.

The wetland evaluator will only be accountable for the objectivity and accuracy of the wetland evaluation to the person paying for it.

As consequence, the property owner or developer seeking to remove the significant wetland designation will be the only authority determining if the wetland evaluation is valid. This is intolerable from an ethical and democratic perspective.

We demand that the Province maintain a role in the management of Provincially Significant Wetlands and that, if not the province, then the municipalities be given the authority to review and approve wetland evaluations.