

# Sustaining Ontario's Waterfront Communities: A Vision for Growth and Stewardship

## Provincial Election Priorities for Ontario's Waterfront Communities

The Federation of Ontario Cottagers' Associations (FOCA) represents over 250,000 families who live seasonally and year-round in waterfront communities across the province. Annual spending by waterfront property owners supports over 150,000 full-time equivalent jobs in the province and generates \$11.66 billion of Ontario's GDP. Collectively, these families own and steward 50,000 hectares of waterfront land, and 15,000 kilometres of sensitive Ontario shorelines.

---

As the province moves toward a new election, FOCA highlights key policy priorities essential to sustaining vibrant, resilient waterfront communities.

### 1. Stop Municipal Downloading and Property Tax Increases

The provincial government's growing transfer of responsibilities without adequate financial support forces municipalities to raise taxes, placing a financial burden on property owners.

Recommendation: Establish predictable funding models to enable municipalities to deliver essential services, including infrastructure maintenance and emergency response.

### 2. Strengthen Forest Fire Protection

As climate change accelerates, Ontario's cottage regions face heightened risks from forest fires that threaten homes, communities, and natural landscapes.

Recommendation: Increase investments in fire prevention, detection, and coordinated response efforts involving local fire services and provincial authorities.

### 3. Lake Water Quality Monitoring

Healthy lakes are vital for the environment, recreation, and local economies. The province provides invaluable resources for management and response through activities such as the Lake Partner Program. This program and others like it need to be continued to provide recreational and ecological benefits for the long-term health of Ontario's freshwater systems.

Recommendation: Expand funding for lake water quality monitoring, in collaboration with community organizations like FOCA.

#### **4. Ensure 24/7 Hospital Emergency Services in Cottage Country**

Access to timely healthcare is critical for residents and visitors alike. Emergency room closures put lives at risk, especially given the long travel distances to the next available facility.

Recommendation: Increase healthcare funding and implement staffing incentives to guarantee round-the-clock emergency healthcare services in rural and waterfront regions.

#### **5. Flood Management**

Frequent and severe flooding is increasingly impacting communities across the province. To enhance resilience, investment is needed in watershed planning, monitoring technology, and infrastructure.

Recommendation: Provide targeted provincial support to assist small municipalities and conservation authorities in managing flood risks and adapting to climate change.

#### **6. Restoration of Public Appeal Rights**

The passage of Bill 185, the “Cutting Red Tape to Build More Homes Act, 2024,” removed the public's right to appeal the adoption or amendment of Official Plans and Zoning By-laws. This undermines public participation and local decision-making.

Recommendation: Restore the public's right to appeal Official Plans and Zoning By-laws, ensuring transparency and accountability in land use decisions.

#### **7. Combat Invasive Species**

Invasive species are damaging Ontario's ecosystems, affecting biodiversity, recreation, and property values. The cost of managing infestations is far higher than preventive measures.

Recommendation: Maintain strong provincial funding for prevention, early detection, and rapid response programs. Support educational campaigns to raise awareness and engage residents.

---

## Building a Stronger Future Together

FOCA stands ready to collaborate with policymakers and stakeholders to protect Ontario's waterfront communities and ensure they remain economically, socially, and environmentally sustainable.

For more information, please contact:

**Lesley Lavender, CEO**

**The Federation of Ontario Cottagers' Associations**

[lesley@foca.on.ca](mailto:lesley@foca.on.ca)

**Deborah Martin-Downs, Chair**

**The Federation of Ontario Cottagers' Associations**

[president@foca.on.ca](mailto:president@foca.on.ca)