

Taken for Granted



People travel from around the globe to experience the natural wonders of Ontario, that we often take for granted. The natural spaces across Ontario include wetlands, forests and parks which all play a vital role in our province. Our natural spaces provide purification of our air and water, support indigenous traditional practices, provide recreational opportunities and protect our biodiversity!

Yet, climate change and human actions pose a tremendous threat to our natural spaces. The loss of our natural spaces has led to the loss of our biodiversity which has significantly damaged our environment. Our biodiversity has helped to shape our history, identity and economy. Biodiversity provides us with irreplaceable ecosystem services, including clean air and water, productive soils, food, timber and renewable energy. Ontario's people are healthier, and our quality of life is better, because of our biodiversity. Due to the indispensable role of our biodiversity in our lives, we must preserve it by preserving our natural spaces!

The Problem

Ontario's landscape is 66 % forested, accounting for over ¼ of Canada's woodlands. Ontario's forest industry is a key component of the provincial economy, for instance, it contributes over \$12 billion to our economy and supports approximately 150,000 direct and indirect jobs! Although forestry has improved our economy, it has influenced our ecosystems too.

From roughly 1900 to 1940, the forestry industry grew dramatically in Canada. During this time, forestry primarily occurred in the Maritimes, Ontario, Québec and British Columbia. However, over time, interest grew and between 1940 and 1970, immense expansions were made. Technology was enhanced in every aspect of forestry and new products were produced! Steps were also taken by the federal government, for example, they conducted research into the nature of our trees and established new facilities across Canada's different forest regions. As a result, due to forestry greenspaces have reduced throughout Ontario.

Ontario is also losing its greenspaces to climate change. Warmer climates will have extreme effects on Ontario's forests including both disturbances (e.g. insects, fire,) and biotic responses (genetics and plant succession). The most evident climate-related impacts are the changes in fire and pest outbreaks. Warmer winter temperatures have changed the timing of insect outbreaks such as the Emerald Ash Borer, an insect who has spread from Michigan to southern Ontario! This invasive species has significantly damaged Ontario's natural spaces. More impacts have also been observed such as increased forest fires.



Studies show that the total number of fires occurring in Ontario are expected to increase by 15% by 2040 and 50% by 2100. One of the most recent statistics show that in 2018, Ontario had one of the most active forest fire seasons in recent years, with more than 1,300 forest fires burning over 265,000 hectares of woodlands!

This destroyed tons of our natural spaces.

Protecting our Biodiversity/Green Spaces

First and foremost, the government has taken action by improving the resilience of our natural spaces. This includes protecting our natural spaces against wildfires through the development of



Community Wildfire Protection Plans. Improving the resilience of our natural spaces to wildfires is critical since they are a huge cause of loss of biodiversity. Ontario also recognizes the importance of supporting conservation and environmental planning. They will protect vulnerable natural areas such as wetlands and other important areas through good policy, strong science and stewardship!

Furthermore, the Ontario government understands that in order to conserve our greenspace more recreational opportunities are needed. As a result, Ontario is promoting parks and increasing recreational opportunities throughout Ontario by supporting the creation of new trails across the province. The government is working with municipalities, conservation authorities, Indigenous communities, and other community groups to conserve land and the government is expanding the number of Ontarians exploiting parks by 10% or roughly one million additional guests.

Next, experts insist that second to habitat loss, invasive species are perceived as the following leading global cause of reduced natural spaces. A recent study estimated the impact of invasive species in Ontario is \$3.6 billion annually with municipalities spending at least \$38 million in 2017/18. Ontario is working with several organizations to coordinate prevention, control, research and management activities to help address this serious threat. The government states that raising public awareness in taking preventive action is vital in preventing new species from establishing.

In conclusion, the measures taken by the inhabitants and the administration of Ontario will improve SDG #14 and SDG #15.

What The Future Holds

In the future, the province of Ontario will continue to preserve our biodiversity and green spaces from climate change, invasive species and human actions. As Ontarians, we must protect our biodiversity since it holds great importance to us. We recognize that conservation of these areas will play an important role in mitigating and adapting to this problem. Together, we can protect and enhance our natural areas, support conservation efforts, conserve species at risk, develop adaptation strategies, and promote the significance of healthy natural spaces for future generations to use and enjoy.