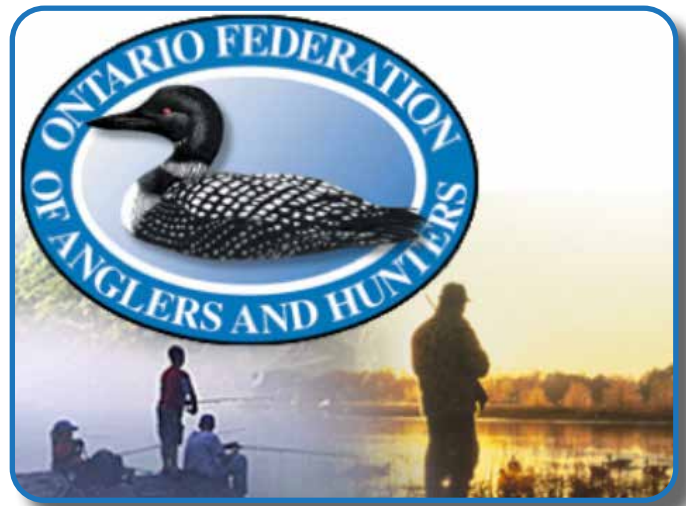


OFAH ZONE "H"

report for BPSA

Stu Paterson – December 2023

"opinions expressed in this report are not necessarily those of BPSA, its members or directors"



1. OFAH PUBLICISES FAKE DEER TAG CASE

You can fool the Conservation Officer some of the time, but not this time. Ontario Out of Doors (an OFAH publication) reports on a case involving an Ontario hunter who was fined \$6,000 for possessing copied deer tags and hunting deer without a license. A Justice of the Peace heard the case in Belleville against Ernie Coulas of Combermere. Evidence showed that in November of 2022 a Conservation Officer patrolling Hastings County, contacted Coulas at a hunt camp, where he claimed to be wolf hunting. The officers determined Coulas possessed a 2022 deer tag which wasn't produced for inspection.



The officers eventually found that Coulas had used his deer tag earlier in the season. That tag was recovered from a butcher shop. The accused had possessed two copies of a deer tag – one he had made the morning before going hunting and had with him. The other he stored at his home. In addition to tag violations, Coulas pled guilty to hunting without a license.



2. 2023 was year ten of BPSA participation in the Great Lakes Fishery Commission (GLFC) Sea Lamprey outreach program at the Owen Sound Salmon Spectacular. The US and Canadian government funded Commission controls populations of invasive Sea Lamprey in our Great Lakes. The control program was delayed during the Pandemic but has been at full speed the last two years.



Lamprey larvae are toothless filter feeders. If left unmanaged they mature into parasitic juveniles. Each one can kill up to 40 pounds of fish during that stage, and the adults can lay up to 100,000 eggs.



Left to right Jim McKane Commissioner Great Laker Fishery Commission, Owen Sound Mayor Ian Boddy, Ross Hall GLFC technician

Owen Sound Mayor Ian Boddy was briefed on the lamprey program by GLFC Commissioner Jim McKane. Boddy said he was impressed with the display and congratulated the international body on “its good work.”

Each year BPSA members join the commission’s display on the Owen Sound waterfront.



Our message to the public is: “without this control program, which has been active since the nineteen-sixties, there would be few fish in our Great Lakes.” We remind visitors to the Commission’s outreach display that, “When seven fish are attacked by a lamprey, six fish will die.”



It is clear that the Great Lakes Fishery Commission facilitates successful cross-border collaboration, ensuring that the two countries work together to improve and sustain our commercial and sports fisheries.

3. OFAH URGES FUNDING ON MICROPLASTICS:

New studies have found significant microplastics in our Great Lakes. University of Western Ontario researchers determined microplastics are becoming a permanent part of the sedimentary layer in the water. These tiny particles have been found in everything from mosquitoes and fish to humans. Microplastics are less than five millimetres in size. They include plastic waste that has broken down, synthetic clothing bits from washing machines that go through municipal waste and plastic beads from personal care products.





OFAH biologist Adam Weir: “There is a need for more funding and research to better understand the risk to fisheries and aquatic wildlife populations...there is a potential for negative interactions with the entire food web.”

Governments have prohibited microbeads in cleaning products, but microbead numbers are increasing.

Two aquatic drones that operate like an automated household vacuum, have been deployed in Toronto Harbour. Each can collect up to one ton of plastic per day.

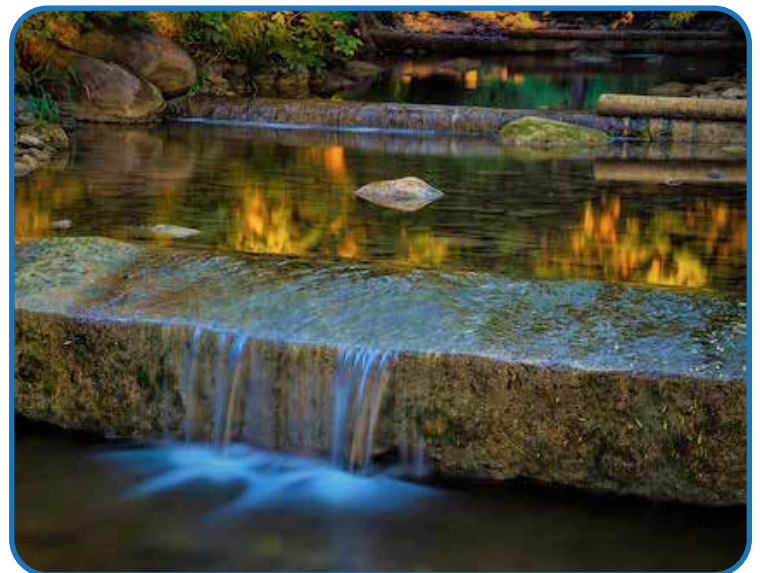
OFAH biologist Wier says eliminating them from Toronto Harbour is a good thing that should be coupled with a waste reduction education campaign.



4. ENVIRONMENT:

Ontario Auditor General Bonnie Lysyk’s report “The State of the Environment in Ontario” presents a picture of how the province is doing in protecting the environment for future generations. That picture is not rosy. The report’s sections on water quality and nature and wildlife, feature factors of interest to anglers and hunters.

The section on water quality identified Lakes Erie and Ontario as being more polluted than Lakes Huron and Superior. Erie’s algae blooms are an example, and although phosphorus input is decreasing, it’s not meeting targets. More surprising are two indicators for water quality of rivers and streams which were described as “fairly poor” to “very poor.” Chloride levels, from road salt, are a concern in both inland lakes and rivers and streams.



One positive, dissolved oxygen — an indicator for the survival of fish and other aquatic organisms — is improving in Lake Simcoe. But remains shy of targets. Overall, water resources have improved in many ways over the past 50 years.

Wildlife habitat is a concern. The number of hectares of forest lost each year is almost four times the number of new hectares. Most of that deforestation has been in southern Ontario, where the rate doubled from 2009. Lysyk also notes the province has not met biodiversity strategy targets set in 2011 to conserve at least 17% of land and water systems through well-connected networks of protected lands.

5. FIREARMS BYBACK EXTENDED – OFAH WEIGHS IN

OFAH has reacted to the ruling that the amnesty order to protect owners of prohibited firearms from criminal liability has been extended to Oct. 30, 2025. Mark Ryckman OFAH policy manager reports the Feds extended the Amnesty Order for owners of firearms that were reclassified as prohibited via Order-in-Council in May 2020. The amnesty period has been extended five years. The original Amnesty Order was set to expire on October 30 of this year. It was put in place to allow gun owners to continue to possess newly-prohibited firearms until the government could establish its mandatory buyback program. The majority of the firearms affected are semi-automatic centrefire guns, such as the AR-15. The initial order covered about 1,500 firearms models and variants. Another 500 have been added since.



OFAH Policy Manager Ryckman says: “Given the sheer number of firearms that would be eligible for compensation, I expect the program to include multiple avenues for turning in firearms, including via police detachments and firearm businesses...these details have yet to be confirmed and are simply speculation at this point.”

The newly-prohibited firearms can no longer be legally used, sold, imported, transferred or transported except under specific circumstances listed here

OFAH President Rick Moore says: “It is clear the government has no idea how to conduct this by-back program. They don’t know how

they plan to remove prohibited firearms from gun owners. For the time being firearms owners continue to store them and cannot sell, transport, transfer or use them. You can be sure OFAH’s priority with firearms advocacy will continue to be built around pushing the government to address the real issues around firearms which are: illegal guns, gangs and better investments in keeping firearms out of the hands of the real criminals.”



In Moore’s words “playing politics with firearms isn’t achieving anything.”

6. In May we published a report about a move to require all boaters to wear a Personal Flotation Device/Life Jacket when in a boat.

OFAH reported on the fact Ottawa wants legislation requiring us to wear Personal Flotation devices. Transport Canada said it hopes to implement “mandatory compliance of personal flotation devices (PFDs) and life jackets.” Ottawa is meeting with the Canadian Marine Advisory Council (CMAC) to discuss the proposal. The Council advises the government on issues related to marine safety. The ministry reports: “Focused work on the issue of mandatory wear began in 2019, given the persistent number of fatalities from the lack or improper use of PFDs/life jackets, which account for almost 90% of boating deaths in Canada.” Currently, boaters must have one life jacket on board per person, but they don’t have to be worn.



At a recent BPSA meeting a speaker on hypothermia spawned discussion on the need for mandatory PFD use, given the high number of boater drownings The Lifesaving Society reports over 260 drowning deaths a year in Canada, with 80% of the victims being male. Most drownings involve those aged 65-74.

And Cottage Life supports Mandatory Life Jacket use:

“life-jackets or PFDs when using a motorized or human-powered craft (canoes, kayaks, and stand-up paddleboards, are important for protecting you from drowning and cold-water shock, the first stage of sudden submersion in water. Most boaters who die in the water are not wearing life jackets, or they are wearing them improperly.”



7. SO FAR - ZERO CHRONIC WASTING in Ontario

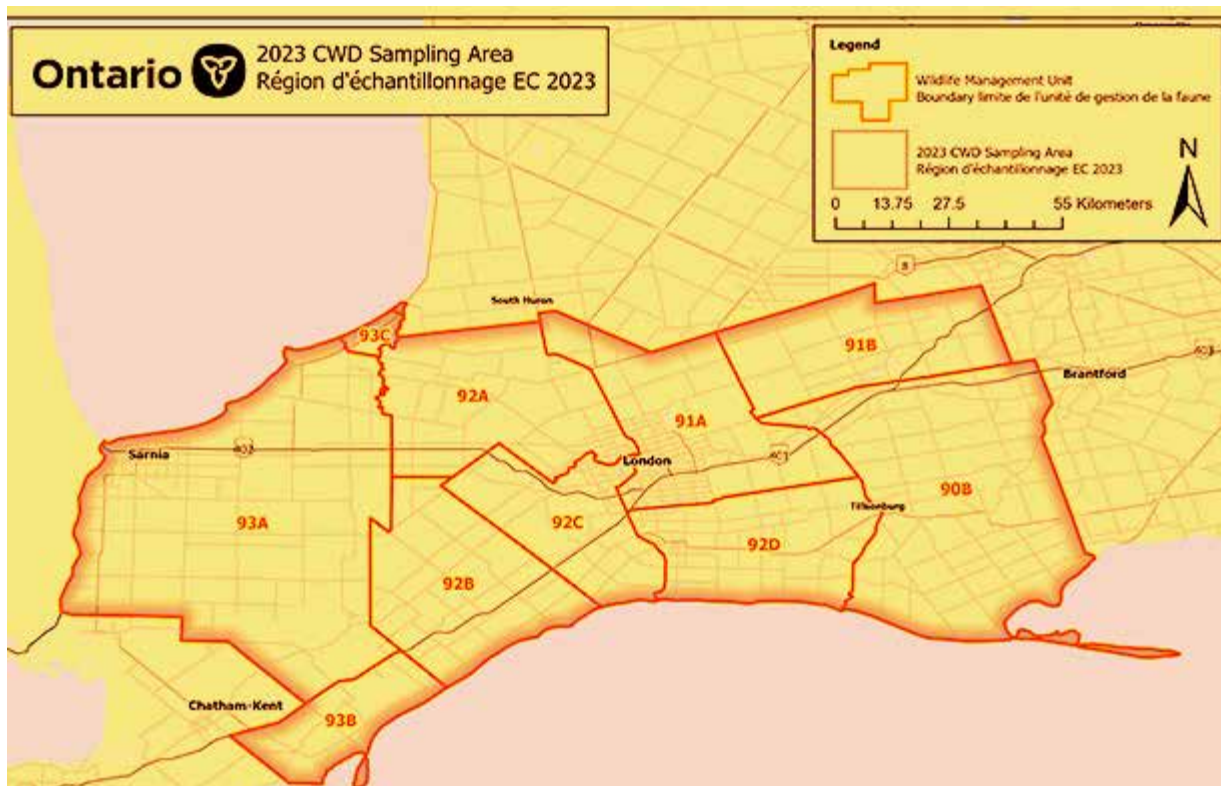
Fall hunting seasons reminded us that our deer, moose and elk populations are worth fighting for. You expect OFAH to lead the charge to help keep Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) out of Ontario, and we've answered the call. In 2019, we hosted a CWD conference with international experts, initiated the Canadians Concerned About CWD stakeholder collaborative, made CWD a federal election priority. We developed a new video to raise awareness. Check out and share the video, The Risk of CWD Explained at www.ofah.org/cwd.

CWD SURVEILLANCE REMINDER

The Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry (MNRF) conducted its annual chronic wasting disease (CWD) surveillance program throughout 2023. In 2023, the ministry conducted chronic wasting disease monitoring in three Ontario regions:

Northwestern Ontario, Central Ontario and south of us

Southwestern Ontario: wildlife management units: 90B, 91A, 91B, 92A, 92B, 92C, 92D, 93A, 93B and 93C.



You could have had your deer tested by either dropping off the head at a freezer depot or by having the test done by an MNRF crew. Visit www.ontario.ca/cwd for more.

CWD is one of the greatest threats to wildlife in North America. It is highly infectious and 100% fatal to members of the deer family including white-tailed deer, as well as elk, moose and caribou, resulting in population declines. CWD is a fatal, untreatable brain disease. It has not been found in wildlife in Ontario but has been detected in over 30 U.S. states and four Canadian provinces (Alberta, Manitoba, Québec, and Saskatchewan).

The MNRF is committed to taking measures to minimize the potential introduction of CWD into Ontario and to keeping harvesters informed. Surveillance allows the MNRF to monitor wildlife populations and assess their health to allow for early CWD detection should the disease enter the province.

If you see a wild animal showing signs of CWD, report it to the Canadian Wildlife Health Cooperative at 1-866-673-4781, the MNRF's Natural Resources Information and Support Centre at 1-800-667-1940, or by email at cwd@ontario.ca.



8. RECORD NUMBER OF FOREST FIRES:

Ontario had record forest fire destruction this year. An astonishing 441,100 hectares or 1 million 89 thousand acres burned between April and October in 2023. We know what this meant in terms of destruction of fish and wildlife habitat. More than 700 fires were extinguished. The MNRF had more than 600 firefighters on the job in what it calls “one of the most challenging fire seasons ever.”

Three times as many hectares were destroyed compared to the last ten years.

Our extensive woodlands in Grey-Bruce got off lightly with only a few brush fires. Now Northern Bruce Peninsula is looking ahead seeking grants from Ontario's Community Emergency Preparedness Fund, to pay for emergency fire management projects and training. Northern Bruce Peninsula Fire Chief Jack Burt says, “The grant money will help ensure we are safe, practiced, and prepared before, during and after emergencies.

The grant will provide funding to help us buy emergency supplies, equipment such as drones, provide more emergency exercise planning, coordination, and education.” Drones are a valuable tool for firefighting and emergency management. They help to quickly identify fires or locate people in hard-to-reach areas, as well as assist in search and rescue.



9. WILL THIS HAPPEN IN ONTARIO?



Controversy is raging in Michigan over a state bill introduced in October that would allow state commercial fishers to catch and sell popular game fish such as walleye, lake trout and yellow perch. Commercial fishers see the bill as a lifeline thrown to a dying industry. The bill went to the State House natural resources committee in October and is unlikely to be heard until 2024.

Sports fishing groups are fighting the bill. It would allow commercial fishers to harvest 25 percent of the walleye, lake trout and perch populations in Michigan's Great Lakes waters each year. Smallmouth bass and panfish such as rock bass, crappie and sunfish would be added to the statewide allowable list as bycatch. Recreational fishing generates roughly \$2.3 billion in economic activity in Michigan.

Sportfishing and conservation groups claim the commercial fishing industry pays almost nothing toward the cost of managing a resource it benefits from economically.

10. Our next OFAH Zone H meeting is on Sunday, January 14, 2024 at 10:00 a.m. at the Georgian Bay Hunters and Anglers clubhouse. The address is: 3175 Ogden's Beach Road, Tay Township, Midland



This 600-member conservation club recently celebrated its 100th birthday. Hundreds showed up to celebrate. This club, founded in 1923, through the years has provided the MNRF with regular input on fish and wildlife issues and helped establish the OFAH. OFAH Zone H presented the group with plaques marking the occasion. Zone H Chair Mike Evers saying “we congratulate the Georgian Bay Hunters & Anglers on their ongoing involvement in their community and on their conservation education programs. On to another successful 100 years.”

One guest speaker in January will be a rep. with Georgian Bay Forever.

**GEORGIAN BAY
FOREVER**

It's a registered charity “using science, research outreach and community collaboration to protect Georgian Bay water.” Part of the discussion will focus on the need for used fishing line containers at launch ramps and fishing locations around Georgian Bay.

Join us! Learn about what's going on in our region. Share your passion for the outdoors with like minded individuals.

Thanks to Kat McCulloch who edits these reports! Please have a safe and Happy Holiday season. We will return in 2024 publishing six new OFAH reports, with a focus on issues and events of interest to hunters, sports shooters, anglers and conservationists in and around Grey-Bruce.

Stu Paterson Director Zone H OFAH, Community Relations Chair BPSA, BPSA OFAH rep since 2003.

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