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Environmental Defence Welcomes New Ontario Cabinet

Many Environmental Challenges Ahead

Toronto – Environmental Defence is hailing the swearing in of an experienced group of Ontario Cabinet Ministers in the so-called "green" portfolios of Environment, Energy, Natural Resources, Public Infrastructure, Municipal Affairs and Transportation.

Premier Dalton McGuinty's choices suggest the new government's priorities will be focused on reducing Ontario's ecological footprint at a time when other countries are racing ahead of Canada on critical environmental issues, such as climate change and green building standards.

Urgent priorities for the first few months of the new Ontario government include:

- Introducing the *Lake Simcoe Protection Act* to safeguard the Lake and head off rampant land speculation in south Simcoe County;
- Stopping the proposed 1,000 mega-marina proposed for Big Bay Point in Innisfil on Lake Simcoe and placing an immediate moratorium on developments that affect First Nations interests without basic consultation;
- Growing the Greenbelt into threatened areas of natural heritage and agricultural value;
- Banning toxic chemicals like bisphenol A and others posing harm to children's health through a new *Toxic Pollution Reduction Act*;
- Halting gravel pits and quarries from operating on sensitive Natural Heritage Areas and adopting a Green Gravel Standard;
- Modernizing Conservation Authorities and the Ontario Municipal Board; and,
- Instituting new Great Lakes protection and properly implementing the *Clean Water Act*

"The Premier's enthusiasm and sincerity to tackle critical environmental issues was palpable last term and we look forward to even greater progress over the next four years," said Dr. Rick Smith, Executive Director, Environmental Defence. "Having senior Ministers in green portfolios gives us encouragement that we won't have to wait long for urgent decisions on environmental problems."

The recent Ontario election was notable for a near consensus among major environmental groups in the province on the challenges facing any new government. A coalition of 13 leading environmental organizations released a summary of the Ontario political parties' environmental positions on six key environmental priorities: energy, Boreal Forest protection, curbing urban sprawl, toxics, Great Lakes health and waste reduction (www.PrioritiesforOntario.ca).

The first McGuinty government made significant progress on some environmental issues, including passing the best *Endangered Species Act* in Canada, creating the 1.8 million acre Greenbelt, developing a Climate Change Plan, curbing urban sprawl through the Places to Grow planning regime, and protecting drinking water through a new *Clean Water Act*.

Despite these advances, the McGuinty government's first term didn't start out on the right foot. Upon taking office in 2003, the government was rocked by a challenge from developers bent on building 6,600 houses on the Oak Ridges Moraine. In a strange repeat of history, some of the same developers are now pushing to open up Simcoe County to massive new sprawl projects.

"Minister Gerretsen's work on the Greenbelt is still praised by environmental groups across southern Ontario," said David Donnelly, counsel to Environmental Defence and a number of groups fighting sprawl throughout the GTA. "He did his best work playing offence in the first two years of the term; however, what is required now is to kick-start much needed action from the Ministry of the Environment to save Lake Simcoe and to stop the trickle of toxins getting into the bodies of our kids."

About Environmental Defence (www.environmentaldefence.ca): Environmental Defence protects the environment and human health. We research. We educate. We go to court when we have to. All in order to ensure clean air, safe food and thriving ecosystems. Nationwide.

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