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SUBJECT: ERO Policy Proposal 025-1141 - *Natural Resources Regulatory and Permit Reform Initiative: Unlocking Ontario's Economic Potential*

On behalf of Nature and Outdoor Tourism Association (NOTO), thank you for the opportunity to provide initial comments on the Ministry's proposal to implement a modernization initiative to improve how Ontario's public lands and resources are managed.

This initiative would update frameworks under the *Public Lands Act*, *Lakes and Rivers Improvement Act*, and *Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act, 1997* to better support economic development, burden reduction and service delivery.

1. General Comments

NOTO members and the broader Resource-Based Tourism (RBT) sector rely heavily upon access to Crown land and waters to deliver important economic benefits to Northern Ontario. The RBT sector works closely with MNR and other ministries to manage and sustain Crown lands and waters. Our operators' livelihoods depend directly on the long-term health, quality, and sustainability of the fisheries, wildlife, and natural resources found on Crown land.

Many interactions between operators and MNR involves hundreds of applications and approvals each year for activities that are typically long-term, low-risk, and environmentally benign. These include applications for various permits, leases, renewals, and other occupational authorities (mostly issued under the Public Lands Act and the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Act) that often carry the same approval process and compliance conditions year after year. This represents a significant administrative burden for both the Ministry and the RBT sector which is dominated by small, family-run businesses.

NOTO welcomes this proposal to reduce the need for the Ministry to review applications for site specific permissions for certain activities or occupations including:

- eliminating traditional permits for some low-risk activities;
- replacing requirements for some low-risk activities with codes of practice; and
- allowing proponents to self-register certain low risk activities with prescribed conditions.



2. Specific Comments

Crown Land Use Policies

NOTO is very interested in the Ministry's proposal to modernize Crown land use policies, particularly efforts to streamline the process for updating land use direction so it better reflects current priorities and emerging opportunities.

The resource-based tourism sector has long relied on Crown land use planning to help protect and maintain a land base for tourism, protect against incompatible land use activities, provide strategic direction to resource management planning such as forestry and manage road access to remote areas.

One of the key land use designations in the *MNR Guide to Crown Land Use Planning* is the Enhanced Management Area (Tourism) designation. Secondly, area reports in the *Crown Land Use Policy Atlas* (CLUPA) often provide area specific policy direction to protect commercial tourism values on the landscape. The tourism sector has always activity participated in Ministry land use planning.

NOTO requests that it be proactively engaged by the Ministry at the earliest stages of any discussions on potential land use planning changes to ensure the interests and values of the resource-based tourism sector are fully considered, addressed, and maintained.

Occupation of and Disposition of Interests in Public Lands

As noted in our general comments above, the RBT sector is a major occupier of public lands and for this reason we support the proposals to reduce administrative delays, enhance service delivery, and better support economic development including resource-based tourism.

NOTO would welcome the opportunity to provide advice on what types of occupations should be allowed through permit-by-rule or code of practice approaches and what conditions should be applied to these occupations, or to review any early thinking by the Ministry in this regard.

For example, there are a number of PLA approvals that, subject to pre-engagement with NOTO and the RBT sector, could readily be moved to a registry system with sensible conditions of use including:

- approval of Type B outpost camps as defined in PLA policy PL 4.06.01 Commercial Outpost Camps <https://www.ontario.ca/page/commercial-outpost-camps>
- renewal and/or re-issuance of certain reoccurring land use permits for the RBT sector, which is the most common form of occupational authority issued for the sector
- approval of many of the shorelands related activities and occupations (e.g. docks, boat storage) that are of critical importance to the sector and
- alternative administrative approaches to maintaining the recreational and commercial boat cache program in northwestern Ontario, which is very important to maintain both the commercial viability of the sector and the fisheries population health of lakes in this area. To be clear, NOTO opposes any cancellation of this important boat change program.



NOTO would be pleased to meet with the Ministry in early 2026 to review the broad range of PLA administered approvals issued to the RBT sector and to discuss which of those activities and occupations would be good candidates for use of the registry model and what types of conditions should apply to those activities and occupations.

We believe that there is a real “win-win” opportunity here for both the Ministry and the sector. Such regulatory streamlining would allow the Ministry to focus on higher risk activities and occupations of Crown lands, while the sector would benefit by reduced administrative burdens, financial costs and investment uncertainty associated with the current permitting model.

That said, NOTO wishes to go on record as strongly supporting the recreational and commercial boat cache program established in Northwestern Ontario and we would vigorously oppose any cancellation or significant reform that compromised either our member’s commercial interests on the lakes associated with program, or the world-class quality of the fisheries that NOTO has worked with MNR to sustain and protect.

While NOTO would be very pleased to collaborate with the Ministry and other stakeholders to refine and streamline the administration of the program, we are very concerned with any proposal to either cancel the program or to adopt a new occupational authority model that would be subject to consultation to which the outcome may be uncertain for our members.

Finally, we also believe that there is a significant opportunity to benefit both the RBT sector and public lands administration by enabling the voluntary transition of many multi-year land use permits to Crown leases. To date the sector has been reluctant to bear the significant financial costs of legal surveys, but if the Ministry was prepared to embrace a new perspective and allow GPS based and other moderately priced legal descriptions, then the transition to Crown leases (not patents) could be more readily achieved.

Work Permits and Restricted Area Permits

Given the waterfront location of many RBT activities and occupations, as well as the fact that many RBT operations are located in areas subject to *Public Lands Act* Section 13 Restricted Area Orders (e.g. Lake of the Woods), NOTO broadly supports the Ministry proposal to update these permitting systems with tailored application requirements, efficient digital applications, an online portal to help applicants identify suitable areas of public lands for proposed work and clear timelines for decision making.

NOTO would be pleased to meet with the Ministry in early 2026 to review any proposed improvements to the permitting regime and in particular those potential changes that would help to relieve administrative burdens on the sector, while ensuring that both fisheries values and RBT interests are not negatively affected.

Compliance and Enforcement

NOTO welcomes the Ministry proposal to develop new tools to encourage voluntary compliance, provide clearer rules and penalties for common problems and implement new enforcement options.



While NOTO members have long prided themselves on their solid compliance record associated with PLA and FWCA authorizations issued to the sector, we have been frustrated by the actions of other users of Crown lands and the often-limited enforcement actions associated with unauthorized motorized access to areas designated for remote tourism values. Lack of compliance associated with road closures, access limitations and signage has been an ongoing challenge that deserves attention.

Access to Information

While NOTO is generally not opposed to the proposal to modernize how the Ministry shares information and provides public access to information on the use of Crown land, as a sector with a major interest in occupational authority and use of Crown land, we have some reservations about how potential access to commercially sensitive business information may be made public.

NOTO requests that it be pre-engaged by the Ministry as it develops key new tools in this proposed modernization including any online portal that provides public access to how Crown land use is used and what occupational authorities have been granted.

Conditions of Dispositions, Consents and Reservations

NOTO generally supports the Ministry proposal to modernize and streamline its approaches to the disposition of interests in public lands (such as sales, leases or easements), as well as handling requests related to conditions placed on the disposition, requirements for consent or releases of interests reserved to the Crown.

Given the hundreds of occupational authority instruments held by the RBT sector, this modernization could have benefit to our sector for those instances where rights holders are seeking Ministry approvals and releases.

That said, NOTO would have reservations about any modernization of disposition approaches where the disposition may be associated with non-RBT occupations of lands or waterbodies where the enabled disposition may negatively impact commercial tourism operators' interests in the local area and the sector is not prior engaged on the proposal.

Fish and Wildlife

While NOTO is not opposed to the proposed improvements associated with the issuance of scientific collectors permits per the FWCA, we are very disappointed that the range of modernization proposals associated the FWCA is so limited.

NOTO encourages and requests that the Ministry bring forward a broader set of modernization proposals associated with the thousands of FWCA related permits, approvals and permissions that NOTO members or their guests seek each year from the Ministry. NOTO would welcome the opportunity to review and advise on a broader set of FWCA related modernization proposals for the Ministry.

Summary

In closing, NOTO appreciates the opportunity to provide these initial comments on the policy proposal and would welcome the opportunity to meet with Ministry staff to discuss how we can work collaboratively to modernize the administration of public lands and associated resources.



Sincerely,

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c.c. Peter Henry, MNR CFLPB Director
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ABOUT NOTO:

Founded in 1929, NOTO is dedicated to proactive planning, development and promotion of a strong nature and outdoor tourism industry in Ontario. We support the resource-based tourism (RBT) sector through advocacy, information sharing, and business support, and we work with government to help guide regulations and policies that support a strong, sustainable, and competitive outdoor tourism industry in Ontario.