Mr. Greg Sorbara, MPP
Room 186, Main Legislative Bldg
Queen's Park
Toronto, ON M7A 1A4

Subject: Tourism and Forest Research in Northern Ontario

Dear Mr. Sorbara,

We are pleased that the Ontario government has commissioned your tourism study. We believe that our members can help the people of northern Ontario to develop a more robust and competitive tourism sector that also integrates well with the other major economic pillars of the north: forestry and mining.

Tourism in Northern Ontario is focused on attracting a narrow range of people. This group of anglers, hunters and campers has been declining and will continue to decline. The reasons are several and include the diversity, sophistication and concentration of recreational and entertainment opportunities that have been developed by private and public enterprises in our large urban centres. How then can remote, similar and few tourist destinations in Northern Ontario hope to compete in the new global tourist industry?

Our members are forest professionals, many that live, work and recreate in the north. They tend to be passionate realists that recognize that there are limited private and public funds available to create the types of tourist destinations available in large urban centres. However, they see an opportunity to influence the use of existing public and private investments in Northern Ontario that expands the use of our natural resources into the growing experiential knowledge intensive eco-tourism market. We recommend the development of experimental forests near northern Ontario communities.

Research, operations and monitoring into all aspects of our forests will have to intensify and become more widespread for Ontario to achieve the spirit of provincial legislation and the goals of the current National Forest Strategy. Publicly funded forest research and monitoring can also provide important economic stimulus in forest dependent communities. This is especially so if research areas are developed as experimental forests where extractive research treatments are allowed and where the public would be welcome to visit and learn about the work being done. There is already a high degree of interest in natural resource research as witnessed by the growing experiential eco-tourism market. Furthermore, such research and monitoring facilities will provide the infrastructure to increase local community capacity that will encourage career choices into natural resources and science-based disciplines. They would also create a knowledge base and culture where people will work at finding their own best solutions to messy environmental problems.
Except for few examples, such as the Petawawa Research Forest in Renfrew County, current long term forest experimental and monitoring sites tend to be located far from the better travelled public roads in Northern Ontario. In order to be successful eco-tourism sites, long term forest research sites must be developed in co-operation with the regional tourist industry and local communities. Since forest professionals already try to find solutions to diverse needs of people that use forests, we would be happy to play a role in bringing all parties to work towards a mutually beneficial goal.

Sincerely

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cc.  Monique Smith, MPP
    Minister of Tourism