

Ontario Outdoors Recreational Alliance (OntORA)

35 Amber Street, Sault Ste. Marie, ON (705)256-7679

NEWS RELEASE

MPP Gilles Bisson, Timmins-James Bay, raised a question in the Legislature on November 4th, asking MNR Minister Linda Jeffrey about the vast areas of Crown lands (and 2,000 of our best lakes) set aside for the virtual private use of remote tourist operators with the general public being severely restricted or virtually prohibited from trespassing (under pain of heavy fines). **(Relevant portion of Hansard from Nov. 4th reproduced below verbatim)** Minister Jeffrey twice replied how much she enjoyed working with remote tourist operators and what a wonderful relationship the MNR has with these businesses (who cater mostly to out-of-province sportsmen).

Why did Minister Jeffrey ignore the questions of MPP Bisson about the public's right, by law, to unhindered access to their own lands, and preferred lavishing praise on the exclusive remote tourism industry. Surely, these questions deserve a better answer than was not given by the Minister. **Another example of the Minister of the MNR having no understanding of issues concerning Northern Ontario.** (Note: The MNR may be in contravention of the NAFTA by closing to the general public, many of the \$75M/yr provincially-subsidized forestry and bush roads. The Ontario government has maintained to the US that public funds did not amount to a subsidy to the forest industry as the "public will also have free access to the roads".)

Thank you for your kind assistance.

Contact: Mr. Tom Brason, President, Ontario Outdoors Recreational Alliance (OntORA) 705.256.7679 - Cell 705.257.1169 -brason@sympatico.ca-

Mr. Gilles Bisson, MPP Timmins-James Bay. -gilles@gillesbisson.com- 416.325.7122 - Constituency office: 705.268.6400

ACCESS TO PUBLIC LANDS

Mr. Gilles Bisson: My question is to the Minister of Natural Resources. Minister, in northern Ontario, the MNR is setting aside vast areas of crown land for tourist outfitters. The greater issue is the limited access traditional users have to our natural resources. Cottagers, anglers and hunters are all being kept off public land so that a sense of remoteness can be maintained for tourist outfitters.

The Public Lands Act, section 3, under the shoreline reservations for recreation and access section, outlines that 25% or more of crown land that borders a lake must be reserved for public use, yet this statute is frequently violated by the MNR.

My question to you is, what right do you have to violate the law and to restrict the access of traditional users to those lands?

Hon. Linda Jeffrey: I'm pleased to answer the question. Our government certainly recognizes the contribution the resource-based tourism sector provides to the economic prosperity of Ontario. We have been working with Nature and Outdoor Tourism Ontario. We have a long history and partnership of working together to sustainably manage our fish and our wildlife resources. Our government is committed to improving the business climate and encouraging investments in those remote tourism areas in northern Ontario.

We understand the economic challenges that they face, and it's certainly something that they've communicated to me. We work with our northern outfitters. We want to make sure that they have the resources, and we want to brag about what we do in northern Ontario. It's a wonderful place to visit. We will work with them, and I'm pleased to make sure that we communicate on a regular basis.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Gilles Bisson: Well, I had a really smart supplementary written out, but I'm saying there lies the problem: The minister doesn't understand that you need to strike a balance between, yes, the need of the

outfitter to make a living, but also people having traditional access to those lakes and areas that they've had for generations within their families in northern Ontario.

People are fed up. They're not able to access lakes that their fathers and their forefathers have hunted and fished and camped and picked blueberries at for years and years. The minister stands up, doesn't answer the question and says, "I'm working with outfitters." Great, but what about all of the citizens in northern Ontario? What are you prepared to do for them?

Hon. Linda Jeffrey: As I said, we've been working with Nature and Outdoor Tourism Ontario as well as many other stakeholders. They came to meet me very early on, when I became minister in January. They have reflected to me what kinds of constraints they had on their business and how we could work together. In fact, in Rainy River, we gave \$150,000 to help winterize the Harris Hill Resort. We offer year-round tourist opportunities.

We're extraordinarily proud of the relationship we have with a lot of our outfitters in northern Ontario, something we strive to improve. We can always do better, and it is about finding a balance. It's about protecting the north and providing business and economic development.

We will continue to work with them. We appreciate the participation that they give us, and we appreciate the business that they provide in northern Ontario. It's something we want to strive to improve and grow, and I'm pleased to work with them in the future.