

Missing Values 2001

The Failure of Environmental Planning in Ontario



Executive Summary



The Conservation Council of Ontario
October, 2001



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Principal Author: Chris Winter, President, The Conservation Council of Ontario

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Section 4. of this report has been submitted to the fourteen EBR ministries under the procedures set out in the Environmental Registry, EBR Registry Number PN01E0001.

Executive Summary



A climate change strategy that doesn't exist

A flagship smog campaign that addresses only one per cent of the problem

A major policy review without any data

A new approach to environmental management that doesn't mention any environmental issues

A public consultation process that doesn't exist

This is Ontario's commitment to the environment?

Over the next year and beyond, we will be asked to believe that Ontario's Smart Growth initiative will control urban sprawl and protect our farmland and natural areas; that Operation Clean Water will guarantee clean, safe drinking water for generations to come; that Ontario's Anti-Smog Action Plan is creating cleaner air, and that Ontario's natural ecosystems will be protected in perpetuity.

We will be asked to believe that Ontario's government and ministries have integrated environmental values into their policy decisions.

We will be asked to believe these things without reliable data, and often without adequate consultation. We are being misled and managed. This is no way to run a government, and it is no way to protect the environment.

Missing Values is the Conservation Council of Ontario's annual review of ministry business plans and environmental commitments. This year, we expanded our review to look at the public, issue-oriented environmental strategies, and at the internal government planning exercises.

We found a comedy of errors and omissions that, at best, shows a lack of commitment and, at worst, leads directly to a decline in environmental quality and public health and safety. Here are some examples:

A climate change strategy that doesn't exist

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The Ministry of the Environment refers to its Air Quality and Climate Change Strategy. We have been unable to find such a strategy in print.

A flagship smog campaign that addresses only one per cent of the problem

Page 10

The government continues to tout Drive Clean as a major part of the solution to smog. Over its five year period, they say, Drive Clean will achieve reductions the equivalent of taking 23,000 cars off the road. Trouble is, in the past five years, vehicle registration in Ontario rose by 2.3 million, which means that, at best, Drive Clean is addressing one per cent of the problem. To make things worse, vehicle registrations in Ontario rose by 900,000 last year alone.

A major policy review without any data

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The five year review of the Provincial Policy Statement under the Planning Act is being called part of Ontario's commitment to "Smart Growth". Our request to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing for data on land use trends over the past five years received the response that the ministry is developing a series of indicators, and therefore could not provide us with any data in the timeframe requested. What value is a review without any data, we ask?



A new approach to environmental management that doesn't mention any environmental issues

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The Gibbons report, *Managing the Environment*, promised a new strategic approach to environmental issues. Unfortunately, it failed to address any issues directly, preferring to focus on bureaucratic management strategies such as “knowledge management”, “continuous improvement”, “compliance assurance”, “risk analysis”, and an “emerging issues process”. Rather than figuring out which issues are “emerging”, we'd have preferred a little more attention to the existing ones.

A major public consultation process that doesn't exist

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A report from the Manitoba Provincial Auditor on business planning across the country included survey results where Ontario claims it consults with stakeholders **prior** to the final approval of ministry business plans and performance measures. In fact, we only get to see a shorter, public version about three months after the official plans are approved. We have yet to receive any answers to our request for details on the stakeholder consultation process used by each of the fourteen ministries subject to the Environmental Bill of Rights.

In addition to our detailed review of individual ministry business plans, we reviewed seven issue-oriented strategies that have been developed by the government to respond to issues of concern:

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- Operation Clean Water
- Anti-Smog Action Plan
- Air Quality and Climate Change Strategy
- Waste Reduction Action Plan
- Smart Growth
- Oak Ridges Moraine Plan
- Living Legacy

We found that the government excels at zoning undeveloped areas as “protected natural areas”, but that it has completely failed to address the fundamental conflicts between economic development and environmental protection. The government's strategies on pollution issues (water, smog, climate change, and waste) are a poorly designed collection of individual programs that fail to address the root causes of pollution. Even with the natural areas strategies, there are signs that the quality of the natural ecosystems will be compromised by the government's support for urban development, forestry and mining, and recreational uses in and around the parks and protected areas. The Conservation Council believes that environmentally-sound development is possible, but it requires government-wide commitment and attention to detail. Environmental health and conservation needs to be pursued with the same zeal as has recently been displayed with respect to reducing red tape and government expenditures.

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We also uncovered a disturbing story of how the government's attempts to step up environmental protection without providing additional funding and staff resources have led to unsafe work conditions. In Sudbury, an inspection officer working to fulfil the Operation Clean Water commitment to inspect all area water treatment facilities logged 860 hours of overtime between January and mid April 2001 (about 60 hours of overtime per week). After completing an overtime shift, he failed to stop at a railroad crossing and drove into the side of a train, receiving serious injuries.

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In reviewing the government's procedures for developing business plans and performance measures, we found that the approach encourages the development of targets based on ministry programs rather than environmental objectives. The ability to report successes each year is almost guaranteed, while environmental conditions continue to deteriorate.

On the positive side, there are signs that the government is beginning to see the need to integrate its various planning processes into a coherent process that actually identifies issues, targets, and meaningful performance measures. From several sources in different ministries, we have been told “be patient, our procedures are evolving”.

Unfortunately, we don't have the luxury of time. We are losing 7,500 acres of prime farmland a year to urban sprawl, and 1,900 people die prematurely each year due to smog. Our failure to act today will lead to environmental, health, and economic costs future generations will have to bear.



In our conclusions and recommendations, we have called for an environmental summit to identify the priority environmental issues and targets for Ontario and to agree on a process that will lead to meaningful and comprehensive environmental strategies within two years.

We also call on the provincial government to:

1. develop a provincial statement of environmental values, consistent with the recommendation from the Gibbons report for a provincial environmental vision
2. undertake an immediate public review of the Statement of Environmental Values for each of the ministries under the Environmental Bill of Rights
3. provide clear provincial direction to integrate environmental values, targets and performance measures into ministry business plans
4. develop a meaningful public and stakeholder consultation process for ministry business plans **prior** to their final approval
5. provide stronger commitments and increased resources for
 - clean water
 - clean air
 - eliminating urban sprawl and protecting farmland and natural areas
 - green energy and energy conservation
 - waste reduction
 - hazardous waste reduction and pollution prevention
6. provide funding and data for an integrated and independent state of the environment report for Ontario.

