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For immediate release

A dismantling of environmental protection that is unprecedented in Ontario history

Ontario's environmental protection laws have been weakened, pollution monitoring and enforcement reduced, citizen's kept "in the dark" of environmental conditions and shut out of decision-making, and environmental funding and services cut over the past four years, according to a new report released today.

The report "[Ontario's Environment and the Common Sense Revolution -- A Fourth Year Report](#)" (PDF, 1.5M) is the fourth yearly evaluation of the Ontario government's environmental performance published by the Canadian Institute for Environmental Law and Policy (CIELAP). The reports are produced as a service to help the public to understand the scope and implications of the changes to the Ontario's government's approach to environmental protection.

"The range of environmental protection cutbacks Ontario has seen since 1995 is unprecedented," said CIELAP Research Director Mark Winfield.

"Landfills are being approved without public hearings, the ministry no longer tests the quality of drinking water, the ministry has a list of environmental laws it no longer enforces -- and when prosecutions so take place polluters are paying lower fines than in the past, and the list goes on," Dr. Winfield said.

In terms of funding and services, the government has:

- Downloaded responsibility for funding curbside recycling, household hazardous waste, urban and rural beach clean up from sewage overflows, regulation septic systems and operating sewer and water infrastructure previously operated by the province and no additional funding;
- Ceased testing municipal drinking water for health-threatening contaminants;
- Ended the flow of "environmental levy" monies collected on the sale of alcoholic beverages in non-refillable bottles to the municipal Blue Box systems which recycle them;
- Terminated provincial funding for public transit services (\$700 million/yr.)
- Cut by 70% the funding to help regional conservation authorities manage rare and fragile ecosystems and wildlife habitats;

Since 1995, the Ministry of the Environment has lost 45% of its annual operating budget, and

32% of its staff since 1995. "The cuts to environmental protection spending are disproportionately high, going well beyond the government-wide level of spending reductions" said report co-author Greg Jenish, CIELAP Project Officer.

In September of 1998, Ontario unilaterally terminated an agreement to enforce the habitat protection provisions of the Fisheries Act, leaving what the House of Commons Environment Committee called a "huge hole" in the protection of streams and wetlands in the province.

In closed-door meetings of provincial and federal officials, Ontario has blocked initiatives to reduce smog and acid rain pollutants, is opposing efforts to develop a national climate change strategy, and attempted to block a federal initiative to reduce sulphur content of gasoline even though Ontario gasoline has the highest levels of the health-threatening contaminants of any jurisdiction in the industrialized world, the study reported.

The Report also notes a limited program of mandatory vehicle emission testing and maintenance has been put in place in the last few weeks, and a plan to protect 12% of the province's lands from industrial resource exploitation has been recently announced.

"CIELAP regards these annual reports on changes to environmental laws, policies and regulations in Ontario to be an important public service, which we will continue to provide." Said Anne Mitchell, Executive Director of CIELAP.

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The Canadian Institute for Environmental Law and Policy has for been commenting on and monitoring policy and regulatory changes related to the environment for 30 years.
