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Submitted to the Environmental Registry of Ontario:

- ERO number 025-0409 via [MiningActAmendments@ontario.ca](mailto:MiningActAmendments@ontario.ca)
- ERO number 025-0391 via [SpecialEconomicZones@Ontario.ca](mailto:SpecialEconomicZones@Ontario.ca)
- ERO number 025-0380 via online portal
- ERO number 025-0418 via online portal

RE: Objections to *Bill 5: Protect Ontario by Unleashing our Economy Act, 2025*

Saugeen Habitat Collective (formerly Kincardine Naturalization Projects), “SHC” hereinafter, is a not-for-profit corporation in the Municipality of Kincardine, located in the Saugeen region of Bruce County, on the shores of Lake Huron. We started as a Facebook group and currently have 430 members. SHC and its team of volunteers preserves, restores and enhances the natural environment by planting native trees, shrubs, bushes, wildflowers and grasses, and we support animal habitat by installing bird and bat houses. We have worked closely with the Municipality of Kincardine to naturalize unused, public, green spaces. To date, our group of volunteers have planted close to 2000 native trees such as red maple, silver maple, birch, black walnut, red oak, white oak, white cedar, spruce, butternut, white pine, balsam fir and linden trees. In addition to our hands-on naturalization work, we have engaged in extensive advocacy resulting in our municipal Council adopting a private tree protection by-laws, and have encouraged Council to amend the Official Plan to better protect the environment through the land use planning process. We also monitor and provide comments on active development applications and provincial legislation.

SHC vehemently opposes *Bill 5: Protect Ontario by Unleashing our Economy Act, 2025*. This legislation is an unprecedented attack on Ontario’s environmental protections, democratic accountability, and local decision-making. It prioritizes corporate expansion over ecological preservation, stripping communities of their right to safeguard the land, water, and species they depend on.

## **Endangered Species Act**

Preserving biodiversity is essential for maintaining ecological balance and ensuring future generations inherit a thriving environment. The unprecedented weakening of protections under the Endangered Species Act threatens vulnerable wildlife and their habitats. Bill 5 would see online forms replacing meaningful environmental assessments, which is so reckless it seemed designed to destroy our natural environment. Ontario's forests are home to numerous species that depend on stringent environmental safeguards. Expediting industrial projects will result in habitat destruction, further endangering species already at risk. Conservation efforts, such as tree planting and habitat restoration, are crucial in mitigating the impacts of development, but they must be supported by strong legislation—not undermined by deregulation. Habitat must be protected at all stages of the life cycle, and species recovery must continue to be a key piece of our strategy. Instead, under Bill 5, habitat protections are proposed to be limited, and recovery would not be a concern at all.

Our forests are nature's defense against climate change, absorbing carbon, preventing floods, and fostering biodiversity. Yet, this bill disregards vital environmental assessments, allowing development to proceed without scrutiny. In a time of worsening climate impacts, removing oversight eliminates Ontario's ability to build a resilient future. The survival of over 270 species at risk—including wolverines, piping plovers, and Blanding's turtles—must be guided by science, not political convenience.

## **Mining Act**

The proposed amendments in Schedule 5 of Bill 5 drastically reduce transparency in land use by removing the public's ability to track mining claims. This opens the door to unchecked industrial expansion, particularly on traditional Indigenous and public lands, without accountability or procedural fairness. The expansion of ministerial powers, including the discretionary ability to fast-track mining permits through a concierge service, lacks clear criteria or transparency standards. This could lead to inefficient resource allocation and preferential treatment of well-connected industry players, potentially harming Ontario's forests and ecosystems. Responsible land stewardship requires open data and public engagement, not secrecy and fast-tracking.

## **Special Economic Zones**

Economic development should not come at the expense of environmental sustainability. Special Economic Zones (SEZs) as proposed in Bill 5 designed to permit reckless land use and exploitation. Any initiative that prioritizes industrial expansion over ecological responsibility threatens Ontario's natural landscapes, which provide critical environmental benefits, such as carbon sequestration and climate resilience. We urge

policymakers to ensure that SEZs uphold strong environmental standards, respect Indigenous land rights, and align with long-term sustainability goals rather than facilitating unchecked development.

## **Ontario Heritage Act**

While heritage is generally outside SHC's purview, we would like to take the time to comment on the proposed exemption of infrastructure and housing projects from the need to conduct archeological assessments. Indigenous consultation often occurs as part of archeological assessments, and this process can trigger the duty to consult. The changes to the Ontario Heritage Act appear designed to undermine reconciliation efforts by eliminating consultation and potentially destroying Indigenous historic sites. SHC is staunchly opposed to this and we are ashamed that our government would put such a proposal forward.

## **A Betrayal of Our Children and Future Generations**

Bill 5 is not just a failure of environmental policy—it is a betrayal of the future. By dismantling the very safeguards meant to protect Ontario's air, water, and biodiversity, Premier Ford is sacrificing the health and well-being of tomorrow's children for short-term economic gain. Every tree cut, every wetland drained, every species pushed toward extinction under this bill leaves behind an irrevocable debt—a diminished world where our children inherit polluted lands, depleted ecosystems, and a government that put corporate profits ahead of their future.

Ontario's leaders have a moral responsibility to safeguard the environment for those who come after us. Yet, instead of investing in long-term sustainability, they are signing away the province's natural heritage to industries that will take, exploit, and leave behind destruction. This bill is a clear signal that Ford's government does not value the voices, the health, or the future of the next generation.

## **We Demand the Full Rejection of Bill 5**

SHC stands firmly against the passage of this legislation and demands:

- The full withdrawal of Bill 5
- The enhancement of mandatory endangered species protections to pre-Ford levels.
- Independent environmental assessments for industrial projects.
- Stronger municipal authority to enforce conservation policies.

- The removal of provisions allowing Special Economic Zones.
- The preservation of public oversight, including appeals and advisory committees.
- A commitment to biodiversity conservation, not political deregulation.

Ontario's ecosystems are not obstacles to economic growth—they are essential to our survival. *Bill 5 is not an economic victory—it is an ecological disaster in the making.* We call on the Ontario government to withdraw Bill 5 and uphold its responsibility to the people, the land, and to the future generations who deserve better.

Sincerely,

Sam Benson, Doug McCallum, Andrea Peebles, Linda Peebles and Blair Porter  
Board of Directors  
Saugeen Habitat Collective