

# Ontario Budget 2019

*April 16, 2019 – An open letter from FOCA's Executive Director:*

## **What does the Ontario budget 2019 mean for our members?**

Budgets are an important opportunity for governments to set out their mandate and to ensure that their priorities are suitably funded.

In the April 2019 budget, the Ontario government has indicated a number of decisions which may impact waterfront property owners in ways that we will only be able to determine in the coming months – budgets are notoriously light on details.

Generally, the Ontario 2019 budget includes no new taxes for residents or businesses. But it does include tax credits and other measures meant to help parents, seniors and business owners.

The Ontario government has announced a focus on five core commitments:

- “Put more money in people’s pockets”
- “Create and protect jobs”
- “Restore accountability and trust in government”
- “Clean up the hydro mess”
- “Cut hospital wait times and end hallway health care.”

They’ve also indicated that government will hold itself to the same customer service standards as private sector businesses.



*So what does this mean for FOCA, and for waterfront Ontario?*

Immediately, we have seen some changes in the approach taken in the realm of natural resource management.

### **Invasive Species:**

FOCA and others have been involved in invasive species outreach and education and have done so in partnership with other non-profit groups and with some modest financial support from the Province of Ontario through the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry in 2018 – 2019. FOCA has been informed that in this current year there will be **no funding forthcoming to FOCA** for ongoing programming, so the invasives pilot projects, signage and other outreach initiatives which have been delivered by FOCA member associations on [invasive species prevention](#) may be significantly curtailed for the foreseeable future.

### **Lake Partner Program:**

The popular and important [Lake Partner Program](#), which FOCA members deliver in partnership with the Ministry of Environment Conservation and Parks, is **set to continue for the current**

**fiscal year.** What happens in 2020 will be a matter for future discussions, to determine how best to continue our long-term water quality monitoring, so that we have scientifically defensible decision-making and an informed citizenry and public service when it comes to managing our lakes in a sustainable manner.

### **Flood prevention:**

Preparedness for [climate change](#) and [extreme weather](#) is of particular interest to FOCA and our members. Some initial budget impacts include a significant (approximately 50%) **reduction to the flood prevention resources** provided to [conservation authorities](#) from the province. Note that about half of FOCA's 500+ member groups are in municipalities served by a conservation authority.

### **Fighting Forest Fires:**

There are also significant **reductions in funding to the forest firefighting budget** of the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry (from \$212 million to \$69 million). Given recent experiences with [wildfire](#) and the significant impacts it can have to human health and community safety in the near north and north, FOCA is hopeful that fire fighting activities can be adequately resourced when fire events once again threaten our properties and our communities.

### **Ministry budget reductions:**

Several Ministries of interest to waterfront property owners are facing significant budget reductions. The **Ministry of Environment, Conservation and Parks' budget will decrease** by approximately 35% (from \$983 million to \$631 million). The **Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry's budget will decrease** by 20% from \$834 million to \$672 million.

### **Rural health care/public health:**

The government plans to merge 59 municipal and local **paramedic operations** into 10 regional ambulance providers, and will reduce the number of **public health units** in Ontario from 35 to 10. How this will impact rural health services remains to be seen.

### **Broadband/cellular service:**

In the budget, Ontario also commits to ensuring that communities across Ontario have access to critical [broadband and cellular connectivity](#), with an **investment in regional projects** of \$315 million over the next five years.

### **Energy Prices:**

The Province has vowed to fix expensive and confusing electricity programs, to make electricity bills more transparent, and to lower electricity costs for residential, farm, and small business customers by 12%. The **Ministry of Energy, Northern Development and Mines' budget will drop** by \$566 million, or about 10%.

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Overall, FOCA will continue to monitor the situation, and to advocate for the interests of waterfront property owners, as provincial funding can impact many aspects of rural waterfront

living. This includes everything from the management of natural resources that impact waterfronts (water quantity and quality management, forestry, mining, aggregates, farming), approaches to land-use planning, the funding of municipalities and thus how our property taxes are impacted, and many other aspects of rural living.



Please share this information freely, and stay in touch with FOCA for [updates](#) as more information becomes available.

Regards,

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2019 Ontario Budget – <http://budget.ontario.ca/2019/index.html>