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**Standing Committee
on the Interior**

Provincial Parks
and Conservation Reserves
Amendment Act, 2025

**Comité permanent
des affaires intérieures**

Loi de 2025 modifiant la Loi
sur les parcs provinciaux
et les réserves de conservation

1st Session
44th Parliament
Monday 24 November 2025

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44^e législature
Lundi 24 novembre 2025

Chair: Aris Babikian
Clerk: Stefan Uguen-Csenge

Président : Aris Babikian
Greffier : Stefan Uguen-Csenge

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

STANDING COMMITTEE
ON THE INTERIOR

Monday 24 November 2025

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

COMITÉ PERMANENT
DES AFFAIRES INTÉRIEURES

Lundi 24 novembre 2025

The committee met at 0900 in committee room 1.

PROVINCIAL PARKS
AND CONSERVATION RESERVES
AMENDMENT ACT, 2025

LOI DE 2025 MODIFIANT LA LOI
SUR LES PARCS PROVINCIAUX
ET LES RÉSERVES DE CONSERVATION

Consideration of the following bill:

Bill 26, An Act to amend the Provincial Parks and Conservation Reserves Act, 2006 / Projet de loi 26, Loi modifiant la Loi de 2006 sur les parcs provinciaux et les réserves de conservation.

The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian): Good morning, colleagues. The Standing Committee on the Interior will now come to order. We are here for clause-by-clause consideration of Bill 26, An Act to amend the Provincial Parks and Conservation Reserves Act, 2006.

If a member indicates that they wish to move additional amendments, we will take a short recess to allow the member to consult with the legislative counsel to draft the motion.

Are there any questions before we begin? I see none, so we will begin with the clause-by-clause consideration.

We have the first amendment by the NDP. MPP Shaw, would you like to move your amendment?

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Certainly, Chair. Thank you.

I move that subsection 1(1) of the bill be amended by striking out paragraph 9 of subsection 8(1) of the Provincial Parks and Conservation Reserves Act, 2006.

The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian): Is there any debate on the motion? MPP Shaw.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: I want to just reiterate that this section of the bill, paragraph 9, is what I argued in committee and what we heard from deputants in committee—that it is such a broad statement and it gives really significant power to the ministry and the minister. Just saying “as may be prescribed by the regulations” takes any changes to our provincial parks behind closed doors, essentially, which is something that is really unfortunate given how important our provincial parks are to people all across Ontario.

We heard at committee from many of the presenters—and I’ll refer you to the legislative report that we’ve just received from the proceedings at committee. The general recommendations were that Bill 26 include clear protec-

tions for existing public access, continued volunteer stewardship and mandatory consultation before any land is reclassified. Paragraph 9 would allow things to happen that wouldn’t include consultation.

Another deputant said to ensure that any future park classes created by cabinet are subject to legislative debate. This speaks to what we heard and what I’m arguing, that we need to make sure that the power that’s being provided in this bill is not so broad that these changes can happen without Indigenous input and public input. All the stakeholders that came here have things to say about changes to provincial parks.

Finally, one of the statements that is, again, in the report from our committee proceedings that’s before us here, the summary of recommendations, says that a deputant said to withdraw Bill 26 in its current form, prohibit the reclassification of crown land without full public consultation, and require ecological assessments and public reporting before any recreational development is approved in an area identified as ecologically significant.

Now, I’m not proposing we go so far as to withdraw Bill 26, but I’m proposing this amendment that’s consistent with our concerns that we have with this bill and concerns that we heard at committee regarding paragraph 9 and this vague, prescriptive power. I hope that the government will support what we heard at committee and support all stakeholders that I’ve heard from that are very concerned with this paragraph.

I would just like to say that MPP Dowie, there’s significant support for what you are trying to do. We support the concept that you are trying to do to create urban parks. As you know, we’ve talked about it. We have members from the New Democrats, both federal and provincial, that were working towards this.

We support that, but what I feel, and I mean with all due respect, that your good bill has been used in a way to put in what I would call a Trojan Horse, a clause in there that adds powers that was never the intention—I won’t speak for you, but it was never what was described as the intention to create legislation that would allow this park to be created.

I think it’s a disservice to the idea of creating this Ojibway national park, and it raises concerns that you can understand people have with this government’s power when it comes to using natural lands, green lands—let’s just talk about the greenbelt, the reclassification.

What would otherwise be a bill that we could full-throatedly support has a clause in here, paragraph 9, which

gives blanket power, which isn't required to achieve the objectives that I believe you were seeking in the first place.

With that, Chair, I'll conclude my remarks.

The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian): Thank you. Any further debate? MPP Dowie.

Mr. Andrew Dowie: Thank you, MPP Shaw, for your comments.

No matter what the classification of a provincial park is, all Ontario parks have to follow core objectives that are set out in section 2 of the Provincial Parks and Conservation Reserves Act:

“1. To permanently protect representative ecosystems, biodiversity and provincially significant elements of Ontario’s natural and cultural heritage and to manage these areas to ensure that ecological integrity is maintained.

“2. To provide opportunities for ecologically sustainable outdoor recreation opportunities and encourage associated economic benefits.

“3. To provide opportunities for residents of Ontario and visitors to increase their knowledge and appreciation of Ontario’s natural and cultural heritage.

“4. To facilitate scientific research and to provide points of reference to support monitoring of ecological change on the broader landscape.”

What I have as a vision in here is to not turn administrative classification into something that gets bogged down in legislation.

We have seen, as I described in my comments earlier, this debate over the near-urban parks of the 1970s. Really, an opportunity may arise in the future where we can establish a new provincial park that may not fit very neatly into the existing classifications. I certainly want to ensure that that opportunity is available to the government to actually classify a park properly.

Given that the amendment limits the ability of Ontario parks to adapt to changing circumstances, and really the evolving demands of park visitors, I’m not going to be in support of the amendment.

The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian): Any further debate? Seeing none—

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Recorded vote.

Ayes

Shaw.

Nays

Cuzzetto, Dowie, Gallagher Murphy, Pinsonneault, Vickers.

The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian): The amendment is lost.

We move to the second amendment. MPP Shaw, do you want to table your amendment?

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Yes, please, Chair. Thank you.

I move that section 1 of the bill be amended by adding the following subsection:

“(1.1) Section 8 of the act is amended by adding the following subsection:

“Restriction re certain classifications

“(1.1) Despite subsection (1), if, on November 1, 2025, a provincial park was classified as a wilderness class park, a nature reserve class park, a natural environment class park, a waterway class park or a recreational class park, the Lieutenant Governor in Council shall not classify the provincial park as a cultural heritage class park, an adventure class park, an urban class park or a class of park prescribed for the purpose of paragraph 9 of subsection (1).”

The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian): Any further debate? MPP Shaw.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: I would just say, consistent with what I argued with the first amendment that we moved and that was defeated, there is significant and legitimate concern that section 9 will be used to reclassify existing parks.

People have asked very clearly that these reclassifications don’t happen by the Lieutenant Governor in Council, which we know as cabinet—that these reclassifications don’t happen at the cabinet table; that they include significant consultation with the public.

Again, I know we all feel this way. I don’t mean to say that we have a monopoly on the fact that we all use and love our provincial parks. We all do.

0910

This motion is simply, I would believe, in the spirit of what you were trying to achieve with this bill, which is to add protections to our provincial parks and that, with the power that will be given with this bill, if there is a move to reclassify, this government consults experts publicly—particularly Indigenous communities, who have the kind of knowledge that often gets overlooked.

Our intention in moving this amendment is simply that the government is true to their word, which is that you are not making changes to our class of provincial parks and doing it in a way that no one is allowed to participate in, to bring their expertise, bring their experience. We have it here. We have a committee that hears these changes that you’re proposing so that it just doesn’t happen—again, as I have repeated myself, that it doesn’t happen as often happens, I’m sorry to say, with this government—in a minister’s office or the Premier’s office, that we make sure that these classifications go through full oversight of the public, not just the government.

With that Chair, I will conclude my remarks.

The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian): Any further debate?

Mr. Andrew Dowie: If passed, this amendment would prohibit the reclassification of Uxbridge Urban Provincial Park as an urban classified park. Really, there are parks—I’d say Uxbridge urban is one; currently it’s recreation class—that would be better suited for being an urban class park. This amendment would preclude that from happening. It’s the same thing with Bronte Creek, which was considered back at its inception as a possible urban classification.

Really, we need to balance our environmental and ecological factors with the expectations and experience of park users. We really do need that ability to reclassify parks for that reason. And also, that consultation will continue to exist with the Environmental Registry of

Ontario for any changes. Certainly, I am in opposition to the amendment.

The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian): MPP Shaw.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: It's too early—and I haven't finished my first cup of coffee—for me to get right into it the way I want to. But you are moving an amendment here that gives you the ability to reclassify the Uxbridge Urban Provincial Park. You're giving yourself, with an amendment, that power very specifically, and you're including Charleston Lake, which wasn't in the original bill. So, really, what you're saying is that you need the ability to do this, but you will give yourself, most likely, in your amendment, the ability to reclassify those two parks.

So my concerns stand. Your ability to classify existing parks as the government sees fit is a significant concern. I would argue that even people who have not heard of this or didn't come before this committee will be concerned with this once they hear about it.

Again, it's pretty early for me to be as cynical as I'm about to be, but your ERO process is substandard at best. Let me say this: The government has broken the law three, maybe five times. Somewhere between three and five times, they've been found to have broken the law when it comes to the people's Environmental Bill of Rights, which is one of the few rights that the people of the province of Ontario still have when it comes to weighing in on concerns that they have with their environment.

The ERO is cold comfort. It's a substandard—how do I describe this? It's not a very robust process when it comes to people weighing in on what you're about to do. People put comments online, if they are even aware of it. God knows where those comments go. They never hear back with what the government has decided to do with those comments. We don't know how they're taken into consideration. So the ERO is not an adequate—while I believe the ERO is significant and it is one of the last rights that people have, as I said, when it comes to weighing in on significant changes to environmental concerns in the province, it is certainly nowhere near the same as it would be if we had full, robust public consultation.

So I thank you for that, but an ERO is not going to cut it when it comes to our provincial parks.

The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian): MPP Shaw, done?

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Yes. I can go on, though, if that is not enough.

The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian): Any further debate? I see no debate going forward, and I understand, recorded vote.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: You got it.

The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian): Okay. Recorded vote.

Ayes

Shaw.

Nays

Cuzzetto, Dowie, Gallagher Murphy, Pinsonneault, Vickers.

The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian): Thank you very much. The motion is lost.

We move to the third amendment by the NDP.

MPP Shaw: Would you like to move—

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Thank you, Chair. I'm just looking for clarification. This amendment now, is it in order given that amendment 1 didn't pass? Is it in order?

Ms. Kristi Cairns: You can withdraw.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Withdraw, okay. Given that amendment 1 did not pass, amendment 3 is probably not in order, so I'll withdraw amendment 3.

The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian): Okay. Amendment 3 withdrawn.

We move to the fourth amendment, which is from the government side.

MPP Cuzzetto: Please move your amendment.

Mr. Rudy Cuzzetto: I move that subsection 1(2) of the bill be amended by striking out "snowmobiles or all-terrain vehicles" at the end in subsection 8(8) of the Provincial Parks and Conservation Reserves Act, 2006, and substituting "motorized snow vehicles or off-road vehicles."

The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian): Thank you very much, MPP Cuzzetto. Is there any further debate?

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Yes, Chair. Oh, no. Actually, pardon me. I gapped out there. We're on 4?

The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian): Yes.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Well, Chair, I'll just add that this amendment, to me, is an example of why we have committee. It is an amendment that we heard from a deputant as to why this needed to change. To me, this is an example of why we need to bring these things to committee, because people who know better than us use these facilities—or for any other bill—and they're the ones who come to us to tell us, "You could make your bill better by making these changes."

I'm just going to say, Chair, that this is a perfect example of my earlier arguments as why we need to make changes in public consultation, because it seems to me that the group that brought this forward maintain the trails, they know the trails, they love the park, and their information is something that will help to make this bill better.

Again, I rest my case, that making changes at regulation is not effective enough when it comes to something as precious as our provincial parks.

The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian): Okay. Any further debate on amendment 4? No?

I am now going to put the question. All in favour of amendment 4, please raise your hand. Thank you. All in opposition, please raise your hand. Seeing none, the motion is carried. The amendment is carried. I'm still—I need a strong cup of coffee.

Okay. We move now to—

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Do you want a coffee, Chair? I'll get you one.

The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian): No, it's okay. Don't worry.

Amendment 5: MPP Vickers.

MPP Paul Vickers: I move that section 1 of the bill be amended by adding the following subsection:

“(3) Section 8 of the act is amended by adding the following subsection:

“Classification: adventure class parks

“(10) The following park is classified as an adventure class park:

“1. Charleston Lake Provincial Park.

“Classification: urban class parks

“(11) The following park is classified as an urban class park:

“1. Uxbridge Urban Provincial Park.”

The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian): Thank you. Any further debate on amendment 5?

Ms. Sandy Shaw: One second, Chair. Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian): Okay.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Oh, pardon me. I’m 5.1, yes?

The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian): Okay.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Big time.

The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian): MPP Shaw.

0920

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Okay. Thank you for this. This is exactly what MPP Dowie and I were discussing earlier: that you are changing the classification for these two provincial parks.

I’m going to start with Uxbridge Urban Provincial Park. So one of the things that I want to be clear—it may make sense for this particular park, because it’s my understanding it’s one of the newest ones and it was possibly always intended to be this kind of park use. But I really would like clarification, or I would like to make clear, that the government—

Interruption.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: —that reminds me too, Chair; I haven’t turned off my phone—that the government would be clear: Is this going to impact a management plan? This park just had a management plan.

Interruption.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Okay, I see that, so thank you. But I’m just going to put it on the record: This would not impact a management plan that was just approved this summer, I believe. Right?

Interruption.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Okay, thank you, MPP Dowie. Because, again, public engagement on the management plan was robust. Certainly, we had one deputant here, Ontario Nature, who really provided significant input on that.

So when it comes to an urban provincial park, I understand that, and I’m hoping that doesn’t impact the management plan—and I see MPP Dowie nodding, and I appreciate that.

The second reclassification is Charleston Lake Provincial Park. One of the things that I want to make clear is that amending the classification of this park to adventure class isn’t consistent with the current management plan because there are a lot of sensitive conservation values of this particular park. I’ve been there; I’m sure many of us have been there. It’s a beautiful park, so we know. And appropriate consultation, like Indigenous consultation, public engagement—this is a perfect example of why this

shouldn’t just be reclassified here as a subsection of a bill. It should require significant public consultation.

I got some information from Ontario Nature—maybe I’ll just put it on the record here—that it’s located in the Frontenac Arch Biosphere reserve, a biodiversity hot spot, and the current management plan is that 77% of the park’s area is zoned as a natural environment and 17% is nature reserve. Natural environment zones include natural landscapes that permit the minimum level of development required to support low-intensity recreational activities. Natural reserve zones protect provincially significant natural features, their contributions to the environment, diversity of the park and the park system and their potential for scientific research and public appreciation.

So even though I know that what you have said before, MPP Dowie, that the changes you make fall under the values of the Provincial Parks and Reserves Act, I really believe that, had this been two amendments, I would clearly support the reclassification of the Uxbridge Urban Provincial Park, but I do not, in the way that it’s being put forward, support the reclassification of Charleston Lake Provincial Park without the kind of consultation that it deserves: public consultation.

Thank you, Chair. That concludes my remarks.

The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian): Thank you. Any further debate? MPP Dowie.

Mr. Andrew Dowie: Thank you, Chair, and I want to thank MPP Shaw for her comments.

This amendment has come about because of, actually, pending good news. The Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks has been working closely with a lot of local partners to expand the boundaries of Charleston Provincial Park. There was a working group established in August 2024. All parties are very eager to see this expansion proceed, but there have been persistent local concerns over continuing existing uses. There were pre-existing trails and trail networks that are within the lands that are proposed to be added to the park, and this has posed a challenge. So by designating Charleston Lake Provincial Park as an adventure class park, we’ll have an opportunity to move that park boundary expansion forward.

The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian): Any further debate? Seeing none, I’m going to put the question. All in favour of MPP Vickers’ amendment, please raise your hand. All in opposition? The amendment is carried.

We move to amendment 5.1. Who’s going to move it?

Mr. Andrew Dowie: I’ll move it, Chair.

The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian): MPP Dowie.

Mr. Andrew Dowie: I move that section 1 of the bill be amended by adding the following subsection:

“(4) Section 8 of the act is amended by adding the following subsection:

“Management plans: adventure class parks

“(12) A management plan in respect of an adventure class park shall include a policy for maintaining existing uses that are compatible with the objectives set out in subsection (8).”

The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian): Any further debate? I see none. I'm going to put the question. All in favour of amendment 5.1, please raise your hand. All in opposition, please raise your hand. The motion is carried.

Now, we addressed all the amendments related to section 1. Is there any debate on section 1? Seeing none, I'm going to put the question. All in favour of section 1, as amended, please raise your hand. All in opposition? See none. Section 1, as amended, is carried.

Are there any other amendments? There is a new section. Is there any mover for amendment number 6? If none—

Interjections.

The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian): Okay, thank you.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: I have a point of clarification: Does that mean it's withdrawn then, this amendment?

The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian): It is withdrawn because there is no mover for the amendment.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Okay, so that's the same as withdrawn. Okay.

The Chair (Mr. Aris Babikian): Okay, we move to section 2. I see no amendments for section 2. I'm going to

put the question. Shall section 2 carry? All in favour? All in opposition? I see none. Section 2 is carried.

We move to section 3. Shall section 3 carry? All in favour, please raise your hand. All in opposition? I see none. Section 3 is carried.

Next one is section 4. Shall section 4 carry? All in favour, please raise your hand. All in opposition? Section 4 is carried.

Shall the title of the bill carry? All in favour, please raise your hand. All in opposition? I see none. The title of the bill is carried.

Shall Bill 26, as amended, carry? All in favour, please raise your hand. All in opposition? I see none. Bill 26 is carried.

Shall I report the bill, as amended, to the House? All in favour, please raise your hand. All in opposition? I shall report the bill to the House.

Now this comes to an end. Thank you, everyone. That concludes our business of the day. The committee now stands adjourned until 9 a.m. on Tuesday, November 25. Thank you very much to all of you for co-operating. It was smooth sailing. Have a nice day.

The committee adjourned at 0930.

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