

Plenary Presentation

Environmental Protection and Our Environmental Bill of Rights

Gord Miller, Environmental Commissioner of Ontario

The *Environmental Bill of Rights (EBR)*, which came into effect in February 1994, is one of the most significant environmental laws to be passed in the last 25 years. It recognizes that the people of this province have as a common goal the protection of our natural environment. The Environmental Commissioner of Ontario is charged with monitoring government compliance with this bill, so that the integrity of Ontario's ecosystems, one of our most important legacies, are conserved for future generations.

The *EBR* recognizes that the provincial government has the primary responsibility for protecting, conserving and restoring the natural environment. It also recognizes the people of Ontario have the right to participate in government decision-making and to hold the government accountable for those decisions. Therefore, the *EBR* represents a new era in environmental decision-making and one of better public participation, citizen empowerment and greater accountability of decision makers. It's important to remember that the power of the *Environmental Bill of Rights* comes not from the Environmental Commissioner, but from the people of Ontario, using their rights under the *EBR* to ensure that government decisions reflect their environment values.

This presentation will look at some of the successes in environmental protection and rehabilitation undertaken in the past and examine the evolution of the Environmental Bill of Rights and implications for future efforts.

Background on Gord Miller



Gord Miller was sworn in as the Environmental Commissioner of Ontario on January 31, 2000, to oversee the continued implementation of the *Environmental Bill of Rights (EBR)*, one of Canada's most progressive pieces of environmental legislation. As an independent officer appointed by the Legislative Assembly, Commissioner Miller monitors and reports annually on government compliance with the provisions of the *EBR*. His mandate includes reviewing how provincial ministries use public input to shape environmental Acts and policies, as well as ensuring that educational programs on the *EBR* are provided to the people of Ontario. As Commissioner, he has travelled across the province to speak personally to Ontarians about environmental issues and about their rights under the *EBR*.

Commissioner Miller has issued two annual reports to the Ontario Legislature. "Changing Perspectives" was released in November 2000, and "Having Regard" the following year. He also produced two special reports, "The Protection of Ontario's Groundwater and Intensive Farming," in July 2002, following the tragedy in Walkerton, and "Broken Promises: MNR's Failure to Safeguard Environmental Rights," in June 2001.

Gord Miller has extensive experience with environmental issues, having worked for Ontario's Ministry of the Environment and Energy for 14 years, as a scientist, pollution abatement officer, Manager of Training and Development, and District Manager of ministry environmental programs delivered to a large area of northeastern Ontario. In that capacity, his work included approval and inspection activities relating to municipal sewage, drinking water, solid waste management, hazardous waste, noise, air pollution and land use planning. As a member of the ministry, Mr. Miller developed and imposed control orders and other abatement measures on pulp and paper companies, mining companies and smelter operations. His service with the ministry included not only the enforcement of existing legislation, but also the drafting of new regulations in areas such as the certification of water and wastewater operators.

Commissioner Miller's broad knowledge of environmental matters comes as well from his in-depth scientific work. His research findings have been presented both at major conferences and in academic journals, and they cover areas such as the use of wetlands for sewage treatment and the aquatic effects of acid precipitation. He has also developed and taught courses on environmental legislation and environmental protection at the college level.

Gord Miller is the co-founder of the Lake Nipissing Stewardship Council and of the Roadside Heritage Trees Society, which is dedicated to the collection of tree seed, and the cultivation and replanting of roadside trees in rural areas. He was also a member of the Restore the Link Committee, which has been working to preserve La Vase Portages, the link between Trout Lake and Lake Nipissing used by Champlain in 1615 and then by voyageurs down through Canadian history. Mr. Miller has also served as President of the Ontario Chapter of the Canadian Land Reclamation Association, which works toward the revegetation of disturbed lands in Ontario.

Gord Miller received his BSc. (Hon.) in Biology from the University of Guelph in 1976, and his M.Sc. in Plant Ecology in 1978. He is married and has two adult children.
