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Dear Mr. Kozak

As a member of the Thunder Bay Beekeepers' Association and a concerned citizen, I would like to bring the following issues to your attention.

World wide there is a decline in all pollinators both native and domestic. Today, the honey bee is a major component to our agriculture industry and they (honey bees) are responsible for the pollination of one third of the food we eat. All pollinators are a critical link in our food chain. With the decline in native pollinators it is possible that a healthy commercial honey bee population could play an even more important role in the future.

In the Thunder Bay District we are experiencing a surge of interest in the hobby of beekeeping as well as an increased awareness by the general population of the importance of buying our food from local producers. Both of these changes are very positive as they will ultimately improve our economy and help us to sustain both industries. The local agricultural industry is of course supported by our local pollinators.

However, as I am sure you are aware, honey bee populations are in crisis worldwide. With the recent emergence of Colony Collapse Disorder (CCD) millions of colonies and billions of honey bees have died since 2006. The exact nature of the problem is unclear at this time but there seems to be learned opinion that there are number of factors at play. Some of the suspects are varroa mites, tracheal mites, small hive beetles, viruses, new pesticide use, poor

nutrition of pollination colonies and a number of other contributing factors. The complexity of this issue makes it difficult to find an answer but I firmly believe that any step to help pollinators should be looked at, taken seriously and put into practice as soon as possible.

At the present time, Thunder Bay District has no varroa mites and no tracheal mites that are known to our inspectors. The reason for this is speculative but our geographic isolation and twenty-four years due diligence by the Thunder Bay Beekeepers' Association, area beekeepers and OMAFRA bee inspectors are likely to have played key roles.

Also the culture of beekeeping in the Thunder Bay District is one that shares information freely. Approximately ten years ago there was one incident of varroa mites that had been imported into the area on honeybees. Fortunately, the local bee inspectors quickly identified and immediately destroyed the diseased colonies. The beekeeper was given free replacement hives from TBBA members.

One of the main traits looked for in our new queens is their ability to maintain a hygienic colony. About six years ago TBBA members Jeanette Momot and Chris Carolan had several colonies tested by OMAFRA and the Thunder Bay bees were ranked among the best provincial apiaries tested that year for hygienic behaviour. This hygienic trait, uncapping and removing diseased brood, is also believed to be crucial in our collective efforts to control these destructive mites. Our situation is unique and I believe that our government and regulating bodies should be taking pro active steps to ensure this important mite-free bee population is protected.

At the May meeting of the Thunder Bay Beekeepers' Association we had four guests present from the state of Minnesota. They had traveled to Thunder Bay to attend our meeting because they were looking for a source of mite-free bees to re-stock their hives. They know that Thunder Bay is the only place that as yet, does not have these mites and they are willing to travel here to try to purchase our "clean" bees.

There is also a demand for our bees from Dryden area beekeepers. They have eliminated all of their hives due to their varroa mite infestation and are now looking to Thunder Bay beekeepers to replenish their hives with clean stock.

These events should help you to understand that our mite-free area should be protected fiercely, as we have the potential to become a key resource for repopulating the Ontario honey bee industry.

It was the collective opinion during the recent TBBA May meeting that there are a number of actions that can be taken by the Provincial Apiary Specialist that could help us protect our bees. These would be

1. Have the Provincial Apiarist Specialist recognize and promote Thunder Bay and area as a mite-free area.
2. Institute a positive quarantine for the Thunder Bay District so as to reduce or eliminate the possibility of infected nucs, queens or hives being introduced into our area by novice beekeepers and uninformed bee supply companies.
3. Have OMAFRA re-introduce varroa and tracheal mite sampling to the summer work duties of the two Thunder Bay and area bee inspectors, and reinstate the free sampling, (commonly called slicing,) for tracheal mites in the Thunder Bay District to ensure there is no economical barrier for area beekeepers, and encourage inspectors to test regularly for the presence of both mites.

In closing, although these are small steps to take, the reality is that if we do not do all we can to protect our local mite-free honey bee population now, we risk losing it and perhaps the opportunity to contribute to the recovery of the Ontario commercial bee industry.

Thank you for your timely response to this matter and I look forward to hearing your reply.

Yours truly,

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