AT RISK!

Ontario’s Conservation Authorities
What are Conservation Authorities?

• Unique to Ontario, Conservation Authorities are local watershed management agencies that deliver services and programs to protect and manage impacts on water and other natural resources in partnership with all levels of government, landowners and many other organizations.

• Conservation Authorities promote an integrated watershed management approach balancing human, environmental and economic needs. Conservation Authorities are organized on a watershed basis.

- Conservation Ontario
The *Conservation Authorities Act, 1946*

- A made-in-Ontario solution for managing renewable natural resources and protecting people and property through a prevention-first approach that is built around the management of watersheds. The purpose of the Act is:

  “to provide for the organization and delivery of programs and services that further the conservation, restoration, development and management of natural resources in watersheds in Ontario.”

- Authorizes the formation of conservation authorities in Ontario and addresses their roles, responsibilities and governance in resource management and environmental protection.

- The “objects” of a conservation authority and the powers it has to achieve these objectives are all set out in the Act.
There are 31 Conservation Authorities operating in southern Ontario and five Conservation Authorities delivering programs and services in northern Ontario.

The network of Conservation Authorities is represented by Conservation Ontario, which is a nonprofit association.

Conservation Authorities began to be established by municipalities and the province in the 1940s in response to severe flooding and erosion problems in Ontario.
Hurricane Hazel was a ‘milestone’ in Conservation Authority history. The storm mobilized the need for managing Ontario’s watersheds on a regional basis.

After Hurricane Hazel, the provincial government amended the Conservation Authorities Act to enable Conservation Authorities to acquire lands for recreation and conservation purposes, and to regulate that land for the safety of the community.
Core Mandate of CAs

The core mandate of Conservation Authorities is to undertake watershed-based programs to protect people and property from flooding and other natural hazards, and to conserve natural resources for economic, social and environmental benefits.

- Conservation Ontario (emphasis added)
Typical breakdown of funding sources for CAs

• Municipal Levies – 53%
• Self-generated Revenue – 35%
• Provincial Grants & Special Projects – 8%
• Federal Grants or Contracts – 4%
The Conservation Authorities Act

- Ontario’s 36 Conservation Authorities fall under the jurisdiction of the **Conservation Authorities Act** which was reviewed and modernized in 2017 and again in 2019. In April 2019 the Ministry of Environment, Conservation and Parks consulted on proposed changes to the **Conservation Authorities Act (CAA)** and, in June 2019 the **More Homes, More Choice Act** amended the CAA.

- Conservation Ontario (emphasis added)
MECP Consultation on Mandate of CAs

From Ontario Nature:

• The Ministry of Environment, Conservation and Parks is consulting on the mandate of conservation authorities (CAs) and wants the public to respond to a survey to help them determine the value of CAs to Ontarians. The survey follows public sessions where big developers and others have been urging the government to remove conservation authorities from the planning process, and to limit their mandate and scope. Limiting the mandate of CAs will only open the floodgates for unchecked development, threatening our communities’ flood plains, drinking water, biodiversity, natural heritage and more.

• Ontario’s Conservation Authorities play a key role in protecting Ontarians from the impacts of climate change. We must resist this trend towards environmental deregulation in Ontario.
Four Key Messages

• The role of CAs in planning decisions must be maintained.

• The role of CAs in monitoring needs to be maintained & supported.

• CAs should continue to play a key role in delivering community projects in partnership with municipalities and local organizations, providing on-the-ground expertise.

• The watershed approach of conservation authorities must be preserved.
1. The role of CAs in planning decisions must be maintained.

The CAs’ role in planning decisions under the *Planning Act* and the *Environmental Assessment Act* ensure that developments do not result in changes to the floodplain and natural heritage that would put communities at risk from flooding. The Flood Advisor’s report showed strong support for the conservation authority model in protecting Ontario from the impacts of climate change. This model only works if CAs have the regulatory power necessary to intervene in planning decisions and development applications.
2. The role of CAs in monitoring needs to be maintained and supported.

Watershed-scale monitoring programs are necessary for delivery of “core” programs regarding flood mitigation, natural hazards, and drinking water source protection. Additionally, they hold significant value in delivering broader environmental protections including land conservation, biodiversity conservation, water quality protection, and ecological restoration.
3. CAs should continue to play a key role in delivering community projects in partnership with municipalities and local organizations, providing on-the-ground expertise.

CAs partner with local environmental and conservation groups, farmers, and their communities to deliver regionally significant projects including rehabilitating natural heritage, implementing agricultural best practices, and restoring or creating wetlands. They often provide match funding, in addition to on-the-ground expertise.
4. The watershed approach of conservation authorities (CAs) must be preserved.

CAs operate at the watershed scale, providing a much-valued bridge across jurisdictional boundaries to understand and address environmental concerns, including flooding. CAs conduct watershed-scale monitoring, data collection, modelling and assessments. They are ideally positioned to develop watershed strategies and encourage decision-making at that scale. They support watershed-wide activities including stewardship, communication, outreach and education.
Section 2 – Mandatory & Non-Mandatory Programs & Services

1. Which conservation authority programs and services should be mandatory for each of the following categories and why? Please provide answers for any of the categories that are relevant to you: preparing and protecting against the risk of natural hazards; managing conservation authority-owned lands; and protecting drinking water sources.

2. What programs and services provided by conservation authorities should be non-mandatory?
Section 3 – The Existing Conservation Authority Model

1. What is working well in the existing conservation authority model?
2. What could be improved in the existing conservation authority model?
3. How can conservation authority operations be more consistent, transparent, and efficient?
4. How do you feel about the current roles and responsibilities to plan and issue permits?
5. How do you feel about the way conservation authorities currently issue permits?
Section 3 – The Existing Conservation Authority Model - continued

6. How can the oversight of conservation authorities be improved? Should there be additional oversight of conservation authority operations (for example, by the province or municipalities?) Why or why not?

7. What are your thoughts on conservation authority board composition? Should municipalities be allowed to continue to appoint members of the public to conservation authority boards? What should be the length of conservation authority board appointments? (Currently it is 4 years).
Section 4 – Partnerships & Collaborations

1. Please describe key collaborations between conservation authorities and partners that your organization is involved in (for example, provide funding; share staff or other resources; work together on specific projects; provide volunteers)

2. How long has this collaboration/partnership been in place?

3. What about your partnerships is working well and what needs improvement?
Section 5 – Additional Feedback

1. Do you have any other feedback that would inform the governments’ review of legislation, regulations and policies related to conservation authorities?

Reinforce key messages here.

You could also point out that very few municipalities have the staff capacity and expertise to deal with natural heritage planning, and that CAs are filling this role, in most cases, at the direction of municipalities, according to negotiated Memorandums of Understanding. Removing CAs from this role will not increase efficiencies. Someone will still need to do the work and assume the responsibility of planning and permitting.
AT RISK – Ontario’s Conservation Authorities

You can access the CAs Survey via this link:

www.ontario.ca/form/survey-ontario-conservation-authorities

The deadline to complete MECP’s survey is March 13, 2020

We have also created a resource page that includes the link to the survey and a copy of Ontario Nature’s guidance document. You can access this resource page in the ‘Take Action’ section of Environment Hamilton’s website – www.environmenthamilton.org