



2022 Provincial Budget Consultation

Minister of Finance

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Conservation Authority Programs Help to Build Ontario's Resilience

Extreme weather and other climate change impacts take a costly toll on the well-being of Ontario's residents, on our infrastructure and with the functioning of business and industry.

One need only look at the recent and tragic events in British Columbia where flooding had a major impact on people's homes and livelihoods, as well as on drinking water infrastructure, food supply and the environment.

The key to a more resilient Ontario lies in understanding how nature is so closely connected to our own well-being and to our economy; and then doing everything we can to protect, restore and conserve our environment and its natural systems. We need to re-imagine the value of nature.

Conservation Authorities are key delivery agents for the Province, particularly around flooding and erosion, the management of conservation lands and drinking water source protection. Conservation authority programs protect the Great Lakes, support a healthy agricultural industry, protect water quality and quantity and provide the local science that helps Ontario to adapt to climate change impacts. They use an integrated watershed management approach to managing the impacts on natural resources in order to ensure the long term viability of our environment.

Conservation Ontario and the conservation authorities (CAs) gratefully acknowledge the Province's recent commitment to two-year multi-year funding for the Ontario Drinking Water Source Protection Program. This meets one of the important objectives of this work which is the long term planning and implementation of drinking water source protection.

However, other provincially mandated programs are woefully underfunded. Additional and new strategic investments are needed in natural hazards, conservation lands, nature-based programs and watershed science.

Conservation Authorities Are Important Partners for the Province

Conservation authorities are effective, cost efficient partners for the Province, particularly around key provincial environmental, economic and social policy priorities.

They **facilitate a provincial housing strategy** by balancing growth and environmental pressures. Since April 2019, Conservation Ontario (CO) has been working with Ontario's conservation authorities (CAs) to make improvements to CA plan review and permitting activities through the [*Conservation Ontario Client Service and Streamlining Initiative*](#). The Initiative was created to support actions outlined in the provincial *Housing Supply Action Plan*, and identifies a number of actions to improve client service and accountability, increase speed of approvals and reduce red tape to help the Province address the lack of housing supply, while at the same time not jeopardizing public health and safety or the environment in the process.

Conservation Ontario applauds the Government's establishment of a Streamline Development Approval fund to modernize, streamline and accelerate housing applications. We believe expanding its scope to include planning interactions between municipalities and conservation authorities will positively enhance the impact of this initiative.

Conservation authorities also contribute significantly to the health and well-being of residents by protecting safe drinking water sources, using conservation lands to address climate change impacts and providing almost 300 conservation areas for 8 – 10 million people to visit annually.

And, finally **conservation authorities are well-known for their watershed expertise**. This was evident last November (2021) when they were asked to immediately send as many natural hazard experts as possible to British Columbia to assist during its state of emergency due to devastating flooding. A total of 53 CA staff from 18 conservation authorities quickly volunteered to help out. Fortunately, flooding impacts began to subside and conservation authorities stood down.

We appreciate the recent letter from the Honourable Greg Rickford, Minister of Northern Development, Mines, Natural Resources and Forestry expressing his appreciation for the support shown by conservation authorities.

What Conservation Authorities Need to Ensure This Work Continues

1. Investments in Natural Hazards Programs

Flooding is the most costly natural hazard and the leading cause of public emergency in Ontario. For every dollar paid in insurance claims for damaged homes and businesses, the Insurance Bureau of Canada tells us that Canadian governments and taxpayers pay out much more to repair public infrastructure that severe weather has damaged. And these costs are rising as climate change impacts grow.

Land use planning is a critical component of an integrated approach to flood risk management. Conservation authority regulations as well as their planning and review

process are key to keeping development safely away from flooding and erosion, and they prevent development from creating new natural hazards. Conservation authorities support the provincial housing strategy by continuing to improve the planning application review and approval processes working under Conservation Ontario's Client Service and Streamlining Initiative.

However, to continue to meet the growing challenges, conservation authorities need:

- ✓ more financial and technical support for natural hazard programs
 - ✓ continued and improved funding is needed for aging natural hazards infrastructure that prevents flooding and erosion. Continued or increased funding for the provincial Water and Erosion Control Infrastructure (WECI) Program is needed. This program is delivered through a municipal – provincial – conservation authority partnership. Province provides \$5M; municipalities match this with another \$5M and CAs implement the projects. CA water and erosion control infrastructure helps to avoid more than \$150 million in damages to properties
 - ✓ new funding for the development of CA natural hazard asset management plans as required by changes to the *Conservation Authorities Act*
 - ✓ provincial top up of current federal natural disaster funding opportunities for additional infrastructure projects as well as floodplain mapping improvements
- These programs allow CAs to implement both small scale projects (dykes and erosion control, storm water /low impact development) and multiple infrastructure projects that benefit both urban and rural municipalities.

Floodplain mapping provides significant returns on investment because it keeps people and businesses out of flood-prone areas. Floodplain maps inform and delineate risk assessment as well as guide land-use planning.

2. Protect The Value of Conservation Lands and Increase Protected Land

Greenspaces such as conservation lands provide multiple benefits: their biodiversity help us to adapt to climate change impacts, they protect drinking water sources and they provide recreational opportunities for Ontario residents. Conservation authorities are requesting:

- ✓ new funding to support the infrastructure and operational needs of conservation areas

A one-time investment of \$15M into infrastructure improvements would enable conservation areas to accommodate higher visitor numbers more safely. It would also provide local employment incentives and support for local

supply chains. The types of projects could include: construction of sanitary stations and signage, upgraded washrooms, parking improvements, touchless gates systems, bridge widening, visitor monitoring technologies in order to track users to maintain social distancing and trail expansion/reconstruction to accommodate safer one-way and looped hikes with safely distanced pullouts for resting.

- ✓ a return of provincial support to acquire more conservation lands

3. Invest in Nature-based Climate Solutions

- ✓ provide financial support for the protection, restoration and rehabilitation of watershed natural assets such as trees, forests and wetlands. These assets provide important nature-based climate change solutions that absorb carbon, reduce temperatures, support a healthy agricultural economy, and protect drinking water sources.

4. Support the Continued Development of Local Watershed Science

- ✓ invest in conservation authority watershed studies and research, improve CA technical capacity and expand partnerships in conservation authority monitoring programs.

Outcomes Achieved in Partnership with Conservation Authorities.

- Reduced risk and costs from flooding events
- Less red tape and more sustainable growth under the provincial housing strategy
- Increased resilience to climate change through CA nature-based solutions such as green infrastructure, watershed stewardship and source protection programs. Watershed natural assets provide important nature-based climate change solutions that absorb carbon, reduce temperatures, support a healthy agricultural economy, and protect drinking water sources.
- Improved public health of Ontario residents and reduced healthcare costs through drinking water source protection and enabling people to be active in nature at over 300 conservation areas
- Resilient Ontario economy

Conservation authority watershed management programs such as stewardship initiatives, agricultural beneficial management practices and water quality and

quantity improvement projects ensure sustainable and resilient water resources for a wide variety of industry

Advantages of Working with Conservation Authorities

- ✓ Known and valued for their watershed-based approach to managing flooding & erosion
- ✓ Watershed management model is scientifically solid
- ✓ Cost effective partners using science to guide priorities and identify targets
- ✓ Governed by member municipalities and fosters collective actions at the local and community level
- ✓ Ability to leverage partnerships for greater resources and broader outcomes

More Information

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