



November 27, 2020

To all Dufferin County municipalities

RE: Concern about Bill 229 and impact on Conservation Authorities

Conservation Authorities (CAs) are unique to Ontario. While other agencies aimed at conservation and watershed management exist across the country, Ontario is the only province that has promoted the establishment of conservation authorities through legislation and financial support. Today, over 95 percent of Ontario's population lives within the borders of a conservation authority's jurisdiction. Ontario CAs protect and manage the impacts on our natural resources in partnership with residents, businesses, not-for-profit organizations, and all levels of government.

While we certainly agree that Ontario should be home to a prosperous economy, with jobs close to home and housing that is attainable we understand that we cannot achieve our ambitions without a healthy environment.

Bill 229, Protect, Support and Recover from COVID-19 Act (Budget Measures), 2020 significantly limits or completely changes the role of conservation authorities to protect Ontario's environment and ensure people and property are safe from flooding and other natural hazards. The changes risk watering down or limiting the conservation authorities' ability to ensure a watershed-based approach needed to conserve and restore Ontario's important natural resources.

In 2006, the Highland Companies, funded by a Boston based hedgefund Baupost, represented by civil engineer John Lowndes, started buying up properties in the Melancthon area (100km North of Toronto), eventually accumulating 8,500 acres of farmland – purportedly for growing potatoes. But, after the company started drilling in the area, local people became suspicious and began organizing. At the time Baupost had assets worth 23 billion dollars.

In 2009, Highland revealed plans for the mega-quarry at a public meeting. In March 2011, Highland filed its application with the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR) to excavate 2,400 acres of prime agricultural land located at the headwaters of five major rivers. This area is in the Grand River Conservation Authority Region where more than 1 million people rely on source water.

When completed, the mega-quarry was to have been the second largest quarry in North America. It would have extended 200 feet below the water table, with the company pumping out 600 million litres of groundwater daily in order to excavate the aggregates (rock and gravel) used to make concrete.

Citizens mobilized and were very effective in stopping this, but what really helped seal its fate was a technical report prepared by SLR dated May 2014 for the Grand River Conservation Authority (copy attached). Several issues were identified in this report including, “insufficient investigation”, “insufficient address of potential impacts to the environment”, “does not allow for informed decisions”. The fact that no legislation has changed to protect prime agricultural land and source water, this report is the only thing that will prohibit someone from filing for a license for this exact aggregate operation.

OUR ASK:

- Repeal Schedule 6 of the Budget Measures Act (Bill 229)
- Continue to work with conservation authorities to find workable solutions to reduce red tape and create conditions for growth
- Respect the current conservation authority/municipal relationships
- Embrace their long-standing partnership with the conservation authorities and provide them with the tools and financial resources they need to effectively implement their watershed management role

Submitted on behalf of the Board by Karren Wallace, Chair
North Dufferin Agricultural and Community Taskforce (NDACT)

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Credit Valley Conservation
Grand River Conservation Authority
Saugeen Valley Conservation Authority
Toronto Region Conservation Authority
Conservation Ontario
Simcoe County Greenbelt Coalition
AWARE Simcoe
Environmental Defence

BACKGROUND - NDACT

North Dufferin Agricultural and Community Taskforce (NDACT) is a grassroots group formed in 2009 by local farmers and residents to defend Melancthon's prime farmland at the headwaters of 5 rivers from a proposed mega-quarry. An outline of the proposal is attached as Schedule A. After a successful campaign, NDACT continues to fight for farmland and source water by developing awareness, encouraging people power, and by promoting better legislation. Food & Water First is a campaign of NDACT.

FACTS:

"Only about 10,800 hectares of the 56,200 hectares available was developed between 2006 and 2016-leaving 80% of land still available." (source: Neptis Foundation)

"Ontario is home to almost 46,900 farms that grow more than 200 agricultural commodities. Ontario's family farm and food processing businesses contributed \$47.5 billion each year to the province's economy supports 837,000 jobs. Agriculture and agri-food processors are the number one economic contributor to Ontario's overall economy. (Source: October 7, 2019 Province of Ontario news release)

"...prime agricultural lands, Classes 1, 2, and 3 and specialty croplands, are a very limited resource in Canada. Only 5% of the Canadian land mass is made up of prime land. Only 0.5% of it is Class 1. 50% of that land is in Southern Ontario and 20% of that is Class 1-the best of the best and extremely rare. (Source: <http://www.neptis.org/publications/agriculture-central-zone/chapters/where-are-significant-agricultural-lands-located>)