

Changes to Conservation Authorities Act will put people and property at risk *LSRCA calls on Province to repeal Section 6 of Bill 229*

Lake Simcoe watershed, ON, November 19, 2020 - Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority (LSRCA) Chair, Board of Directors and senior staff are calling on the Province to repeal Schedule 6 of the budget measures Bill 229, Protect, Support and Recover from COVID-19.

“The changes to the Conservation Authorities Act and the Planning Act, introduced in Bill 229, will have consequences that we believe are contrary to what the government is attempting to achieve,” says Wayne Emmerson, York Region Chairman and Chair of LSRCA. “The changes will in fact strip conservation authorities of our ability to ensure that people, infrastructure and the environment are protected from damage and destruction that cannot be repaired. We understand the need to address COVID recovery efforts and to keep our economy viable, so we are more than willing to work collaboratively with the government to address constructive ways for conservation authorities to support these efforts.”

Among other significant changes, if passed with the provincial budget, Schedule 6 of Bill 229 is expected to immobilize conservation authorities and put communities and the environment at risk by allowing the Minister of Environment Conservation and Parks to issue permits directly, and override CA permit decisions, without the advantage of scientific, technical review or an integrated watershed approach to planning decisions. Additionally, a new appeals process will increase red tape, cause delays in permits and planning applications, increase costs to taxpayers and eliminate efficiencies that conservation authorities have adopted since 2018.

Long awaited tools for enforcement have been ruled out as well. Bill 229 will leave conservation authorities without stop work powers and the ability to enter properties to ensure illegal work is not being undertaken. This significantly impacts their ability to protect sensitive ecosystems, leading to more irreparable environmental damage and higher costs for rehabilitation.

“In the Lake Simcoe watershed, we’re also concerned about the ongoing illegal peat extraction and contaminated fill operations. These activities have caused devastation within some of our watershed communities and now is not the time to create gaps to allow these destructive money-making operations to proliferate,” said Mike Walters, Chief administrative officer for LSRCA.

LSRCA’s mission is to work with our community to protect and restore the Lake Simcoe watershed by leading research, policy and action.

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