



March 11, 2010

Carolyn O'Neill
Manager
Land and Water Policy Branch
Great Lakes Office
Ministry of the Environment

RE: Extension of the 2007 Canada-Ontario Agreement Respecting the Great Lakes Basin Ecosystem (EBR #010-9068)

Dear Ms. O'Neill,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the extension of the Canada-Ontario Agreement Respecting the Great Lakes Basin Ecosystem (COA). Conservation Ontario is the network of 36 Conservation Authorities, local watershed management agencies that deliver services and programs that protect and manage water and other natural resources in partnership with others.

Overall, Conservation Ontario supports the extension of the current COA efforts over the next year while the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement is negotiated and strongly supports the commitment to additionally focus efforts on implementation of some key strategies for each of the Lakes. This support assumes adequate provincial and federal funding will be made available for agencies to administer the extension and for local implementation actions to occur.

The Lake Huron South East Shores Project has representatives from Maitland Valley and Ausable Bayfield Conservation Authorities on the multi-partner working group. There is strong support for the Ministry of the Environment's leadership on development of a coordinated action plan to improve nearshore water quality. Additionally, the Province is encouraged to use COA funding to help further water quality/ecosystem health initiatives in the nearshore watersheds; including those that address adaptation to climate change. Lessons learned should be shared with all jurisdictions dealing with nearshore issues across all the Great Lakes.

Conservation Ontario, with Federal funding, hosted a multi-agency technical workshop "Managing Watersheds for Great Lakes Benefits – Nutrients in the Nearshore" in March 2009, to discuss the watershed and nearshore relationship. The workshop identified current threats as being population growth, changing land use practices, invasive species, and climate change and further identified that without action, eutrophication and the growth of nuisance algae will increase, and will affect fisheries, recreational resources, waterfronts and drinking water. Workshop recommendations (<http://www.conservation->

ontario.on.ca/great_lakes_workshop/index.html) detail an action plan for implementing a Great Lakes Nutrient Strategy that: promotes collaboration and integration, is science-based and adaptive, and encourages stewardship actions in the watersheds. The Essex Region, Upper Thames River and the Grand River Conservation Authorities were leaders in the development and delivery of this workshop and they actively collaborated with other Lake Erie Lakewide Area Management Plan (LaMP) partners in the preparation of the binational Nutrient Management Strategy; a process that was initiated in 2007. Further, these and other CAs in the Lake Erie Basin have participated fully on the LaMP's Management Committee and Working Group since their formation in the mid-1990s. The Lake Erie Conservation Authorities look forward to a strong commitment on the part of the Province and other partners to implement the priorities of the Lake Erie Binational Nutrient Management Strategy. Conservation Ontario staff, through its CA membership, has received a copy of the draft Technical Report and Conservation Ontario looks forward to a final report being available for further consideration of the strategy's application to nearshore nutrient issues in all the Great Lakes.

As well, Conservation Ontario staff participated on the bi-national, multi-stakeholder Steering Committee for development and finalization of the Lake Ontario Binational Biodiversity Conservation Strategy (BCS). More than twenty professional staff from the Lake Ontario Conservation Authorities were engaged in the process. The Lake Ontario BCS indicates a strong binational support for watershed plans (e.g. for climate change adaptation strategies and targeting critical lands/waters for protection). Additionally it recommends linkages between watershed plans and nearshore ecosystem health for identification of key watershed management actions that will benefit Lake Ontario biodiversity. While we have not yet been formally contacted regarding implementation of this Strategy, Conservation Ontario and the Lake Ontario Conservation Authorities look forward to being engaged in the implementation of this strategy during the extension period and beyond.

If you have any questions regarding these comments, please contact myself at 905-895-0716 ext. 223.

Sincerely,

Original signed by

Bonnie Fox
Manager, Policy and Planning

c.c. Environmental Commissioner of Ontario
All Conservation Authorities CAOs