



Conservation Ontario Submission to the Standing  
Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development  
Regarding the Continued Study on the  
**National Conservation Plan for Canada**

May, 2012

## **Introduction**

The following comments are provided by Conservation Ontario on behalf of the network of 36 Conservation Authorities in Ontario. Conservation Authorities are community based, resource management organizations established under the Conservation Authorities Act of Ontario to deliver conservation services and programs to protect and manage water and other natural resources in partnership with government, landowners and other organizations. Almost 90% of Ontario's population or approximately 12 million people are located within Conservation Authority jurisdiction - where resource issues and user conflicts are greatest.

Conservation Authorities are organized on a watershed basis and promote an integrated watershed approach balancing human, environmental and economic needs. Integrated watershed management is the process of managing human activities and natural resources in an area defined by watershed boundaries. This approach allows us to address multiple issues and objectives; and enables us to plan within a very complex and uncertain environment.

As leaders in environmental protection in Ontario, Conservation Authorities support the creation of a National Conservation Plan. From our experience there are a number of issues with the way conservation is currently practiced in Ontario that could benefit from an overarching conservation plan. From a Conservation Ontario perspective the top three benefits of a National Conservation Plan would be:

- Provide a framework and structure to support collaboration and coordination among the many organizations involved in delivering conservation programs;
- Support an integrated science based approach for developing local conservation plans and programs to ensure effective and efficient delivery of services;
- Recognition of the importance of conserving natural resources in Canada's working landscapes, including agricultural, urban and resource extraction.

## **Responses to Committee Questions**

With this as context the following are our comments on the specific questions asked by the Standing Committee.

1) What should be the purpose of a NCP?

One of the challenges we face in Ontario and Canada is that there are many agencies, both public and non-governmental, involved in the delivery of conservation programs. One of the main purposes of a NCP should be to provide an overall strategic direction for conservation in Canada that includes a framework for cooperation and collaboration amongst these various agencies. This strategy should include a shared vision, broad goals and a process for developing specific objectives that incorporate social and economic as well as environmental benefits.

## 2) What should be the goals of a NCP?

Without nature, humans could not survive. Nature provides the raw materials for every product we consume. More importantly, it constantly supplies services that sustain life, such as fresh drinking water, food and clean air. Nature directly affects human wellbeing through its ability to meet a wide variety of human needs, whether from tangible ecological services or from more personal connections to nature.

Employment and job creation are prominent in the minds of Canadians and the process of achieving the goals and implementing associated actions will create and maintain jobs. This will include the development of new and innovative technologies making Canada a global leader in the Green Economy<sup>1</sup>.

The development and implementation of a National Conservation Plan for Canada provides an opportunity to maintain and restore Canada's natural capital and to raise awareness of the value of natural capital both in economic and social terms. Our recommendations on goals that should be included in the NCP are:

- Identify and protect sensitive areas and also promote sustainable management of natural resources in working landscapes;
- Support the development and implementation of regional and local plans and strategies such as watershed plans to guide conservation actions;
- Support the development and sharing of science and data necessary for informed decision making on conservation initiatives;
- Encourage the establishment of monitoring systems to evaluate the effectiveness and efficiency of specific conservation actions.

## 3) What guiding principles should govern a NCP?

Conservation Authorities have extensive experience in developing delivering a range local conservation programs including habitat restoration, reforestation and rural water quality programs. Based on many years of experience the key principles that should govern a National Conservation Plan include:

- Conservation should recognize the relationship between natural spaces, human health and well being and a strong resilient economy;

1. A green economy as one that results in improved human well-being and social equity, while significantly reducing environmental risks and ecological scarcities.

- Support collaboration by recognizing and promoting partnerships facilitating information sharing and using existing programs and initiatives wherever possible;
- Conservation decisions should be based on objective science and adequate information which requires integrated approaches based on appropriate natural systems such as watersheds.

#### 4) What conservation priorities should be included in a NCP?

The priorities of a National Conservation Plan for Canada should be established on a regional basis to recognize the vast diversity of Canadian landscapes and conservation issues. Priorities for the Ontario region should include conservation and restoration of the Great Lakes Basin including headwaters, significant natural areas, wetlands, linkages, great lakes shorelines. The Great Lakes provide the largest system of fresh surface water on the globe and we rely on this resource for drinking water, as well as economic, agricultural, health and recreational uses.

Ontario priorities also need to recognize the predominance of private land ownership. Conservation initiatives need to focus on enhancing the protection and restoration of natural resources within these working landscapes, including agricultural, urban and resource extraction land uses. Developing conservation programs for these landscapes will mitigate environmental impacts of land use activities, at the same time supporting a quality of life that includes a strong economy, good jobs and healthy, vibrant places to live.

#### 5) What should be the implementation priorities of a NCP?

Like the conservation priorities, specific implementation priorities will also need to be established on a regional basis. A National Conservation Plan can provide the structure and processes to support the development of specific regional priorities. Conservation Ontario recommends that these include:

- Support implementation by facilitating regional collaboration of organizations in the development of specific implementation priorities;
- Provide resources to leverage the programs and expertise of existing organizations to deliver on the ground programs;
- In working landscapes such as the Great Lakes Basin, support private land stewardship in urban and rural settings with education, technical assistance and incentives;
- Support research and promotion of innovative technologies such as Green Infrastructure, and new funding mechanisms such as market based incentives.

#### 6) What consultation process should the Minister consider using when developing a NCP?

Conservation Authorities have over 60 years of experience leading consultative and collaborative initiatives like the development of local watershed strategies and provincial conservation plans and strategies. Through this experience we have come to understand the importance of involving those that are affected by a proposed plan in its development. Plans are only useful if they are implemented and in the case of a National Conservation Plan implementation will be in the hands of many different agencies, organizations and individuals. It is imperative that these stakeholders share ownership in the plans to ensure commitment to follow through on implementation.

In order to achieve this, the consultation process should ensure broad input from national, provincial and local levels including public sector agencies, non government organizations, private sector as well as the public. Consultation will need to make use of extensive range of tools and technologies from in person meetings to online webinars and electronic surveys and submissions. Where possible the consultation process should use existing networks of conservation organizations to facilitate the consultation process.

## **Summary**

While Canada has a long history in natural resource conservation the effectiveness of these efforts has sometimes been compromised by a lack of a clear set of goals and objectives and a lack of coordination amongst the various stakeholders. Development of a National Conservation Plan is an opportunity to address these issues. A national plan can ensure more coordinated action by the organizations involved by providing a framework to support collaboration in delivering conservation programs.

In order to ensure conservation initiatives are effective and efficient a National Conservation Plan must adopt a coordinated science based approach for developing local conservation plans and programs which is supported by effective monitoring.

A National Conservation Plan must also go beyond identified and protecting sensitive natural heritage and recognize the importance of the conservation of natural resources in Canada's working landscapes, including agricultural, urban and resource extraction.

Conservation Ontario wishes to thank the Standing Committee for the opportunity to submit comments on the development of a National Conservation Plan. Ontario's Conservation Authorities are committed to the conservation of Canada's natural resources and look forward to supporting the completion of a National Conservation Plan and participating in its implementation.

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## Sources of Additional Information

Conservation Ontario Website – [www.conservationontario.ca](http://www.conservationontario.ca)

Map of Ontario Conservation Authorities- <http://conservation-ontario.on.ca/find/index.html>

Conservation Ontario Factsheet: including facts on Conservation Authorities -  
[http://www.conservation-ontario.on.ca/about/documents/CO\\_Fact\\_Sheet.pdf](http://www.conservation-ontario.on.ca/about/documents/CO_Fact_Sheet.pdf)

Conservation Ontario 2011 Annual Report -Leveraging the Strengths of Conservation Authorities -  
[http://www.conservation-ontario.on.ca/about/documents/2011\\_CO\\_annual\\_report\\_PRINT.pdf](http://www.conservation-ontario.on.ca/about/documents/2011_CO_annual_report_PRINT.pdf)

Protecting the Health of Ontario Watersheds – Watershed Stewardship Services within  
Conservation Authorities - [http://www.conservation-ontario.on.ca/resources/Fact\\_sheets/documents/WatershedStewardshipFactSheet2012.pdf](http://www.conservation-ontario.on.ca/resources/Fact_sheets/documents/WatershedStewardshipFactSheet2012.pdf)