



A Review of the Conservation Authorities Act

Summary of Conservation Ontario Comments to the
Provincial Discussion Paper

October 2015

The Province of Ontario has initiated a review of the [Conservation Authorities Act](#) in order to identify ways to improve the existing legislation, regulatory and policy framework that currently governs Ontario's 36 Conservation Authorities (CAs), and the programs and services they deliver. They are soliciting public and multi sector perspectives and input.

As a first step, the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry (MNRF) has developed and posted on the Environmental Bill of Rights Registry (EBR) a [Discussion Paper](#) which looks at three topics around Conservation Authorities:

- Roles and Responsibilities of Conservation Authorities
- Funding Mechanisms
- Governance

Conservation Ontario has worked with the Conservation Authorities to develop formal collective comments on the Province's Discussion Paper. These comments have been submitted to the EBR. View [HERE](#) to download.

In addition, a summary of Conservation Ontario's comments is provided in this document and is also available to [download](#). Others are invited to review these comments, share them with networks, and/or submit individual comments to support Conservation Authorities for a stronger environment.



Roles and Responsibilities

1. **Confirm the Conservation Authority Mandate as outlined in the *Conservation Authorities Act* which is to undertake watershed-based programs for the conservation, restoration, development and management of natural resources.**

The CA Act provides a broad mandate for Conservation Authorities and over the years, specific CA programs and services have evolved in order to respond to changing environmental conditions and challenges.

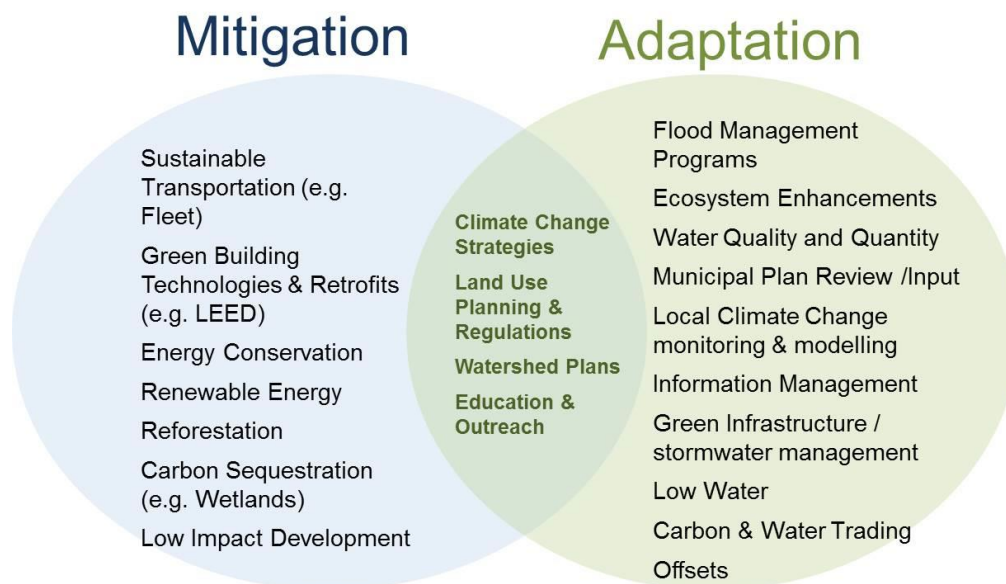
Climate change, rapid growth, and changing land uses significantly impact our natural water and land resources which are needed to support economic growth, a sustainable environment and healthy lifestyles for residents.

Today, CA programs support multiple Provincial ministry objectives and priorities including: flood management, climate change adaptation and mitigation, healthy Great Lakes / St. Lawrence River, sustainable agriculture, drinking water protection, healthy people, and a greener economy.

Other Suggested Improvements

2. More explicit wording in the CA Act to support the watershed approach would help to formally acknowledge and advance integrated watershed management more broadly
3. More explicit wording in the CA Act to support the roles expressed in the Ministry of Natural Resources and [Forestry's Policies and Procedures for Conservation Authority Plan Review and Permitting Activities \(2010\)](#)
4. Require annual multi-stakeholder meetings and training on the MNRF (2010) Policies and Procedures
5. Provincial support through standards, policies, science, tools and training for consistent delivery in key policy areas such as climate change, Great Lakes and others.
6. Additional policy and technical guidelines and tools are needed to support the natural hazards programs (including wetlands component) for greater consistency and modernization (e.g. climate change, green infrastructure)
7. Enable compliance mechanisms (e.g. more significant fines) and clarify definitions in order to effectively and efficiently uphold CA regulatory responsibilities and to support the provincial interest in natural hazard management..
8. Coordinated communication by the Province, Municipalities and Conservation Authorities to clarify roles and responsibilities of Conservation Authorities.
9. Sustainable funding formula needs to support the role of CA programs to address climate change mitigation and adaptation measures.

Conservation Authority Programs Help to Mitigate and Adapt to Climate Change Impacts



Funding Mechanisms

- 10. Establish a sustainable provincial funding formula that captures and reflects the actual range of CA programs and services that support multiple provincial objectives and maximizes the use of Conservation Authorities as an efficient local delivery model. The sustainable funding formula needs to address inflation and the local ability to pay.**

Since the mid-1990s, the Province has decreased support for Conservation Authorities such that municipalities are the primary government funder. The Province does provide project / grant funding for specific activities such as through the Ontario Drinking Water Source Protection Program.

Conservation Authority budgets are largely dependent on the size of the local watershed municipal tax base. This results in diverse capacities of CAs to deliver watershed programs that Ontarians would like to access.

Leveraging Conservation Authorities' local expertise and province-wide delivery ability is an efficient way for the Province to address multiple challenges, conditions and issues affecting communities across the province.

CA programs need to remain flexible enough to respond to local needs and can be standardized for delivery of provincially funded priorities.

Need to sustainably fund Conservation Authorities for direct, measurable benefits that support broader provincial policy priorities around flood management, Great Lakes protection, climate change, education, infrastructure, and public health

Other Suggested Improvements

11. Address current shortfalls in Provincial funding for CA natural hazards programs
12. Provide sustainable implementation funding for the Ontario Drinking Water Source Protection program
13. Support other CA programs that contribute to healthy people and ecosystems including: natural heritage, outdoor education and recreation.
14. Re-establish cost sharing mechanism between Province and municipalities recognizing that CA programs provide local benefits AND meet cross ministry science, policy and legislative objectives
15. Draw on multiple ministries and/or identify new revenue streams (ie carbon pricing, development charges, Trillium Foundation, etc)
16. Improve language to clarify variances in interpretations between the CA Act and the Levy Regulation
17. Update definitions for types of costs (ie administration, maintenance, operations, capital)

Governance

17. Discuss the current Conservation Authority governance model in relation to the funding model.

Current governance model is guided by three principles: enable local decision-making, municipal/provincial cost sharing, and use a watershed approach. Municipalities appoint representatives to the Conservation Authority Boards and approve annual Levy requests.

Advantages of this model:

- Watershed approach enables us to address multiple, related issues together more efficiently resulting in measurable outcomes
- Collaborative approach used by Conservation Authorities enable innovations, result in cost savings, avoids duplication, and encourages pooling of resources and expertise
- Program outcomes address both local and provincial priorities
- Provides information needed for local decision-making (local technical expertise)
- Avoids duplication between CA and municipal services

Network of Conservation Authorities are supported by an association that leverages the impact of all CAs and provides a 'single voice' for provincial policy priorities

18. Formalize and expand the Conservation Authorities' working relationships across Ontario provincial ministries in order to reflect the true value of CA programs and priorities; and to more widely leverage and support Conservation Authority efforts in local watersheds.

Need an enhanced relationship with the Province which reflects the true value and multi-ministry nature of the Conservation Authority – Provincial partnerships.

Could either adapt a current multi ministry committee to include CA partnership development or establish a new multi-ministry secretariat or steering committee

Other Suggested Improvements

19. Align and modernize the language used in the CA Act with proposed Ontario Not-For-Profit Corporations Act (ONCA) and other legislation that institute best management practices (e.g. Municipal Conflict of Interest Act)



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