

Don't throw the baby out with the flood waters

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DEAR EDITOR,

Through letters sent to municipalities and the minister of the environment, and posted on his Facebook page, Lanark-Frontenac-Kingston MPP Randy Hillier is advocating to end the ability of municipalities in Ontario to engage conservation authorities to provide essential services. In my view, this is an overreaction and far too drastic an approach to dealing with concerns that some people have with the role of our conservation authorities.

In the age of rapidly changing and unpredictable changes to our climate, conservation authorities play an essential role in reducing risks to our communities and preventing developments from encroaching into high-risk areas. Failing to appropriately restrict development in flood plains, wetlands and other high-risk areas will result in more property damage, increased risk of personal injury, higher costs for emergency services and higher insurance rates for everyone. Conservation authorities provide infrastructure and have the knowledge, skills and regional perspective that can help communities adapt to the increasing risks of climate change.

The experience of one local business, Perth Outfitters, shows the important role that conservation authorities play. When planning a new out building on their property on the Tay River in Perth, the Rideau Valley Conservation Authority (RVCA) insisted that it be built a foot above the 100-year flood level. This made the building seem unusually high and the owners questioned the necessity of this, but they complied. In the spring of 2017 the waters of the Tay rose above the historical 100-year flood bench mark but only to just below the sills of the new building. The owners of Perth Outfitters publicly acknowledged and thanked the RVCA for the foresight it demonstrated. They have also thanked for the RVCA for providing assistance with naturalizing the shoreline of their property. (See Perth Outfitters' Facebook page for their comments, photos and videos. This example is used with permission of the owners.) Such positive examples are too seldom brought to the attention of our politicians or the media.

Mr. Hillier's letter suggests the experience of others may not be as positive, but the specific issues he raises should be addressed through HR and complaint processes with the conservation authorities. We shouldn't throw the baby out with the flood waters. The provincial government should work to improve the collaboration between the conservation authorities and municipalities, not end it. If municipal governments determine they are not well served by the conservation authority in their region, then they can choose to end their service agreement. Municipalities are the best placed to judge whether this is the case and ought to be able to decide for themselves.

Sincerely,

Ramsey Hart

Perth