

Media Release

Changes to *Conservation Authorities Act* Trigger Red Flags for Conservation Ontario

NEWMARKET November 6, 2020 – Conservation Ontario and the conservation authorities (CAs) are reviewing the Province’s changes to the *Conservation Authorities Act* (CA Act) which were released in the 2020 Ontario Budget yesterday.

“There are a number of changes that we feel could have significant impact on conservation authorities, and on their watershed management responsibilities,” said Kim Gavine, General Manager of Conservation Ontario (CO). Conservation Ontario is the association which represents Ontario’s 36 conservation authorities.

The CA Act has been under review by the Province since April 2019. Earlier this year, the Minister of Environment, Parks and Conservation (MECP) hosted a series of five consultation meetings across the province with invited representatives primarily from municipalities, conservation authorities and agriculture, landowner and development sectors. Conservation Ontario was a presenter at these sessions.

“There are a number of changes that could actually create more red tape and delay permit application approvals and I’m not sure that’s what the Province intended to do,” Gavine pointed out. Over the past two years, CO has been working with CAs, the development sector and the Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO) to develop better streamlined client service approaches for CAs to use when reviewing plan review and permit applications. The initiative has been well-received and is ongoing.

As well, changes have been made to the planning role for conservation authorities which could actually put more people at threat, rather than protect them from natural hazards. “One of our main goals throughout this review has been to maintain the conservation authorities’ watershed-based approach to protecting people from natural hazards and ensuring the conservation of Ontario’s natural resources. Some of the changes will impact the CAs’ ability to do so,” Gavine said.

Some of the other changes included in yesterday’s budget bill (Bill 229) are around new rules for CA Board appointments, scoping of non-mandatory programs and services, and creation of new Ministerial powers.

“If nothing else, pandemic conditions this year have certainly reinforced how much we rely on a healthy environment for our own well-being,” Gavine said. “It’s important that conservation authorities are able to continue to protect our natural environment and ensure the safety of Ontario residents.”

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