

## Province consolidating 36 CAs into nine to deliver more consistent services, strengthen watershed management and better protect communities

By Mark PavilonsEditor

The consolidation of provincial conservation authorities has moved forward. The Ontario government is taking the next step to improve the province's conservation authority system with our plan to create nine regional conservation authorities. This follows extensive consultation on how conservation authorities can help get shovels in the ground faster on homes and other local infrastructure projects, while strengthening their vital role in managing watersheds and protecting communities from floods and natural hazards. The plan initially drew criticism and concern from stakeholders, who wanted to ensure this amalgamation would maintain local service and representation. In fact, a motion sent from King council in February urged the Province to build safeguards, including funding, into the transition. The motion also asked Queen's Park to establish clear roles and responsibilities to prevent any service gaps in permitting and planning. It also wanted confirmation on how watershed plans, sub-watershed plans, and the LSPP in particular, will be maintained, applied, and enforced under a regional structure. King is currently served by two Conservation Authorities -- the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA) and the Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority (LSRCA). Under the proposed consolidation the Township of King would still be served by two new ones -- the Central Lake Ontario Regional Conservation Authority and the Huron-Superior Regional Conservation Authority. The consolidated regional conservation authorities, the Province contends, would reduce administrative duplication, redirect resources to front-line conservation and modernize permitting to help the province deliver on its plan to protect Ontario by cutting red tape and building an economy that is more competitive, resilient and self-reliant, to help keep workers on the job in the face of tariffs and economic uncertainty. Ontario's improved approach would feature watershed-based regional conservation authorities operating under consistent provincial standards, modern tools and strengthened capacity -- delivering stronger watershed management, flood resilience and better support for housing and infrastructure growth, said Todd McCarthy, Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks. We listened and used feedback from last fall's consultations to refine and strengthen our plan, including optimizing regional boundaries to better reflect local needs, knowledge and relationships. Ontario's current system includes 36 independent conservation authorities with varying policies, processes and capacity, which has created a fragmented system with inconsistent standards and timelines. This has created uncertainty and delays for builders, landowners and farmers, and has made it more challenging for conservation authorities to carry out their role in protecting communities from floods and natural hazards. To address this, the province created the new Ontario Provincial Conservation Agency (OPCA) last fall and began consulting with conservation authorities, municipalities and other partners on proposed boundaries for consolidating the province's conservation authorities. Based on the extensive feedback received, the government amended its proposed conservation authority boundaries and intends to introduce amendments to the Conservation Authorities Act in the coming weeks that, if passed, will set out a path to consolidate Ontario's 36 conservation authorities to create nine new regional conservation authorities. Under this plan, the OPCA would coordinate a clear and successful transition targeting early 2027 for consolidation, and to deliver on its goal of improving customer service, enabling more consistent decision-making and strengthening watershed management across the province. With centralized leadership and independent oversight of conservation authorities by the OPCA, Ontario's plan for a regional conservation authority system will reduce administrative duplication across the system and allow conservation authorities to redirect resources to front-line services, operate with greater consistency and transparency and deliver strengthened services to municipalities and permit applicants. This would better position conservation authorities to support the building of new homes and infrastructure while continuing to protect communities from flooding and other natural hazards. Programs and services delivered by conservation authorities would remain the same, including watershed management, natural hazard management and source water protection. To ensure local knowledge and input continue to guide watershed management, the province would require regional conservation authorities to create one or more local watershed councils that help identify local priorities for watershed-based conservation programs and services. Regional conservation authorities would remain municipally governed, with regional municipalities, counties and cities appointing members to conservation authorities. Lower-tier municipalities in counties, such as towns and townships, will no longer be participating municipalities of a conservation authority under this approach. Today marks a milestone for conservation in Ontario. By building a modern, more unified system, we're protecting local expertise while supporting front-line programs that

communities rely on," said Hassaan Basit, Ontario's Chief Conservation Executive. "The Ontario Provincial Conservation Agency would lead a smooth, well-supported transition, ensuring conservation authorities have the tools and resources they need every step of the way to deliver effective watershed management programs, meeting the needs of today and the future." To support regional conservation authorities throughout the transition process, the province is providing annual funding to the OPCA in the amount of \$3 million, beginning in 2026. This funding would be used by the agency to support conservation authorities as needed during the transition period. Following transition, this annual funding would go toward helping regional conservation authorities achieve program improvements. These changes are part of the government's plan to protect Ontario by improving the province's fragmented and inconsistent conservation authority system to deliver more consistent services and more efficient resource and information sharing, ensuring conservation authorities are more responsive to the needs of the communities they serve. The Ontario Provincial Conservation Agency would coordinate the transition to ensure conservation authorities can continue to manage flooding and other natural hazards, drinking water source protection, permitting and the management of their lands and recreational trails. Conservation authorities issue permits for development activities such as housing and the installation of supporting infrastructure in areas affected by risks of natural hazards such as floodplains, shorelines and wetlands. In November 2025, the government amended the Conservation Authorities Act to establish the Ontario Provincial Conservation Agency to provide efficient governance, strategic direction and independent oversight of Ontario's conservation authorities. From November 7 to December 22, 2025, the province led a 45-day consultation on the proposed boundaries for the regional consolidation, with conservation authorities, municipalities, general stakeholders, and Indigenous communities, which included six regional workshops that engaged directly with conservation authority and municipal leadership. All input received was considered and helped to inform the government's plans.