

## **Proposed boundaries for the regional consolidation of Ontario's Conservation Authorities**

At a time when the Lake Simcoe watershed is facing unprecedented pressure from rapid growth, stressed shorelines, rising phosphorus loads, and intensifying climate impacts, it has never needed strong, locally grounded protection more than it does today. The proposed consolidation of Ontario's Conservation Authorities comes at a moment when local expertise, timely decisions, and place-based stewardship are essential to safeguarding the natural systems our communities rely on.

Conservation Authorities protect our watersheds, wetlands, forests, and floodplains, offering trusted local knowledge that keeps people safe and helps communities adapt to climate change. Any restructuring should strengthen these foundations, ensuring that the natural systems we depend on continue to be managed with the same care, experience, and local insight developed over decades.

Consolidation may unintentionally reduce the staff and field expertise needed for monitoring, enforcement, and responsive decision-making. Shifting permit timelines from 36 days to 7 is unlikely to create consistency and could instead lead to confusion during the transition. A more constructive path would be clear, province-wide standards and stronger collaboration through the Conservation Ontario network. Removing local boards also increases the distance between residents and the decisions affecting their water, natural heritage, and safety. Large or uniquely sensitive regions such as Huron–Superior and especially Lake Simcoe, may require more tailored governance approaches.

Effective watershed management relies on timely, place-based knowledge. A centralized structure may slow responses or fragment coordination at a time when climate-related flooding, drought, and storm events are becoming more common. Local communities and municipalities bring essential experience to these decisions, and preserving this engagement is crucial for long-term stewardship.

The science-based work of Conservation Authorities has long protected wetlands, forests, and flood-prone areas. These are natural systems that store carbon, regulate temperatures, safeguard drinking water, and reduce costly flood damage. Many Authorities also deliver habitat restoration, species-at-risk work, and stewardship programs that, although now considered “non-mandatory,” provide direct value to residents and save public dollars through preventative action.

If consolidation proceeds, it is vital that locally informed expertise, habitat protection, mitigation timelines, species-at-risk programs, climate adaptation efforts, and community input remain strong and well-supported.

At this pivotal moment, I respectfully ask for your support in ensuring that the Lake Simcoe watershed continue to benefit from robust, locally guided Conservation Authorities. Our

communities need this protection now more than ever, and your leadership can help make sure it remains firmly in place for future generations.