

## LSRCA to be folded into new, broader Conservation Authority

Ontario's 36 Conservation Authorities, including the Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority, will be restructured into nine broader Conservation Authorities, to deliver more consistent services, strengthen watershed management, and better protect communities, says the Province.

The Ontario Government announced the restructuring of conservation authorities last week, with the Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority (LSRCA) being folded into the new Lake Huron Regional Conservation Authority.

Local knowledge and input will continue to guide watershed management, they said, through the establishment of local watershed councils to 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, said the Province. Lower-tier municipalities in counties, such as towns and townships, will no longer be participating municipalities of a conservation authority under this approach.

The move, they said, 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.

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, in a statement. 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.

Hassaan Basit, Ontario's Chief Conservation Executive described the decision as a milestone for conservation in the Province.

By building a modern, more unified system, we're protecting local expertise while supporting front-line programs that communities rely on. 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.

The Province says the 36 existing Conservation Authorities have varying policies, processes, and capacities that have created a fragmented system with inconsistent standards and timelines.

They claim this fragmentation and consistency has created uncertainty and delays for builders, farmers, and landowners, while also making 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, said the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation, and Parks in the statement. 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.?

The LSRCA was founded in 1951 as a local watershed management authority, ?dedicating to conserving, restoring, and managing the Lake Simcoe Watershed.?

Initially based around the five municipalities through which the East Holland River flows, its jurisdiction presently includes the entire Lake Simcoe Watershed with the exception of the City of Orillia and the Upper Talbot River Subwatershed.

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