

HCA Board Motion re Bill 68/ERO:

WHEREAS Bill 68 (Schedule 3) proposes the creation of the Ontario Provincial Conservation Agency whose objects include overseeing conservation authorities and the transition to a regional watershed-based framework for conservation authorities in Ontario with municipal cost contribution yet to be defined; and

WHEREAS the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks has posted Environmental Registry Notice No. 025-1257 (“Proposed Boundaries for the Regional Consolidation of Ontario’s Conservation Authorities”), proposing to reduce Ontario’s 36 conservation authorities to 7 regional entities as part of a broader restructuring; and

WHEREAS under this proposal, the Hamilton Region Conservation Authority (HCA) would be consolidated into a new “Western Lake Ontario Regional Conservation Authority” together with the Niagara Peninsula CA, Halton Region CA and Credit Valley CA, forming a single organization extending along the western Lake Ontario shoreline from Niagara through Halton and Peel, encompassing urban and rural watershed that support the Greater Toronto-Hamilton corridor; and

WHEREAS the Province already has the authority to establish overarching legislation, regulations and standards through the Conservation Authorities Act and the Ministry of Environment, Conservation and Parks; and

WHEREAS Conservation Authorities in partnership with their member municipalities have for decades tailored programs and services to local watershed and community needs; and

WHEREAS HCA’s municipalities currently provide 35% of total HCA budget funding, while the province of Ontario provides less than 1%; and

WHEREAS the HCA has already undertaken significant modernization work aligned with provincial objectives, including Information Technology / Information Management, and leveraging technology to streamline planning and permit review processes processing 94% of major permits within the provincial time period in 2024; and

WHEREAS conservation authorities collectively own and manage thousands of acres of lands - including 11,744 acres within HCA - entrusted to them as a legacy for long-term protection, stewardship and public benefit, with the expectation that such lands would be cared for by locally governed conservation authorities.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED:

THAT the Board of Directors does not support the proposed “Western Lake Ontario Regional Conservation Authority” boundary configuration outlined in Environmental Registry Notice 025-1257 as the proposal lacks sufficient justification, would significantly diminish local governance, and fails to recognize the effectiveness and efficiencies already achieved within existing watershed-based models; and

THAT the Board affirms that large-scale regional consolidation is unnecessary, would introduce substantial transition costs, and would divert resources away from frontline watershed programs. The Board further asserts that restructuring at this scale would erode local decision-making, weaken municipal accountability, and disrupt long-standing community partnerships that are central to delivering responsive watershed management; and

THAT the Board urges the Province to strengthen centralized standards, resources, and communication rather than undertaking broad structural amalgamation and to provide **sustainable, predictable provincial funding** across conservation authorities—particularly where gaps exist—to enable local CAs to advance ongoing digitization and systemization work that has already resulted in improved efficiency and consistency in recent years; and

THAT the Board requests that the Ministry engage meaningfully and collaboratively with affected municipalities, conservation authorities, and local First Nations before advancing any consolidation, to ensure that any changes reflect both local needs and the practical realities of implementation; and

THAT the Board believes that the Province’s proposed new online permitting portal can be implemented within the existing conservation authority framework without requiring structural amalgamation; and

THAT this resolution be included as part of the HCA submission to the Environmental Registry of Ontario and forwarded to the City of Hamilton, the Township of Puslinch, and all Conservation Authorities in Ontario.