Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks

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Ontario

357-2026-754

March 10, 2026

Dear Chairs:

I am writing to provide an update as we move into the next phase of improving Ontario's conservation authority system. This spring, the government intends to introduce legislative amendments to the *Conservation Authorities Act* (CAA) that, if passed, would implement this next phase.

Thank you for taking the time to participate in the consultation process. We listened closely, and the feedback we received directly shaped and strengthened our plan. Based on the feedback, we adjusted the planned regional boundaries—from the originally proposed boundaries that would have created seven regional conservation authorities–and optimized to boundaries that create nine new regional conservation authorities. These planned boundaries would accommodate areas with distinct geographies and development contexts, better balance differing priorities across rural, urban and northern areas and improve alignment with watersheds and with source protection regions.

We are also building in clear mechanisms to ensure local knowledge continues to guide decision-making. The plan is for the newly created regional CAs to create one or more Watershed Councils to ensure watershed planning is guided by local insights. Regional CAs will continue to operate as independent public bodies with municipally appointed boards that maintain strong local representation and oversight.

The planned consolidation to regional conservation authorities is targeted to occur in early 2027 and is designed to strengthen the system—not weaken it—by increasing consistency, modernizing standards, and providing better tools and resources to support the frontline work your teams deliver every day. Under this plan, regional conservation authorities will continue to rely on the deep local expertise, knowledge, and relationships that your staff bring to their communities. Those who know the watershed best will remain central to delivering local programs and on-the-ground support, helping to ensure decisions reflect the unique environmental priorities of each area.

…2

This plan to transition to regional conservation authorities marks the beginning of a renewed relationship—one that builds on local strengths while establishing greater consistency and shared capacity across the province. As part of this plan, the Ontario Provincial Conservation Agency (OPCA) will lead a gradual, carefully managed transition to ensure stability and continuity. Services, programs, and permitting will continue uninterrupted as planning for transition progresses toward early 2027. There will be no cuts to front line jobs. Protecting local service delivery is a guiding principle of this planned transition, and communities will continue to work with the same local teams at conservation authorities they rely on today.

To ensure a smooth and organized transition, the province is providing $3 million in annual funding, to be administered by OPCA. These resources are planned to be used by OPCA to support conservation authorities throughout the transition period and, in the longer term, will enable regional conservation authorities to achieve program improvements.

Your leadership is vital as we begin this new chapter. I encourage you to share this message with your staff to provide reassurance that their work, expertise, and community relationships remain at the heart of Ontario's conservation system.
In the coming weeks, you will be invited to technical briefings to provide further information on the next steps in the planned transition process.

For questions regarding the planned consolidation and the transition process, please contact CCEO@ontario.ca. If you have questions about the planned legislative amendments or day-to-day CA business, please reach out to MECP staff at ca.office@ontario.ca.

Thank you for your continued partnership and commitment. We look forward to working with you over the next year to make important improvements to Ontario's conservation authority system.

Sincerely,

Todd McCarthy
Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks

c: Hassaan Basit, Chief Conservation Executive, MECP
Chloe Stuart, Assistant Deputy Minister, Land and Water Division, MECP