

Provincial Conservation Authority Consolidation

Board of Directors Briefing

April 2, 2026



ERO #025-1257 – HCA Key Comments

- On November 6, 2025, the province posted a policy proposal on the ERO to consolidate Ontario's 36 conservation authorities into seven regional conservation authorities
- On November 25, 2025, the HCA Board resolution stated the Board of Directors does not support the proposed "Western Lake Ontario Regional Conservation Authority" boundary configuration 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
- On December 4, 2025, the HCA Board approved response to the ERO affirmed that regional consolidation was not necessary to achieve the Province's stated goals and that the objectives can be fully achieved through strengthened standards, shared systems, and coordinated provincial support rather than amalgamation
- Important that our landholdings and assets continue to support our local watershed communities, concerned about costs for consolidation and imperative that existing staff complements be maintained to ensure continuity of front-line services without disruption

Provincial Announcement – Next Steps to Improve Ontario’s Conservation Authority System

- **Key Points from March 10, 2026, Announcement**
 - Ontario moving from 36 Conservation Authorities to 9
 - HCA remains part of the Western Lake Ontario Regional Conservation Authority
 - Single digital permit platform will be developed
- **Transition approach**
 - Consolidation targeted for early 2027
 - Transition committees will be created to guide integration
 - Project executives to be appointed to lead Transition Committees
- **Provincial commitments**
 - No reduction in staffing
 - Local expertise to remain + requirement for Watershed council
 - \$20M transition funding to OPCA + \$3M annually

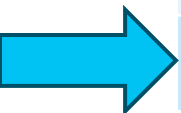
Regional Model Following ERO Consultation

Current system: 36 Conservation Authorities

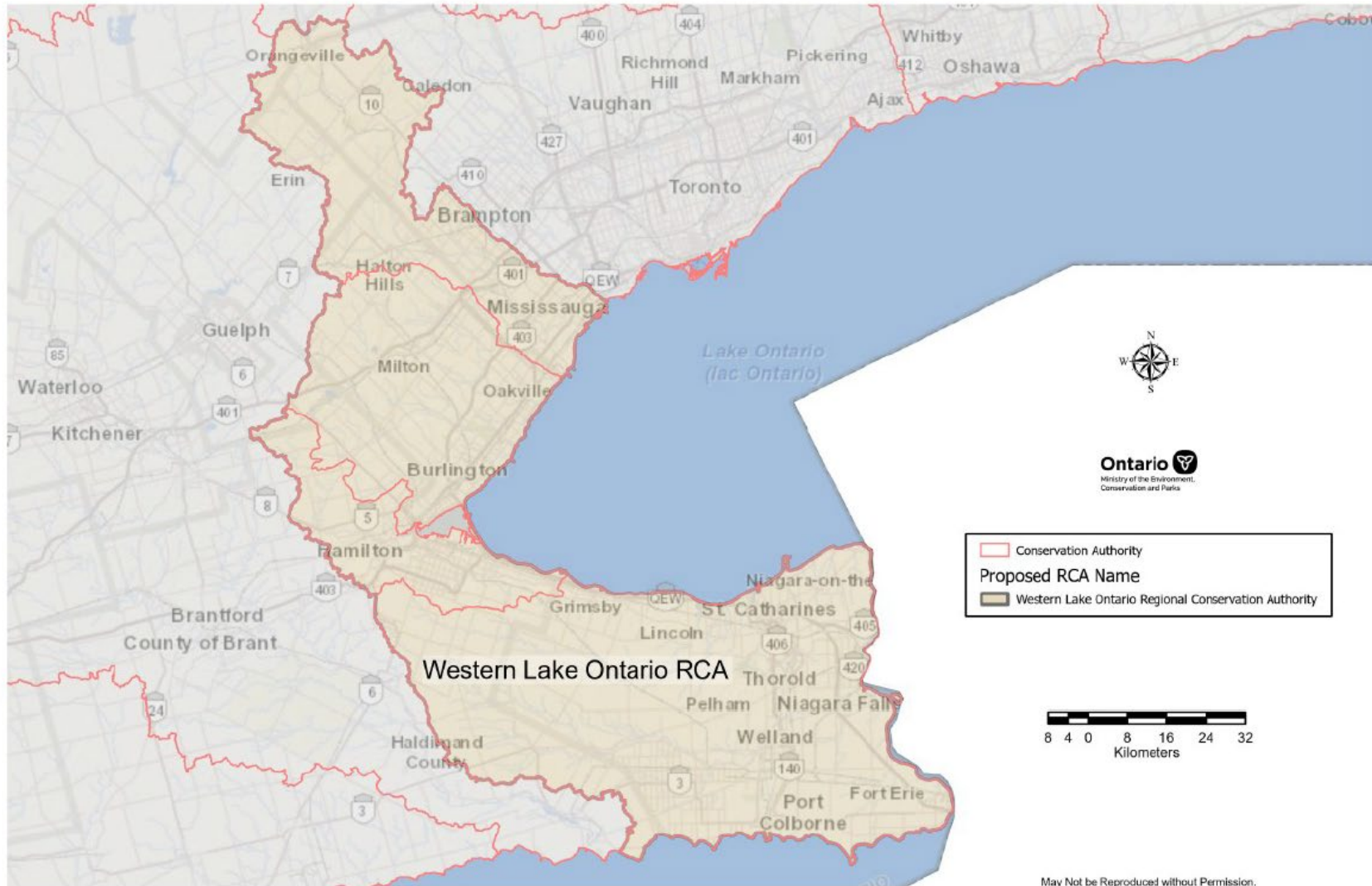
- **Proposed system:**
9 Conservation Authorities
- **Eight new regional CAs**
 - Central Lake Ontario Regional CA
 - Eastern Lake Erie Regional CA
 - Eastern Lake Ontario Regional CA
 - Lake Huron Regional CA
 - Northeastern Ontario Regional CA
 - St. Lawrence River Regional CA
 - Western Lake Erie Regional CA
 - Western Lake Ontario Regional CA (**includes HCA**)
- **Standalone Authority**
 - Lakehead CA → Northwestern Ontario Regional CA

Regional CA Boundaries- corresponding CAs

Proposed Regional CAs	List of existing CAs being consolidated	
Central Lake Ontario Regional CA	Central Lake Ontario CA	Toronto & Region CA
Eastern Lake Erie Regional CA	Catfish Creek CA Grand River CA	Kettle Creek CA Long Point Region CA
Eastern Lake Ontario CA	Cataraqui Region CA Crowe Valley CA Ganaraska Region CA Kawartha Region CA	Lower Trent Regional CA Otonabee Region CA Quinte Region CA
Lake Huron Regional CA	Ausable Bayfield CA Grey Sauble CA Lake Simcoe Region CA	Maitland Valley CA Nottawasaga Valley CA Saugeen Valley CA
Northeastern Ontario Regional CA	Mattagami Region CA Nickel District CA	North Bay Mattawa CA Sault Ste. Marie Region CA
Northwestern Ontario Regional CA	Lakehead Region CA	
St. Lawrence River Regional CA	Mississippi Valley CA Raisin Region CA	Rideau Valley CA South Nation River CA
Western Lake Erie Regional CA	Essex Region CA Lower Thames Valley CA	St. Clair Region CA Upper Thames River CA
Western Lake Ontario Regional CA	Credit Vally CA Halton Region CA	Hamilton Region CA Niagara Peninsula CA



WESTERN LAKE ONTARIO REGIONAL CONSERVATION AUTHORITY



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Ontario Provincial Conservation Agency (OPCA)

- **Created in Fall 2025** to provide centralized leadership and oversight of regional CAs (“new head office”)
- **Key Functions**
 - Governance oversight of Conservation Authorities and their programs
 - Guide transition to a regional watershed-based structure
 - Establish consistent policies, standards, and fees across authorities
 - Monitor performance and financial sustainability of authorities
 - Lead shared services and digital systems (e.g., permitting)
 - Support strategic investment and funding alignment
 - Advise the Province on conservation authority programs and outcomes

From the Province: What is and What's Not Changing

What these changes would mean:

- More resources for front-line services
- Improved flood management and erosion prevention
- Strong environmental protections maintained
- Faster permit approvals
- Modern service delivery
- Consistent standards and use of modern technology

What's not changing:

- Where CAs operate (areas currently served by CAs will continue to be served by CAs)
- The programs and services CAs provide, including the responsibility for source water protection, natural hazard and watershed management
- CA management of their lands and trails, providing access to green spaces, recreation and education programs
- Where and how CAs receive funding
- CA relationships with municipalities, developers, landowners
- Each CA being an independent, municipally-governed organization

How Will Consolidation Occur?

– Statutory Amalgamation

The Province intends to amend the *Conservation Authorities Act (CAA)* to:

- Consolidate 35 existing CAs into 8 regional authorities
- Target implementation early 2027

Key provisions:

- All assets, liabilities, rights, and obligations transfer to new regional CAs
 - Existing agreements, permits, and contracts continue
 - Jurisdictions of existing CAs combine under the new regional authority
 - Public Sector Labour Relations Transition Act will apply to the consolidation of CAs
- *new regional CAs would replace the former CAs as legal entities*

Transition Governance through Transition Committees

Proposed regulatory changes would require the establishment of Transition Committees to develop a transition plan

- Province has advised this will come with guidance from OPCA including playbook with templates and best practices – to guide through an orderly step by step integration across key functions such as HR, finance, assets and IT
- One committee for each new regional CA with the following Membership:
 - CAO from each current CA
 - One municipally elected board member from each CA
 - OPCA will appoint **Project Executives** to Chair transition committees and will serve as inaugural CAO for up to 24 months after consolidation
 - Possible additional members appointed by OPCA

Transition Committees

New regional CAs must implement transition plans, with the opportunity to make revision subject to OPCA's approval, and report progress to OPCA

- Transition Committees dissolve once consolidation is complete
- To ensure there aren't any service disruptions during transition, the plan would put time-limited measures in place to ensure a smooth and organized transition process
- Province has indicated it will introduce regulations to manage the transition period through the Minister

Regional CA Board of Directors

Update governance structure through regulatory changes

- Representation based on upper-tier and single-tier municipalities (no Towns or Townships)
 - Participating municipalities for the Western Lake Ontario Regional Conservation Authority would include City of Hamilton, Dufferin County, Haldimand County, Halton Region, Niagara Region, Peel Region and Wellington County
- Each municipality guaranteed representation
- Limits on the number of representatives from any one municipality for balanced representation
- Updates to other governance provisions including those related to percentage of appointments that are elected officials, term length and rotation of the chair and vice chair position
- Following the municipal election in October 2026, newly elected upper tier municipal councils select the first members (Board) for the new regional CA prior to the targeted amalgamation date

Local Knowledge & Input through Watershed Councils

Proposed amendments would require each regional CA to establish one or more watershed councils

- Purpose:
 - Ensure local priorities and watershed knowledge inform regional decisions
- The Minister may regulate:
 - Council composition
 - Roles and responsibilities
 - Procedures and reporting
- Potential representation may include:
 - Indigenous representatives
 - Agricultural sector
 - Local watershed stakeholders

Minister Commitments

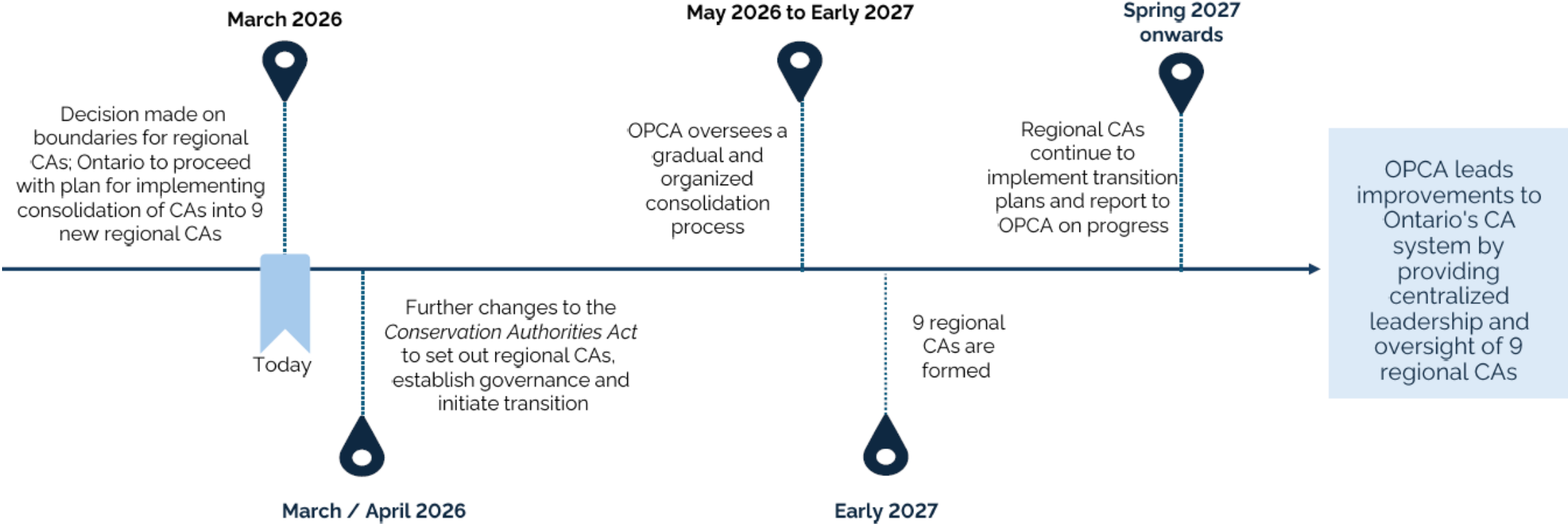
The Province indicated:

- **No reduction in CA staffing**
- Local expertise will be maintained
- \$20M one-time funding to OPCA
- \$3M annually to support transition through OPCA

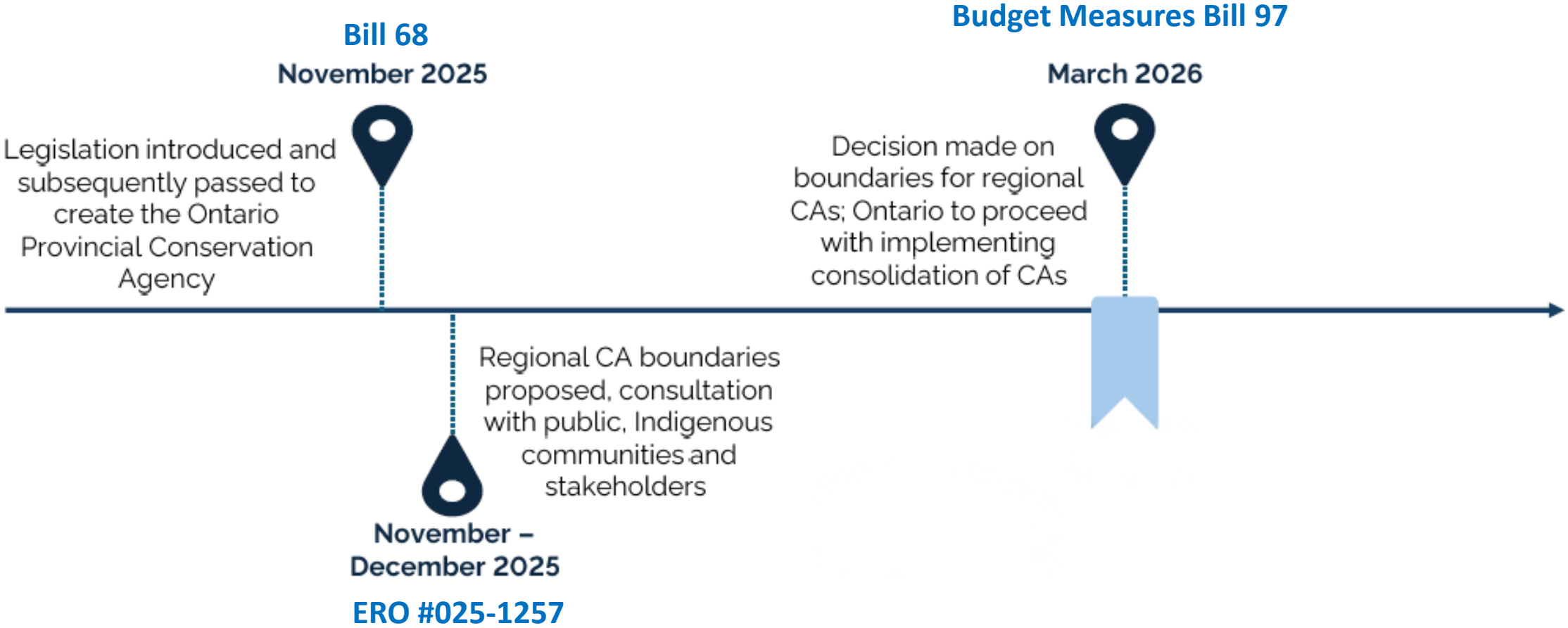
Next Steps:

- Provincial technical briefings to follow
- Regulatory amendments
- Further guidance on transition process and timelines

Transition Process Timeline



Provincial Process to Date



2026 Ontario Budget – A Plan to Protect Ontario (Schedule 3)

- Budget Bill (released March 26, 2026) confirms changes to the *Conservation Authorities Act* from the March 10 Announcement
- Passed first reading March 26 and second reading passed today, April 2
- Implementing regulations will follow, after Bill passes
- Timeline detail: Predecessor authorities will appoint representatives to the Transition Committee within 90 days of budget receiving royal assent
- If appointments are not made within 90 days, the OPCA will appoint

Budget Bill: Transition Committee & Continuity

Appointments & Transition Planning

- Appointments include one municipal councillor and one CAO/GM **or** senior staff member
- Transition plans will be developed and submitted to OPCA for review
- If a transition plan is not completed, the OPCA will develop one
- Once finalized, summaries will be shared with municipalities and predecessor authorities

Operational Continuity *(All current work continues)*

- Permit applications underway continue with the new Authority
- Hearings and legal proceedings initiated under predecessor Authorities continue
- Provincial Offences Officer appointments carry forward
- All current advisory boards continue under the new Authority
- Employment of employees at predecessor (current) CAs is continuous in the new Authorities



Our Work Continues

- **Business continues as usual** — the work staff undertake every day remains incredibly important to the watershed and community as we continue to protect people and property from natural hazards, conserve natural areas and provide meaningful access to nature
- MECP Information Session scheduled April 9 for Chairs and CAOs outlining the proposed transition path and key milestones
- Transition Committees will be established this Spring to guide implementation
 - HCA CAO and Chair will participate alongside peer Conservation Authorities
- Many implementation details are expected to be shared by OPCA, shaped through regulations and the work of Transition Committees including:
 - Integration approach across regions
 - Governance and reporting structures
 - Branding and organizational identity
 - Alignment of policies, programs, and fee structures
 - Relationships with our foundations
- We will engage constructively, adapt as needed, and keep Board and staff informed as the Province's transition process evolves

Thank you

Lisa Burnside CAO

