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To:

The Honourable Todd J. McCarthy,
Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks
Legislative Building, Queen's Park
Toronto, ON M7A 1A2

CC:

The Honourable Lisa Thompson, MPP for Huron–Bruce

Dear Minister McCarthy,

On behalf of the Huron Clean Water Project Review Committee, I am writing to express concern regarding the Province's proposal to regionalize Ontario's Conservation Authorities and to request that the Province consider the potential impacts of this change on locally delivered stewardship programs such as the Huron Clean Water Project.

On October 31, 2025, the Provincial government announced plans to create a new agency, the Ontario Provincial Conservation Agency (OPCA), with the aim of improving the Province's Conservation Authority system. This agency is proposed to replace the current model of 36 Conservation Authorities across Ontario, with a more regionalized system. The proposed new region for Huron County potentially includes a very large geographical area referred to as the Huron-Superior Regional Conservation Area.

For the past 20 years, Huron County has led the *Huron Clean Water Project*, which provides financial and technical assistance to Huron County residents to improve and protect water quality in Huron County. It is funded by the County of Huron and service delivery is provided by *Ausable Bayfield* and *Maitland Valley Conservation Authorities*.

The Huron Clean Water Project celebrated its 20th year in 2024, with more than 5,000 projects completed to date. Since its inception, Huron County has invested more than \$6.8 million in the Huron Clean Water Project. The local Conservation Authorities assist landowners to access matching funds for stewardship projects. For every dollar

spent from the Huron Clean Water Project, there are \$3.70 of matching funds and landowner investments.

The partnership that the County of Huron has with both local Conservation Authorities is critical to the continued success of the Huron Clean Water Project. Conservation Authority staff have a wide range of technical expertise to inform the implementation of the Huron Clean Water Project's stewardship work such as tree planting and naturalization, wetland creation, innovation in cover cropping, drainage, stormwater management, well and manure storage decommissioning. The Conservation Authorities have excellent extension services. Through this project, local Conservation Authority staff have built trusting relationships with landowners and provide advice on land use practices. It is this local knowledge and trusting relationships with landowners that make this stewardship project so successful.

In addition, local Conservation Authorities deliver excellent programming outside the Huron Clean Water Project that improve water quality and instill a stewardship ethic among Huron County residents, including education and recreation, as well as planning services, flood monitoring and shoreline protection. The innovative Huronview Demonstration Farm is another example of the importance of partnerships with local Conservation Authorities. The Demonstration Farm is owned by the County of Huron, operated by Huron Soil and Crop and monitored by the Ausable Bayfield Conservation Authority. Local Conservation Authority staff play a critical role by providing technical expertise and securing funding to develop and demonstrate science-based agricultural practices at this property.

The Huron Clean Water Project Review Committee is concerned that the proposed regionalized system will affect the delivery of this very successful stewardship program. With Huron County proposed to be included in such a large geographical region, there is a potential loss of local knowledge, landowner relationships, and technical advice that exists with local Conservation Authority staff delivering the Huron Clean Water Project. This may affect capacity for future delivery of the program.

Sincerely,

Jim Dietrich,
Huron County Councillor
Chair of the Huron Clean Water Project