

OFFICE OF THE WARDEN

Corporation of the County of Huron
1 Courthouse Square
Goderich, Ontario N7A 1M2
www.HuronCounty.ca
Phone: 519.524.8394
Toll Free: 1.888.524.8394



Date: December 15, 2025

To: Hon. Todd J McCarthy, Ministry of Environment, Conservation and Parks

Re: Proposed Consolidation of Conservation Authorities: Bill 68 and ERO # 025-1257

On behalf of Huron County Council, I would like to thank the Province of Ontario for the opportunity to provide comments on the proposal to consolidate Ontario's Conservation Authorities into seven Regional Conservation Authorities.

While Huron County Council acknowledges that there is always opportunity to improve systems and processes, including opportunities to streamline service delivery and enhance consistency across jurisdictions, the County has a number of significant concerns regarding the proposed consolidation of local Conservation Authorities into very large regional structures. These concerns centre on the following:

- The potential loss of local knowledge;
- The disruption of long-standing partnerships;
- Reduced capacity to deliver locally responsive programs and services; and
- The loss of a meaningful rural voice within a much larger regional governance framework.

The County of Huron has a long history of productive partnerships with its local Conservation Authorities, and these relationships are foundational to the successful delivery of environmental stewardship, agricultural innovation, land use planning, and natural hazard management across the County.

One example is the [Huron Clean Water Project](#), a 20-year partnership between the County of Huron, the Ausable Bayfield Conservation Authority (ABCA) and the Maitland Valley Conservation Authority (MVCA). Through this program, stewardship projects funded by the County are implemented by Conservation Authority staff with

specialized technical expertise in areas such as tree planting and naturalization, wetland creation, innovative cover cropping practices, drainage, stormwater management, and well and manure storage decommissioning. Over time, local Conservation Authority staff have built strong, trusting relationships with landowners and provide practical, site-specific advice on land use practices. This local knowledge and trust are critical to the program's success. The County is concerned that consolidating Conservation Authorities into a much larger regional entity could reduce the effectiveness and efficiency of this program and impact future delivery capacity.

The [Huronview Demonstration Farm](#) further illustrates the importance of local Conservation Authority partnerships. This innovative 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 key role by providing technical expertise and securing funding to support the development and demonstration of science-based agricultural practices. The success of this project relies on the presence and engagement of Conservation Authority staff who understand local conditions, priorities, and relationships.

Local Conservation Authority staff also work closely with municipal staff across Huron County to deliver planning, permitting, and building services. This collaboration includes coordinated planning policies and zoning provisions, data sharing, joint review of planning applications, and integrated building permit processes. Conservation Authority staff provide specialized technical reviews of studies such as geotechnical reports and undertake critical projects including floodway studies, shoreline management plans, and the current Coastal Adaptation project. Without this expertise, municipalities may be required to increase internal staffing or retain external consultants, creating additional costs and administrative burden. The County is concerned that consolidation could weaken this close working relationship and reduce opportunities for innovative, locally driven projects.

Governance is another area of concern. Currently, Conservation Authority Boards include municipal representation and provide local oversight of policies, programs,

and budgets. Under the proposed changes, it appears that existing Boards may be removed at the end of the current municipal term in October 2026, with new governance structures established following the municipal elections. At this time, it is unclear how municipal representation will be structured within a Regional Conservation Authority spanning a very large geographic area, or how rural municipalities will maintain an effective voice. In addition, the Province has not provided information regarding the costs to municipalities associated with establishing the proposed Provincial Agency or implementing consolidation.

Finally, local Conservation Authorities currently own and maintain approximately 98 properties within Huron County that provide recreational and educational opportunities while protecting valuable wetlands and floodplain areas. While the Province has indicated that Regional Conservation Authorities would continue to own and manage lands and trails, there is uncertainty about whether a larger regional entity will have the capacity or mandate to continue managing this number of local properties over the long term.

For these reasons, the County of Huron urges the Province to carefully consider the implications of consolidation on local partnerships, program delivery, governance, municipal costs, and the preservation of local expertise and relationships. The County strongly believes that local knowledge, trust, and collaboration are essential to effective conservation and watershed management, particularly in rural communities.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide these comments.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jamie Heffer". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Jamie Heffer
Warden, Huron County