

Staff Report

To: Board of Directors

From: Rob Baldwin, Chief Administrative Officer

Date: December 19, 2025

Subject

Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority's submission regarding the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks Environmental Registry Notice No. 025-1257, Proposed Boundaries for the Regional Consolidation of Ontario's Conservation Authorities

Recommendation

Whereas the Provincial Government has amended the *Conservation Authorities Act* through Bill 68 "Plan to Protect Ontario (Budget Measures)" that allows for establishing the Ontario Provincial Conservation Agency to oversee the transition to Regional Conservation Authorities, and direct the strategic direction, finances, and operational activities of the new Regional Conservation Authorities; 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 consolidate Ontario's 36 conservation authorities into 7 regional entities as part of a broader consolidation; and

Whereas under this proposal, the Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority would be consolidated into a new "Huron-Superior Regional Conservation Authority", together with the Nottawasaga Valley Conservation Authority, Grey Sauble Conservation Authority, Saugeen Valley Conservation Authority, Maitland Valley Conservation Authority, Ausable Bayfield Conservation Authority, and Lakehead Region Conservation Authority.

Therefore, be it Resolved That Staff Report No. 40-25-BOD regarding Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority's Environmental Registry of Ontario response to proposed consolidation of Conservation Authorities be received; and

Further that the Attachment A, the Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority's comments letter, be approved for submission by the December 22, 2025 deadline for submissions; and



Further That the Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority recognizes and supports the Province’s desired outcome of improved consistency and modernized digital permitting processes, aligned with its goals and objectives for cutting red tape and getting more homes built faster, and safely; and

Further That the Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority recommends that the Province engages in detailed consultation with all conservation authorities, municipalities, and watershed stakeholders in a meaningful manner and provide the detailed information required to implement such a significant undertaking; and

Further That should the proposed regional consolidation of conservation authorities be implemented, the current implementation of the *Lake Simcoe Protection Act* and Plan by the Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority be transferred to the proposed Huron-Superior Region Conservation Authority; and

Further That should the proposed consolidation proceed, the Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority requests the Province establish consistency between the *Lake Simcoe Protection Act* jurisdiction and the Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority jurisdiction through the inclusion of Upper Talbot River Arm and the portion of the City of Orillia that is within the Lake Simcoe watershed; and

Further That the Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority recommends the removal of the Lakehead Region Conservation Authority from the proposed Huron-Superior Regional Conservation Authority.

Purpose of this Staff Report

The purpose of this Staff Report No. 40-25-BOD is to provide input from the Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority regarding proposed consolidation of Ontario’s 36 Conservation Authorities into 7 regional agencies. This input will be formally provided as a submission in response to the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks Environmental Registry Notice No. 025-1257 (“Proposed Boundaries for the Regional Consolidation of Ontario’s Conservation Authorities”).

Background

The Province has passed legislation to create the Ontario Provincial Conservation Agency, which is intended to oversee consolidation of Ontario’s current 36 Conservation Authorities into seven regional authorities, and over the long term, provide oversight of those regional conservation authorities. The stated objectives behind the proposed changes are to streamline and modernize planning approvals, improve consistency across the Province in agency capacity and service delivery, and reduce the number of agencies municipalities interact with.

The Environmental Registry of Ontario posting provides details of the seven regions and poses a series of questions around the proposed consolidation. The Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority's response to those questions is included in Attachment A.

As proposed, Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority would become part of the Huron Superior Regional Conservation Authority, which includes the Lake Simcoe, Nottawasaga Valley, Grey Sauble, Saugeen Valley, Maitland Valley, Ausable Bayfield, and Lakehead watersheds, and more than 70 municipalities.

Issues

The Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority supports the objectives of modernizing and improving service delivery and is committed to working collaboratively towards those ends with the Province, municipalities, and partner conservation authorities. At the same time, it is recognized that achieving these outcomes will require careful planning, clear direction, and significant coordination to address the many operational, financial, and governance considerations involved.

Board members have expressed concerns over maintaining strong local relationships in a regional agency context. Clear communication and advisory structures will be key to preserving local knowledge and community trust, which are essential for effective conservation work.

While the Lake Huron grouping of watersheds makes sense, inclusion of the Lakehead Region Conservation Authority is not an appropriate inclusion for a variety of reasons including its distant location, creating numerous logistical challenges. Instead, it has more strategic alignment and connections to the Northeastern Ontario Regional Conservation Authority.

Relevance to Conservation Authority Policy

The Province has indicated that the proposed consolidation and the Ontario Provincial Conservation Agency will not change the work that conservation authorities currently perform, nor will it eliminate any of the existing offices. The financial and human resources policies of each existing conservation authority, however, would presumably need to be amalgamated going forward.

Currently there is no direct relevance to Conservation Authority policy as the consolidation of conservation authorities is currently a proposal. If the proposal moves forward to implementation, detailed review of policies, bylaws, assets, and much more will be required to not only plan for transition but also to identify any challenges requiring Board direction during this time.

Impact on Conservation Authority Finances

There currently is no direct impact to Conservation Authority finances as consolidation is in a proposal stage. However, should the proposal proceed, detailed analysis and review of all assets and liabilities will be required, and review of conditions and/or restrictions of Conservation Authority reserves is a must. Currently there are limited details on future funding and finance models for the proposed Regional Conservation Authorities, and as these evolve if consolidation moves forward, staff will ensure to outline these aspects to the Board.

The Province has indicated it will be responsible for the costs of the Ontario Provincial Conservation Agency initially. Over time, operational costs will be apportioned to the seven Regional Conservation Authorities. Transition costs and the mechanisms to share those among partners within the Regional Conservation Authorities are still unclear. The Province has indicated support for the transition, but this is yet to be defined.

Summary and Recommendations

Whereas the Provincial Government has amended the *Conservation Authorities Act* through Bill 68 "Plan to Protect Ontario (Budget Measures)" that allows for establishing the Ontario Provincial Conservation Agency to oversee the transition to Regional Conservation Authorities, and direct the strategic direction, finances, and operational activities of the new Regional Conservation Authorities; 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 consolidate Ontario's 36 conservation authorities into 7 regional entities as part of a broader consolidation; and

Whereas under this proposal, the Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority would be consolidated into a new "Huron-Superior Regional Conservation Authority", together with the Nottawasaga Valley Conservation Authority, Grey Sauble Conservation Authority, Saugeen Valley Conservation Authority, Maitland Valley Conservation Authority, Ausable Bayfield Conservation Authority, and Lakehead Region Conservation Authority, forming a single organization of Lake Huron watershed conservation authorities.

Therefore, be it Resolved That Staff Report No. 40-25-BOD regarding Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority's Environmental Registry of Ontario response to proposed consolidation of Conservation Authorities be received; and

Further that the Attachment A, the Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority's comments letter, be approved for submission by the December 22, 2025 deadline for submissions; and

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Further That the Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority recommends the removal of the Lakehead Region Conservation Authority from the proposed Huron-Superior Regional Conservation Authority.

Signed by

Rob Baldwin
Chief Administrative Officer

Attachments:

1. ERO Comments Letter