

Bill 68 and ERO Posting #025-1257: Proposed boundaries for the regional consolidation of Ontario's conservation authorities

BACKGROUND:

Conservation Authorities deliver a range of services including natural hazard permitting and reviews, drinking water source protection, flood forecasting and warning, management of flood and erosion control infrastructure, low water response coordination, public access to conservation areas and trails, education, and implementation of restoration and resilience projects.

Conservation Ontario is the association of Ontario's Conservation Authorities.

SUMMARY:

Summary of Government Proposals:

1. Bill 68, Plan to Protect Ontario Act (Budget Measures), 2025 (No.2)

- On November 6, 2025, the Ontario government released the 2025 Ontario Economic Outlook and Fiscal Review: A Plan to Protect Ontario, known as the Fall Economic Statement (FES).
- The government also introduced Bill 68, Plan to Protect Ontario Act (Budget Measures), 2025 (No.2) that makes the corresponding legislative changes.
- Through the Bill, the Province proposes amendments to the *Conservation Authorities Act* (CAA) to establish the Ontario Provincial Conservation Agency.
- It is expected this Bill will pass 3rd reading later this month (November 2025).

2. Proposed boundaries for the regional consolidation of Ontario's conservation authorities,

Environmental Registry of Ontario posting #025-1257

- On November 7, 2025, the Ontario government posted ERO Posting #025-1257 on the ERO seeking feedback on proposed boundaries for consolidation of Ontario's 36 conservation authorities into regional conservation authorities, and the criteria applied to inform proposed boundaries.
- The consultation period is currently open and closes on December 22, 2025.
- The province's decision on the number and configuration of regional conservation authorities will be finalized following technical analysis and consideration of the feedback received during this consultation phase.
- Consultation topics include the delineation of regional boundaries, the governance model for the regional CA board, and strategies to ensure continuity of programs and services during the transition to governance under the Regional CA and OPCA.
- Implementation of the new framework is proposed to occur post the October 26, 2026 municipal elections.

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- As proposed, current boards will continue serving until regional authorities are formally constituted.

Lakehead Region Conservation Authority:

The Lakehead Region Conservation Authority (LRCA) was formed in 1963 by an expansion of the Neebing Valley Conservation Authority which was constituted in 1954. The LRCA is one of 36 Conservation Authorities in the Province and one of five in northern Ontario. The LRCA does not abut another conservation authority and is the only Conservation Authority in northwestern Ontario. The LRCA area of jurisdiction includes the City of Thunder Bay, municipalities of Shuniah, Neebing and Oliver Paipooonge and the Townships of O'Connor, Conmee, Dorion and Gillies.

The LRCA owns over 2,500 hectares of land and operates 10 Conservation Areas that are visited by over 500,000 people annually. The LRCA also owns the bed and banks of the Neebing-McIntyre Floodway and conducts all monitoring and maintenance of the Floodway to ensure it delivers flood protection up to the magnitude of the Regional Storm.

The LRCA provides the following mandatory programs: Flood Forecasting and Warning, Low Water, Plan Review, Development Regulations, Water Quality and Quantity Monitoring, CA Owned Land Management, Operation of the Neebing-McIntyre Floodway, Victor Street Erosion Monitoring, Natural Hazard Mapping and Source Water Protection. Non-Mandatory programs provided by the LRCA include: GIS mapping service and water quality sampling on Mosquito and Pennock Creek (fee for service); and Stewardship and Education programming that are self funding with no municipal levy.

As part of the Development Regulations program, the LRCA staff on average issue permits in less than 5 days.

The LRCA is funded approximately 50% by municipal levy, 5% by provincial funding and 45% by self-generated revenue and other external funding that staff apply for and secure annually (programs and projects vary year to year).

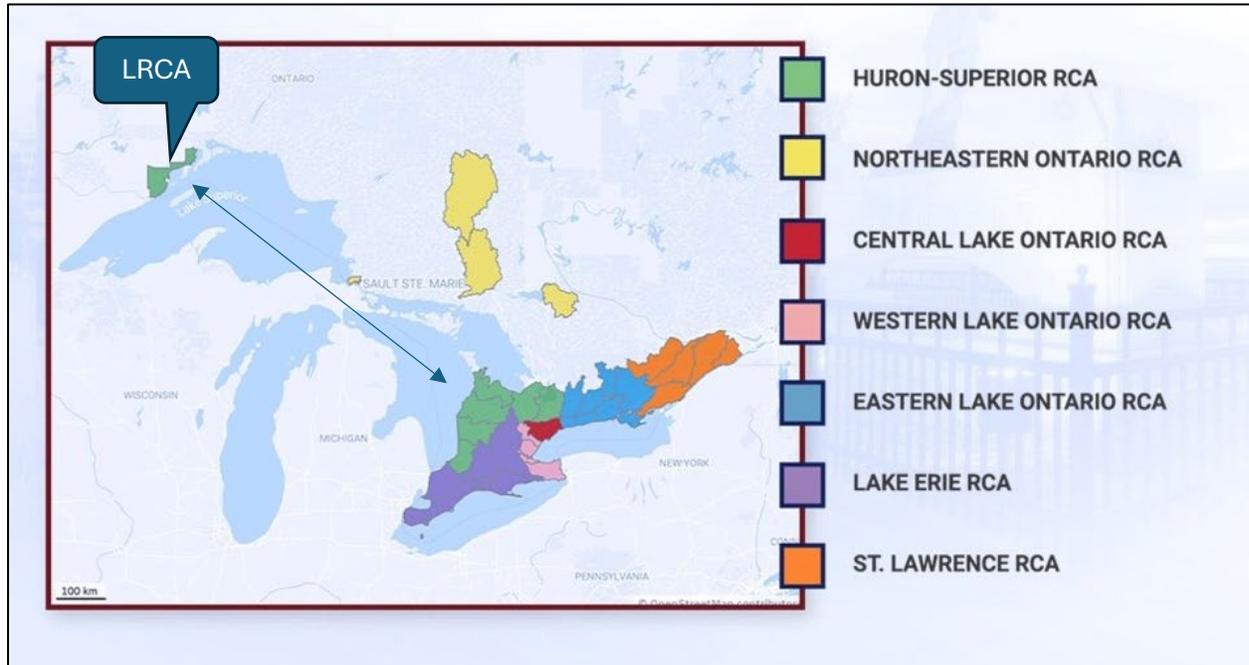
The LRCA owns land and provides programming beyond the area of jurisdiction of the LRCA in the Lakehead Watershed that benefits all of northwestern Ontario including: sea lamprey control, invasive species management (i.e., phragmites, narrow-leaved cattail, etc.), participate in Lake Superior wide groups, grow northwestern Ontario native plants for projects in the north (Seeds for Conservation), Kam River Standing Advisory Committee, Blue-Green Algae research on Lake Superior, migratory bird habitat, species-at-risk monitoring, Boundary Waters Voyageur Waterway – Canadian Heritage River System proposed eastern section River Steward), access to and boat launches on Lake Superior, collaboration and support to neighbouring First Nation Communities, riparian habitat restoration, resource materials, access to educational programming (bird festival, etc.) and general promotion of conservation and protection of the watershed in general.

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Proposed Huron-Superior Regional Conservation Authority

As outlined in ERO Posting #025-1257, the LRCA is proposed to merge into the Huron-Superior Regional Conservation Authority with a total of 80 municipalities and 7 conservation authorities. The majority of the proposed area is 1,300 to 1,500 kilometres/14-16 hours from the LRCA. After consolidation, all assets (i.e. land, etc.), reserves and debt will be merged into one Regional Conservation Authority; there will be one regional budget; and one regional board of directors.

Proposed Regional Conservation Authorities:



LRCA Board of Director Position on Consolidation:

The consolidation of the LRCA within the Huron-Superior Regional Conservation Authority will result in a loss of local direction, governance and prioritization of northwestern Ontario specific pressures and issues. Without local representation, there will be a loss of control of budgeting, no connection to local councils and no understanding of local priorities.

The LRCA Board of Directors opposes the proposed LRCA consolidation with the Huron-Superior Regional Conservation Authority and will be recommending that the LRCA become its own region representing northwestern Ontario.

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Opportunity to provide comment and recommendations:

In addition to Conservation Authorities, as the legislative process advances, municipalities, regional governments, Indigenous communities, and other stakeholders should monitor the consultation process and consider preparing submissions addressing governance structure, funding mechanisms, and approaches to preserving regional expertise and accountability.

A reminder that the commenting period is currently open until December 22, 2025.

Comments can be posted on the ERO posting: <https://ero.ontario.ca/notice/025-1257>.