



Report to: Development Services Committee

Meeting Date: December 9, 2025

SUBJECT: Comments on the Proposed Consolidation of Conservation Authorities and Creation of the Ontario Provincial Conservation Agency

PREPARED BY: Mark Head, Manager, Natural Heritage, Ext. 2005

REVIEWED BY: John Yeh, Senior Manager, Policy and Research, Ext. 7922

RECOMMENDATION:

- 1) That the report dated December 9, 2025, entitled “Comments on the Proposed Consolidation of Conservation Authorities and Creation of the Ontario Provincial Conservation Agency”, be received;
- 2) That this report be forwarded to the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks as the City of Markham comments on the ERO posting of the “Proposed boundaries for the regional consolidation of Ontario’s conservation authorities” (ERO 025-1257);
- 3) That Council support the recommendation that the existing boundaries for the Toronto Region Conservation Authority (proposed to be renamed to the Central Lake Ontario Regional Conservation Authority) be maintained;
- 4) That Council support the recommendation that legislative changes not reduce conservation authority board and municipal autonomy over non-mandatory local programming and services delivered by the new regional conservation authorities;
- 5) That Council support the recommendation that the governance structure for the new Central Lake Ontario Regional Conservation Authority Board maintain the current representation and one-member appointment allocated to the City of Markham;
- 6) That Council support the recommendation that the Province retain the current minimum consultation requirements in the Conservation Authority Act and regulations for the review and approval of conservation authority budgets and not limit the ability for the regional conservation authorities to modify or tailor their budget consultations with member municipalities;
- 7) That Council support the recommendation that the Province undertake further consultation with municipalities and conservation authorities if specific changes are being considered for the conservation authority budget process as currently required under the CA Act;

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- 8) That Council support the recommendation that the Province fully fund the establishment and operation of the new Ontario Provincial Conservation Agency, at no additional cost to municipalities; and
 - 9) That Staff be authorized and directed to do all things necessary to give effect to this resolution.

PURPOSE:

This report provides an overview and comments on proposed conservation authority boundaries and consolidation, the creation of the Ontario Provincial Conservation Agency and provincial discussion questions for endorsement by Council.

OVERVIEW OF PROPOSAL:

On November 6, 2025, the Province introduced the [Plan to Protect Ontario Act \(Budget Measures\), \(2025\) \(No. 2\), \(Bill 68\)](#) along with an ERO posting requesting comments on proposed boundaries to consolidate and establish new regional conservation authorities, the criteria to inform the proposed boundaries, and the following discussion questions from the province on implementation:

- What do you see as key factors to support a successful transition and outcome of regional conservation authority consolidation?
- What opportunities or benefits may come from a regional conservation authority framework?
- Do you have suggestions for how governance could be structured at the regional conservation authority level, including suggestions around board size, make-up and the municipal representative appointment process?
- Do you have suggestions on how to maintain a transparent and consultative budgeting process across member municipalities within a regional conservation authority?
- How can regional conservation authorities maintain and strengthen relationships with local communities and stakeholders?

If passed, the legislation would amend the *Conservation Authorities Act* (CA Act) to create the Ontario Provincial Conservation Agency (OPCA) – a new provincial board-governed agency – to provide strategic direction and oversight of the proposed new regional conservation authorities (CAs) as part of the first phase of legislative amendments. Further amendments to the CA Act will be introduced following initial consultation on the proposed CA boundaries to support further transition. Additional amendments to the CA Act and transition details are anticipated to be announced in 2026.

The proposal would amalgamate the 36 CAs into 7 regional watershed-based CAs and establish a provincial agency to oversee governance, modernize program delivery and standardize development permit approval processes across the regional authorities. The stated objectives of the proposal are to reduce duplicative administrative costs, free-up resources for frontline conservation work, and better align CAs' services with provincial priorities on housing, the economy, infrastructure and climate resilience.

The consultation on proposed boundaries and consolidation of the CAs is included in the Environmental Registry of Ontario posting (ERO 025-1257) with a commenting deadline of December 22, 2025.

Links to the Ministry's proposal are provided in Attachment A.

BACKGROUND:

CAs are created and governed under the provincial *Conservation Authorities Act* as watershed agencies responsible for the conservation of natural resources and the protection of life and property from natural hazards.

Changes to the *Conservation Authorities Act* through the *More Homes, More Choice Act, 2019* (Bill 108) and the *Protect, Support and Recover from COVID-19 Act, 2020* (Bill 229) refocused the roles and responsibilities of CAs to managing the risks of natural hazards and other specified program responsibilities by setting out mandatory programs and services CAs are required to deliver as well as discretionary municipal and other programs and services that CAs may provide on behalf of municipalities or recommend. Programs that are required to be delivered by CAs include: preparing and updating floodplain maps; regulating development within natural hazard areas; development application review as it relates to natural hazards and wetlands; acquisition and management of conservation areas; and source water protection planning.

The City of Markham is entirely located in the jurisdiction of the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority. In May 2023, [staff reported to Council](#) recommending execution of a [Memorandum of Understanding](#) to enable the TRCA to provide discretionary programs and services to the City of Markham on a fee-for-service basis subject to the City's standard procurement process. Mandatory programs and services by TRCA noted above continue to be funded by participating municipalities designated in the CA Act, which for the TRCA includes York Region. The City relies on TRCA to deliver key municipal services including: watershed planning and science, natural hazard planning (flood plain and erosion hazard mapping), land use planning (natural hazard review); recreational opportunities (e.g., Milne Dam Conservation Park); as well as contracted fee-for-service projects and services (e.g., wetland restoration, tree and aquatic planting, invasive species removal, stormwater management advice/maintenance, installation of trails, bridges and culverts, environmental research).

DISCUSSION:**No changes are proposed to the mandate and responsibilities of conservation authorities**

Under consolidation, the new regional CAs would remain as independent authorities with municipal governance and oversight through their board of directors in accordance with requirements under the *Conservation Authorities Act*, as administered by the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks. The regional CAs would continue to fulfill provincially mandated programs and services and continue to deliver additional discretionary municipal and other watershed programs and services as set out under the *Conservation Authorities Act*.

Although there are no proposed legislative changes to the mandate or responsibilities of CAs, there are potential implications to on-the-ground program delivery and resourcing associated with the creation of the Ontario Provincial Conservation Agency which are discussed later in report.

36 conservation authorities will be consolidated into 7 regional conservation authorities

The Province proposes to amalgamate the 36 local CAs into 7 regional CAs.

The consolidation of CAs is being guided by the following criteria:

- **Maintaining watershed-based jurisdictions** aligned with natural hydrological boundaries to support effective flood and water management
- **Reducing administrative duplication and overlap** for municipalities to simplify accountability and strengthen local partnerships
- **Balancing technical expertise and capacity** across the regional CAs to improve service and program delivery
- **Ensuring service continuity** and uninterrupted delivery of conservation authority programs during and after consolidation

As currently proposed, the City of Markham will remain with the TRCA's jurisdictional boundary which is not changing. Under the proposal, the TRCA will be renamed to the Central Lake Ontario Regional Conservation Authority.

From staff's perspective, maintaining existing boundaries for the TRCA is beneficial and supported as it would avoid the potential for TRCA staffing and resources to be reallocated to service a larger regional jurisdiction. It is important that TRCA maintains efficient and responsive programming and levels of service focused on local service delivery with staff having local knowledge of Markham's watersheds and development needs.

Recommendation: That the existing boundaries for the Toronto Region Conservation Authority (proposed to be renamed to the Central Lake Ontario Regional Conservation Authority) be maintained.

Further information on the consolidation of the 36 CAs including mapping of the boundaries for the proposed new regional authorities is provided in Attachment B.

Legislative changes should not reduce CA board and municipal autonomy over local programming and services delivered by the new regional conservation authorities

The OPCA is intended to provide centralized leadership and oversight for all CAs including the proposed consolidation of local CAs. The agency will be tasked with leading modernization projects such as a centralized digital permitting platform and standardizing review standards and timelines for development permits. The OPCA would appear to most directly benefit smaller conservation authorities in rural and less populated areas which lack resources to implement measures such as digital permitting, floodplain modelling and open source floodplain maps.

Although a consolidation of CAs into regional authorities has the potential to expand specialized support and expertise to under-resourced areas, changes in the legislation will insert greater provincial oversight that may potentially reduce CA board and municipal autonomy over local programming and operations. For example, provisions in

the Bill will give the OPCA specific authority to issue directions and actions governing the operations of the regional CAs, including the programs and services they provide.

At this time, full details of the legislative amendments have not been released. While a fulsome review of implications to the City of Markham cannot be completed, City staff are generally supportive of efforts to modernize program delivery and review standards across the Province. These improvements should continue to support and not impact municipal governance, oversight and standards or municipally requested and funded programming and services. Municipalities like the City of Markham have established strong environmental protection standards and programs in partnership with CAs. Ongoing efforts to streamline review standards should not result in the weakening of public health and safety standards and protections.

Recommendation: Legislative changes should not reduce CA board and municipal autonomy over non-mandatory local programming and services delivered by the new regional CAs.

The review of governance structure for the new regional conservation authorities should continue to provide representation from member municipalities and not reduce the number of municipal members allocated to York Region municipalities

The consultation on the creation of the regional CAs is seeking feedback on how governance could be structured at the regional conservation authority level, including suggestions related to board size, make-up and municipal representation. The TRCA Board of Directors is made up of 28 members appointed by the respective councils of participating municipalities including 5 member appointments allocated to the Region of York's lower-tier municipalities. Currently, Regional Councillor Joe Li sits as the City of Markham's representative on the TRCA Board. This current structure is designed to provide representation from member municipalities across the watershed.

Recommendation: That the governance structure for the new Central Lake Ontario Regional Conservation Authority Board maintain the current representation and one-member appointment allocated to the City of Markham.

The Province is seeking input on how to maintain a transparent and consultative budgeting process across member municipalities within a regional conservation authority

The *Conservation Authorities Act* and associated regulations require CAs to follow a transparent budget process. This process includes approval and circulation of draft and final budgets by CA boards, which are composed of municipal representatives, and approval of municipal levies by participating municipalities. For York Region, this responsibility rests with York Region Council for amounts apportioned to municipalities within the Region.

In addition, the Act requires CAs to enter into memoranda of understanding (MOUs) with municipalities for non-mandatory programs and services that are either levied separately or funded on a fee-for-service basis. These requirements provide municipalities with direct control over funding decisions for these specific services.

CAs must circulate draft budgets to participating municipalities for review and comment and provide 30 days' notice before holding the board meeting to vote on the final

municipal apportionment portion of the budget, ensuring municipalities are aware of the decision-making process. The TRCA's current budget process is transparent and follows regulations in accordance with the CA Act. Under the current CA Act, there are no restrictions that would prevent the TRCA from extending consultation on their annual budget beyond minimum legislative requirements if needed or requested.

Recommendation: The Province retain the current minimum consultation requirements in the CA Act and regulations for the review and approval of CA budgets and not limit the ability for the regional CAs to modify or tailor their budget consultations with member municipalities.

Recommendation: The Province undertake further consultation with municipalities and CAs if specific changes are being considered for the budget process as currently required under the CA Act.

Provincial funding should be provided to support the establishment and operation of the OPCA

Bill 68 proposes to establish the OPCA as a board-governed agency with provincially appointed members responsible for providing strategic direction and oversight to conservation authorities, including aligning their programs and services with provincial priorities. The Bill also enables the Agency's costs to be apportioned to the new regional CAs, which will ultimately levy these costs to participating municipalities.

As responsibilities of the new Agency will be to provide advice to the Province and implement directions from the Minister, provincial funding should be provided to support the establishment and ongoing operation of the Agency. The Bill 68 amendments currently propose that the Minister may provide funding. A stronger commitment that the Province fully fund the operation of the Agency should be considered.

Recommendation: That the Province fully fund the establishment and operation of the new Ontario Provincial Conservation Agency, at no additional cost to municipalities.

NEXT STEPS

Staff will continue to monitor and respond to the legislative proposals implementing the Ontario Provincial Conservation Agency and governance framework for the new Central Lake Ontario Regional Conservation Authority and report back as needed.

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

This report has no immediate or direct financial impact to the Operating Budget or Life Cycle Reserve Study. However, if the Province does not fully fund the establishment and operation of the new Ontario Provincial Conservation Agency the resulting costs may need to be funded additionally through the TRCA's levy to York Region.

HUMAN RESOURCES CONSIDERATIONS

Not applicable.

ALIGNMENT WITH STRATEGIC PRIORITIES:

Not applicable.

BUSINESS UNITS CONSULTED AND AFFECTED:

Planning, Engineering, Environmental Services, Finance and Legal staff were consulted in the preparation of this report.

RECOMMENDED BY:

Giulio Cescato, RPP, MCIP
Director, Planning and Urban Design

Trinela Cane
Acting Commissioner, Development
Services

ATTACHMENTS:

- Attachment A – Environmental Registry of Ontario (ERO) posting of proposed boundaries for the regional consolidation of Ontario's Conservation Authorities
- Attachment B – Boundaries of the Proposed Regional Conservation Authorities