

Comments to the provincial government's *Proposed boundaries for the regional consolidation of Ontario's conservation authorities*

The Province of Ontario's Environmental Registry posting ERO #025-1257 proposes amendments to the Conservation Authorities Act and seeks feedback on consolidating Ontario's 36 Conservation Authorities into seven larger regional bodies governed by a new provincial agency.

Ottawa Riverkeeper has serious concerns regarding the impact these proposed amendments will have on Eastern Ontario's rivers, lakes, and wetlands that make up one third of the Ottawa River watershed (two thirds of which are located within Quebec). Conservation Authorities provide a deep understanding of the local waterways within their purview, sharing that information and analysis with communities. This "ground up" approach was integral in the establishment of Conservation Authorities and this remains an important role for these organizations.

Within Eastern Ontario, Conservation Authorities work closely with smaller municipalities creating long-standing municipal partnerships that ensure watershed programs reflect local conditions, priorities, and risks. The proposed amendments would shift this decision-making authority to provincially-controlled regional bodies, reducing municipal oversight of the services that municipalities fund and rely on. The proposed structure would not only merge large urban centres such as Ottawa, Kingston, and Cornwall into a single Conservation Authority but the representation on the board—allocated based on municipal levy contributions—would heavily favour these cities. Rural municipalities, despite representing the majority of the land base and facing some of the most complex natural hazard,

agricultural, shoreline, and land-use challenges, would hold minimal influence. This risks marginalizing rural communities and undermining balanced decision-making.

When considering these amendments it is critical to note that structural changes alone will not improve watershed protection; restoring reliable provincial funding for watershed science, hazard management, monitoring, and climate resilience is also required.

The proposed groupings of Conservation Authorities do not consider the specific needs and unique challenges across regions. For example, Eastern Ontario has a vibrant Franco-Ontarian population that requires unique communication strategies. In addition there are a number of distinct natural resources, hydrology, and geology in this part of the province. Conservation Authorities along the Ottawa River (SNC, RVCA, and MVCA) already coordinate land use planning reviews, watershed monitoring, and joint delivery of stewardship programs and these collaborations extend to natural hazard management. They work closely with the Ottawa River Secretariat and municipalities to monitor river conditions, share data, and deliver coordinated flood forecasting and communications—demonstrating that effective, science-based watershed management already occurs across jurisdictions without restructuring.

Healthy watersheds are the foundation of healthy communities and strong local economies. The Province's goal of improving service delivery, strengthening natural hazard management, and enhancing digital permitting tools to help streamline the development process can be achieved within the existing Ontario's Conservation Authority system, honouring the great work many of these groups already deliver.

About Ottawa Riverkeeper

Ottawa Riverkeeper, a charitable organization, is a champion and collective voice for the Ottawa River watershed, providing leadership and inspiration to protect, promote and improve its ecological health and future.



We are a citizen-based action group that brings diverse people together to better understand and advocate for the ecological health of the Ottawa River and its tributaries. This includes the acknowledgement of the rights of the Algonquin Anishinabeg Nations within the watershed and a commitment to working together to build good relationships and shared understandings on water protection.

Expert and independent, our organization advocates for responsible and participatory decision-making, public education, access to information, and compliance with protective regulations. Guided by a science-based approach, we provide clear information with the aim to engage the public and empower citizens and decision-makers to ensure clean, healthy, and accessible water for all people and species.

Ottawa Riverkeeper is a licensed member of Waterkeeper Alliance, an international grassroots advocacy organization. Waterkeeper Alliance is the largest organization devoted exclusively to clean water, protecting 2.7 million miles of waterways with more than 300 Waterkeepers in 47 countries.