

# NORTHWATCH

December 11, 2025

Public Input Coordinator  
MECP Conservation and Source Protection Branch  
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ERO #025-1257

## Re. **Proposed boundaries for the regional consolidation of Ontario's conservation authorities**

On November 7<sup>th</sup> the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks posted a proposal on Ontario's Environmental Registry for a 45 day comment period that outlined a massive overhaul of the boundaries for Ontario's conservation authority (CA) system.

The posting described the purpose as being to “improve the conservation authority (CA) system to free up resources for front-line service delivery to help protect communities and better align the work of CAs with provincial priorities” but provided no information that suggested the system would be improved or that resources would be freed up for actual service delivery. All indications are that the proposal would have the opposite effect.

The proposal describes the current system of 36 separate conservation authorities as being “fragmented, with each conservation authority following different policies, standards, fees and levels of staffing and technical capabilities” but provides no evidence of this or any indication that the proposed collapse of 36 authorities into just seven would improve system operations at the provincial or at the local level.

Northwatch is a regional non-governmental organization based in northeastern Ontario, with members and interests in the six federal districts of Nipissing, Timiskaming, Cochrane, Sudbury, Algoma and Manitoulin. As such our comments will focus on the proposal as it pertains to northern Ontario.

The newly proposed “Northeastern Ontario Regional Conservation Authority” would be comprised of all of the conservation authorities in the northeast, described in the proposal as being “across major watershed areas that span parts of Northern Lake Huron, the Abitibi, Missinaibi, Mattagami, Wanipitai, French, and Upper Ottawa River systems”.

For northeastern Ontario, the existing conservation authorities for North Bay-Mattawa, Timmins, Sudbury and Sault Ste. Marie will be merged into the “Northeastern Regional Conservation Authority”. Note that it will not actually be northeastern – conservation authority services will still be available only to the four currently existing municipally based (and funded) areas. The gaps between conservation authority coverage areas will remain.



Map of Proposed Northeastern Ontario Regional Conservation Authority  
**NORTHEASTERN ONTARIO REGIONAL CONSERVATION AUTHORITY**



Extraordinarily, the Thunder Bay Conservation Authority will be merged into the “Huron Superior Regional Conservation Authority”, making Thunder Bay the sole northern region grouped with six southern Lake Huron area authorities in a region spanning from well east of Collingwood to south of Grand Bend.

By all appearances, this is another move to reduce local autonomy and insert a layer of upper management bureaucracy, with the merger of 36 conservation authorities across the province into 7 regional bodies and the creation of a new provincial agency to centralize control.

The province says these consolidations will boost efficiency, modernize tools like flood mapping, and speed up development approvals. But conservation staff and environmental experts warn the plan could weaken local expertise, replace community-based watershed decisions with distant bureaucracy, and force “one-size-fits-all” rules onto very different ecosystems.

We have reviewed the ER Proposal and the supporting document. We found no justification in these documents, and no information supporting the claim that this will result in any improvement to Conservation Authorities’ ability to deliver on their important mission.

We urge the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks to withdraw this proposal, to engage in actual consultation with communities and Conservation staff, and develop a proposal that will support the Conservation Authorities in delivering and expanding on their mission. In the case of northeastern Ontario, this would include expansion to beyond the current municipal areas with CA coverage. This expansion will require additional support from the province, given that municipalities cannot be expected to fund services outside their boundaries, but much of northern Ontario is without coverage.

Thank you for your consideration.

  
Brennain Lloyd  
Northwatch Project Coordinator