



OFSC Submission

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

The OFSC appreciates the opportunity to make this submission in favour of proposed changes to improve the conservation authority system as per the posting on the Environmental Registry of Ontario by the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks.

The OFSC is a volunteer-led not-for-profit corporation that delivers two programs in partnership with the Ministry of Transportation – the Ontario Snowmobile Permit Program and the Driver Training Program. These programs rely on the maintenance and availability of approximately 30,000km of Prescribed Snowmobile Trails across Ontario. To ensure network connectivity, volunteers from approximately 178 snowmobile clubs reach land use agreements with both private and public landowners. This range of landowners consists of large corporations, government ministries and municipalities right down to individual farmers.

The OFSC agrees with the proposed details in the posting that “the current system of 36 separate conservation authorities is fragmented, with each conservation authority following different policies, standards, fees and levels of staffing and technical capabilities.”

The main issue for the OFSC is land use on conservation authority lands. Many conservation authorities are happy to work with local snowmobile clubs on an agreement and see the benefits of having the riding public experience their area. However, this policy is not enacted across all conservation authorities and this has led to the removal of some trails based on local decisions. The OFSC would like to see a consistent and efficient land use policy approach which may be attainable if there are less conservation authorities to deal with.

One example of the challenges in dealing with dozens of conservation authorities comes from OFSC District 9. Over many years, snowmobile clubs in this District have invested significant volunteer time and financial resources into infrastructure improvements on conservation authority lands, providing upgrades that benefit both snowmobilers and other recreational users. These investments are dollars and volunteer effort that the conservation authorities did not have to spend, helping support public infrastructure at no cost to the conservation authorities. Despite this, some clubs have been unable to maintain permission to use these lands due to individual conservation authority requirements beyond the capacity of volunteer-led snowmobile clubs, inconsistent lines of communication, and frequent staff changes. These challenges have limited the clubs' ability to operate effectively. Access to conservation lands is critical to our organization: it enhances safety by keeping snowmobilers off roads, increases recreational opportunities, and supports the economic vitality of small communities. The new Regional Conservation Authority model can strengthen relationships with local snowmobile clubs by recognizing these contributions, applying policies consistently, and working collaboratively to establish clear, achievable requirements that reflect the realities and limited resources of volunteer-based not for profit snowmobile clubs.

With regards to the specific questions raised in the registry posting, the OFSC offers the following:

- The key factor in a successful transition and outcome of regional conservation authority consolidation is an efficient and effective system which implements the same policies where possible.
- The benefits of a regional conservation authority framework include consistent implementation of land use management.
- The OFSC does not propose any governance recommendations.
- The OFSC does not propose any budgeting recommendations.
- The sharing of information between regional conservation authorities would help strength relationships with stakeholders such as the OFSC. It is difficult for local snowmobile clubs to understand why snowmobiling is permitted in one conservation authority but not the next.

The OFSC looks forward to continuing its work with all conservation authorities regardless of the results of this registry posting but does prefer to proceed in an effective and efficient manner.

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