

# Conservation Ontario Submission to the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs



## INTRODUCTION:

- Conservation Authorities are community based, resource management organizations working on a watershed basis.
- Almost 90% of Ontario's population (approximately 10.5 million) is located within a Conservation Authority's jurisdiction where resource issues and user conflicts are greatest. It is also where a joint provincial-municipal investment is needed most.
- CAs have a strong track record of partnering with all levels of government to deliver community based, practical solutions to a range of natural resource problems (e.g. drought, flood, natural heritage protection, Great Lakes water quality protection, and more recently, source water protection).

## Source Protection Planning

- We all know about the tragedy in Walkerton in 2000. What happened in Walkerton reinforces the absolute essential that drinking water must be protected at its source. **A clean environment and clean water are integral to human health and economic stability. They must continue to be core priorities for the government.**
- The passage of the **Clean Water Act** in October 2006 is **an important step** in protecting drinking water. Conservation Ontario is a strong supporter of the legislation and has already begun working on implementing the Act. The **funding currently** being provided by the Government has **enabled Conservation Authorities to begin the critical technical studies that will support Source Water Protection Plan development.** However, **drinking water sources will only be protected once plans are completed and successfully implemented.** The first plans will be completed in 2010, while the Government's **current funding commitment ends March 2008. An ongoing funding commitment is critical to ensuring safe drinking water sources.**

## Watershed Stewardship

- Our experience has been that although legislation and regulations are important to achieving compliance, **incentive programs are critical to change rural management practices.** The **2006 provincial announcement of \$7 million** in actions targeted on source water protection will result in improvements in water quality and is a **good first step.**

- Conservation Authorities have a long history of delivering programs that provide expertise and financial assistance to landowners to improve water quality. Over the years, these **efforts have been financed through municipal funding, as well as, provincial and federal funding programs** related to improving Great Lakes water quality (e.g. Canada-Ontario Agreement) and to support best management practices in the agricultural sector. **A long-term sustainable funding commitment is required to see real improvements in water quality on the rural landscape and extending out to the Great Lakes.** Of specific concern, is the **approaching expiry of the Great Lakes Canada-Ontario Agreement in March 2007** and, the **associated loss of 2007/2008 funding support for actions** to protect and restore Healthy Great Lakes.

### Aging Infrastructure

- Some will remember Hurricane Hazel in 1954 when 81 people died and 1800 were left homeless as a huge storm passed through Southern Ontario causing millions of dollars in property damage (about \$1 billion in today's dollars). After this, **public infrastructure was built to prevent flooding and erosion** and flood plain regulations were established. Conservation Authorities were key agencies in implementing these public safety initiatives of senior Governments.
- **Significantly aging CA infrastructure** (more than 800 structures - e.g. dams, channels, dykes, erosion control works - with an **estimated replacement value of well over \$800 M**) **needs maintenance to continue to protect lives and property.** An **ongoing multi-year provincial program of at least \$5 million/year is required** to allow for proper project planning, design and approval for additional improvements.
- **Your Government has provided \$5 million per year** towards the funding of capital maintenance of CA Water and Erosion Control Infrastructure. Every year, 27-30 Conservation Authorities ensure that this was matched with an **equal share of local funding.** This represents a **\$10 million annual investment in public safety infrastructure** and we encourage you to **continue your contribution to this important investment.**

### Floodplain Mapping

- The **flood hazard control and avoidance system in Ontario is recognized as outstanding.** An Environment Canada comparative analysis of Michigan and Ontario showed that Ontario's approach saves hundreds of millions of dollars annually.
- The current **system of preventing development in flood/erosion hazard areas** must be **maintained and updated for ongoing effectiveness.** Hazard mapping in Ontario is required in support of the natural hazards provincial policy statement under the *Planning Act* and the Section 28 Regulation under the *Conservation Authorities Act.* **Originally,** much of the **mapping was completed** under the Federal Damage Reduction Program (FDRP) **with 45% federal and 45% provincial funding.** Much of the current floodplain **mapping** is up to 20 years old and **needs to be updated.** **Accuracy of this mapping protects life, reduces**

property damage, and, minimizes disaster and emergency response costs. A significant investment is required in this program to prevent future problems. Conservation Authorities, cooperatively with the Insurance Industry, will be developing detailed cost estimates for this program in 2007 and will be seeking financial support from all levels of government.

### **Provincial Flood & Erosion Control Section 39 Transfer Payments (Ministry of Natural Resources)**

- **At the current funding levels in Ontario, our collective ability to protect lives and property from natural hazards is diminishing.** This continuing problem is due to the significant shortfall in annual funding provided through the Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR) for the various **mandated programs that Conservation Authorities deliver (e.g. flood control, erosion control, and flood forecasting and warning)**. Current funding is \$7.6 million.
- Conservation Ontario summarized this funding shortfall across all CAs, including a re-examination of provincial interest programs that are currently excluded from funding. The details are provided in a report [entitled “Submission to the Minister of Natural Resources: Re-investment in Ontario’s Conservation Authorities – Now and in the Future”] **submitted to the Minister of Natural Resources** in July 2004. **In this 2004 report, the provincial shortfall for 2005 was projected to be \$13.8 million dollars.**
- The shortfall is calculated from total costs of delivery of programs from 2002 audited financial statements of the CAs and assumes that the province pays 50% of the total cost of delivery. It excludes capital for major maintenance of existing infrastructure, which is addressed separately under “Aging Infrastructure” and it excludes upgrading of the regulatory mapping mentioned previously.
- It is a **conservative estimate** and Conservation Ontario has **updated this shortfall amount against the 2005 audited financial statements of Ontario’s Conservation Authorities.** **The provincial shortfall for 2007 is projected to be \$14.3 million dollars.**
- The Province has cut MNR transfer payments to the CAs by 87% since 1992 when \$58.9 million was transferred. There have been no further cuts and more significantly, no further increases to the MNR flood and erosion control transfer payments since 1999. CAs are **asking the province to reinvest** in conservation and **match the contributions being made by member municipalities for those provincial interest programs examined in our review.** **88% of our member municipalities** have passed resolutions in **support** of this report.

### **Outdoor Education**

- Twenty seven of Ontario’s 36 Conservation Authorities currently provide hands-on, curriculum-related outdoor education programming to more than 400,000 school children

annually. At present, these programs are funded by the school boards/school classes through user fees, Conservation Authorities through municipal levy, and private donation.

- On behalf of Conservation Ontario, a proposal has been submitted to the Ontario Ministries of Environment and Education, to fund up to \$2 million per year for children's outdoor education programs, relating specifically to Source Water Protection. This represents up to \$12 per child to enable the participation of every student in one grade level throughout the province. At this stage it is proposed that this funding would flow through school boards, thus leveraging the significant current investment in existing programs.

## **CONCLUSION**

**Conservation Authorities embody a partnership of the provincial and municipal governments focused on addressing some of our most pressing water and other natural resource management issues. For this arrangement to work in an efficient, effective and equitable manner, many of the financial pressures outlined above must be given due consideration by the Government. The health, well-being and livelihood of current and future generations depend on it.**

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