

Conservation Authorities Act under discussion and review

Conservation authorities are participating in the discussion and review of the Conservation Authorities Act, as announced by the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry.

“The role of conservation authorities around Ontario's natural resources has changed significantly over the years in response to increasing challenges to our water and land resources,” said Kim Gavine, general manager of Conservation Ontario. “Stresses such as climate change, rapid growth, and changing land uses significantly challenge the health of Ontario's watersheds. The work of conservation authorities has had to change in order to reflect this and we expect to see this discussed through the review of the Conservation Authorities Act.”

Ontario's 36 Conservation Authorities are local watershed management agencies that deliver a wide variety services and programs that protect and manage water and other natural resources in partnership with all levels of government, agencies, industry and landowners.

The original Conservation Authorities Act was established in 1946. Some amendments have been made over time, including those in the 1990s which addressed local programs, fees, partnerships and other areas. In 2006, the scope of Conservation Authorities' regulatory responsibilities changed to encompass additional water related hazards.

The Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry has posted a discussion paper for a 91-day comment period. The Ministry states that the objective for this review is to “improve the legislative, regulatory and policy framework that currently governs the creation, operation and activities of conservation authorities that may be required in the face of a changing environment.”

The discussion paper highlights and solicits feedback around three areas of interest: governance, funding mechanisms, and roles and responsibilities of conservation authorities.

“We look forward to having discussions with many different partners throughout this process,” Gavine said. “Conservation authorities are committed to improving and streamlining watershed management in Ontario in order to ensure sustainable natural resources which are needed to support a vibrant economy, strong environment, and healthy people.”