

CVC concerned over proposed changes to the Conservation Authorities Act

Written By BRIAN LOCKHART

Ontario Premier Doug Ford's planned changes to the Conservation Authorities Act has conservation authorities around the province concerned that Bill 229 will remove their ability to effectively do their job.

The new rules would allow the minister of natural resources to take over some decision making on developments as well as allow developers to appeal conservation authorities decision directly to the minister who could then overturn them.

The new rules could possibly allow the province to push aside concerns raised by environmental scientists.

The Ford government said the changes are aimed at speeding up the approval process for small, environmentally insignificant projects.

Ford told reporters, 'We aren't going to dodge environmental assessments or anything,' after the proposed changes were made public.

Ford made reference to an unspecified company that he said took a \$500 million project to Ohio instead of investing in Ontario. However, that project could not be verified.

Credit Valley Conservation (CVC) said the changes are a present 'potential risks to people, property and the environment.'

CVC is one of 36 conservation authorities in Ontario and is responsible for the Island Lake Conservation area as well as ten other conservation areas in the region.

A statement from the CVC said, 'the proposed changes would reduce the effectiveness of conservation authorities to protect the natural environment as well as public health and safety. These changes serve to erode our ability to manage lands containing natural hazards and wetlands, build flood resilience in the face of climate change and preserve critical natural features.'

The CVC said key concerns include authorizing the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry to issue an order to take over and decide a development permit application in place of a conservation authority.

They also say the new rules would eliminate the provision for conservation authorities to issue stop work orders to help stop significant threats to life, property, and environmentally sensitive areas.

While proposed bill is almost certain to pass, conservation authorities are waiting for more information to fully understand how changes will be implemented.