

Bill 68 and the Proposed Consolidation of Conservation Authorities

Board of Directors
December 5, 2025

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Chief Administrative Officer



Lake Simcoe Region
conservation authority



Summary of Ontario Government's Proposal

- October 31, 2025 – Media Release and Announcement
- November 6, 2025 – Bill 68, Plan to Protect Ontario Act (Budget Measures), 2025 (No.2)
 - Conservation Authorities Act (CAA) Amendments to establish the Ontario Provincial Conservation Agency
- November 7, 2025 – ERO posting #025-1257 – Proposed Boundaries and criteria for Regional Consolidation of Conservation Authorities
 - Comments Due December 22, 2025

Ontario Government's Plan to Improve the Conservation Authority System

- Amending the CAA to create a provincial board-governed agency
- The Ontario Provincial Conservation Agency will provide province-wide coordination, shared digital and technical resources, and consistent practices to strengthen the work of regional conservation authorities
- Proposed boundaries for consolidation would result in the existing 36 CAs becoming 7 regional CAs

Why these Changes?

- **Patchwork of standards, service delivery:** Each CA has different policies, customer service standards, fees, processes, staffing and technical capacity
 - leads to unpredictable and inconsistent turnaround times, delays, inconsistencies and uncertainty for those seeking permits
- **Outdated and fragmented systems:** Discrepancies in the tools and technology that CAs use have led to varying types and quality of technology and data management
 - This can compromise effective provincewide flood risk management and evidence-based decision making
- **Administrative duplication:** Under the current framework, municipalities are funding duplicate corporate functions (e.g. procurement), diverting costs away from front-line conservation and service delivery
- **Need for more accountability and transparency:** Lack of consistent and transparent performance monitoring and reporting, and customer service standards

Anticipated outcomes:

- More resources for front-line services
- Improve flood management and erosion prevention
- Strong environmental protections maintained
- Faster permit approvals
- Modern service delivery
- Consistent standards and use of modern technology

What is not changing:

- Governance model – regional CAs will continue to be independent, municipally-governed organizations. Member municipalities will continue to be represented on a board and retain full governance responsibilities
- Areas currently served by CAs will continue to be served by CAs
- Programs and services CAs provide, including source water protection, natural hazard and watershed management
- CA ownership and management of their lands and trails, providing access to green spaces, recreation and education programs
- Where and how CAs receive funding (e.g. municipal levy) including board approval of final budgets

Bill 68 – Plan to Protect Ontario

Amendments to the *Conservation Authorities Act* to Establish the Ontario Provincial Conservation Agency

Amendments to *Conservation Authorities Act*

- Proposed creation of a new **Ontario Provincial Conservation Agency** to provide centralized leadership and oversight of conservation authorities
- **Schedule 3 of Bill 68** includes proposed amendments to establish the Ontario Provincial Conservation Agency, including:
 - Establishing the objects of the agency
 - Setting out the governance of the proposed agency
 - Establishing tools for agency oversight of conservation authorities
 - Establishing provincial oversight of the agency
 - Setting out sources of agency funding
- **Bill 68** has received 3rd Reading

Objects of the Agency

1. Oversee the governance of CAs and other aspects of CAs such as their operations, including the programs and services they provide, to further the purposes of the Conservation Authorities Act
2. Oversee the transition to a regional watershed-based framework for CAs in Ontario
3. Promote consistent policies, standards and fees for programs and services provided by CAs
4. Assess and report on the effectiveness of CAs in furthering the conservation, restoration, development and management of natural resources in watersheds in Ontario, including outcomes related to the implementation of their programs and services
5. Oversee and evaluate the financial performance of CAs to ensure their long-term operational and capital financial sustainability, including the financial sustainability of their programs and services required under section 21.1
6. Guide and evaluate the strategic planning by CAs to ensure it aligns with provincial objectives
7. Support the development and implementation of a standardized and centralized system for processing applications for permits issued by CAs
8. Lead the development and implementation of digital strategies and shared services to support the operations of CAs, including their programs and services
9. Support strategic investment in programs and services provided by CAs, including leveraging funding available to Ontario and CAs
10. Advise the Government of Ontario in respect of the programs and services CAs provide under the *Act* and any matters related to the objects of the Agency
11. Any other objects prescribed by regulation. The Lieutenant Governor in Council (LGIC) can prescribe objects of the Agency

Agency Governance

- Board of Directors
 - 5 to 12 members appointed by the Lieutenant Governor In Council (LGIC)
 - Chair and up to 2 Vice-Chairs
 - Members cannot be a member of Parliament
 - Term up to 3 years – can serve up to 9 years total
- The LGIC shall, in appointing a person as a member of the Board of Directors, take into consideration:
 - The person's knowledge and experience in public administration, corporate governance and finance;
 - The person's knowledge of programs and services provided by CAs; and
 - Such other matters as may be prescribed by legislation
- Board of Directors will have by-laws

Agency Directions to Regional Conservation Authorities

- The Agency may issue directions to CAs governing their operations, including programs and services. A direction may address:
 1. Key performance indicators, key results or service delivery targets
 2. Service standards
 3. Information technology
 4. Procurement
 5. Training of members and employees
 6. Budgeting
 7. Asset management plans
 8. Strategic Plans

Agency Directions to Regional Conservation Authorities

- The Agency cannot issue a direction to a CA until the Minister is notified of the direction
- All Agency directions would be published on a website
- The Agency must establish a notice period of 45-days prior to commencement of a direction
- The notice period is initiated by providing the Minister with a copy of the direction

Agency Staff and Funding

- A Chief Executive Officer (CEO) will be appointed by the Secretary of Cabinet to be employed by the Agency
 - The CEO can appoint employees, arrange for facilities and equipment and obtain expert or technical services
- The Minister may fund the Agency on the terms and conditions that the Minister considers appropriate
- The Agency may establish and require payment of fees related to its performance of duties. The Lieutenant Governor In Council may prescribe circumstances in which the Agency may require the payment of fees to another person.
- The Agency may recover costs and expenses the Agency incurs, in accordance with any regulations by determining the amounts of the costs and expenses that the CAs collectively owe to the Agency and apportioning those amounts to the CAs. Upon receipt of notice from the Agency, the CAs will pay the amount owing.

Ministerial Oversight

- Ministry of Environment, Conservation and Parks (MECP) will provide oversight of the Agency and will also retain policy responsibility for the *Conservation Authorities Act* and associated regulations
- Provincial oversight of the Agency includes:
 - Agency must follow requirements under the provincial Agencies and Appointments Directives including an annual letter of direction
 - Every 3 years the Agency must provide a report on its effectiveness, priorities and value for money
 - Minister can issue mandatory directives to the Agency, request information, and initiate/require a review or audit of the agency
 - Ministerial oversight of Agency directions to CAs

Regional Consolidation of CAs

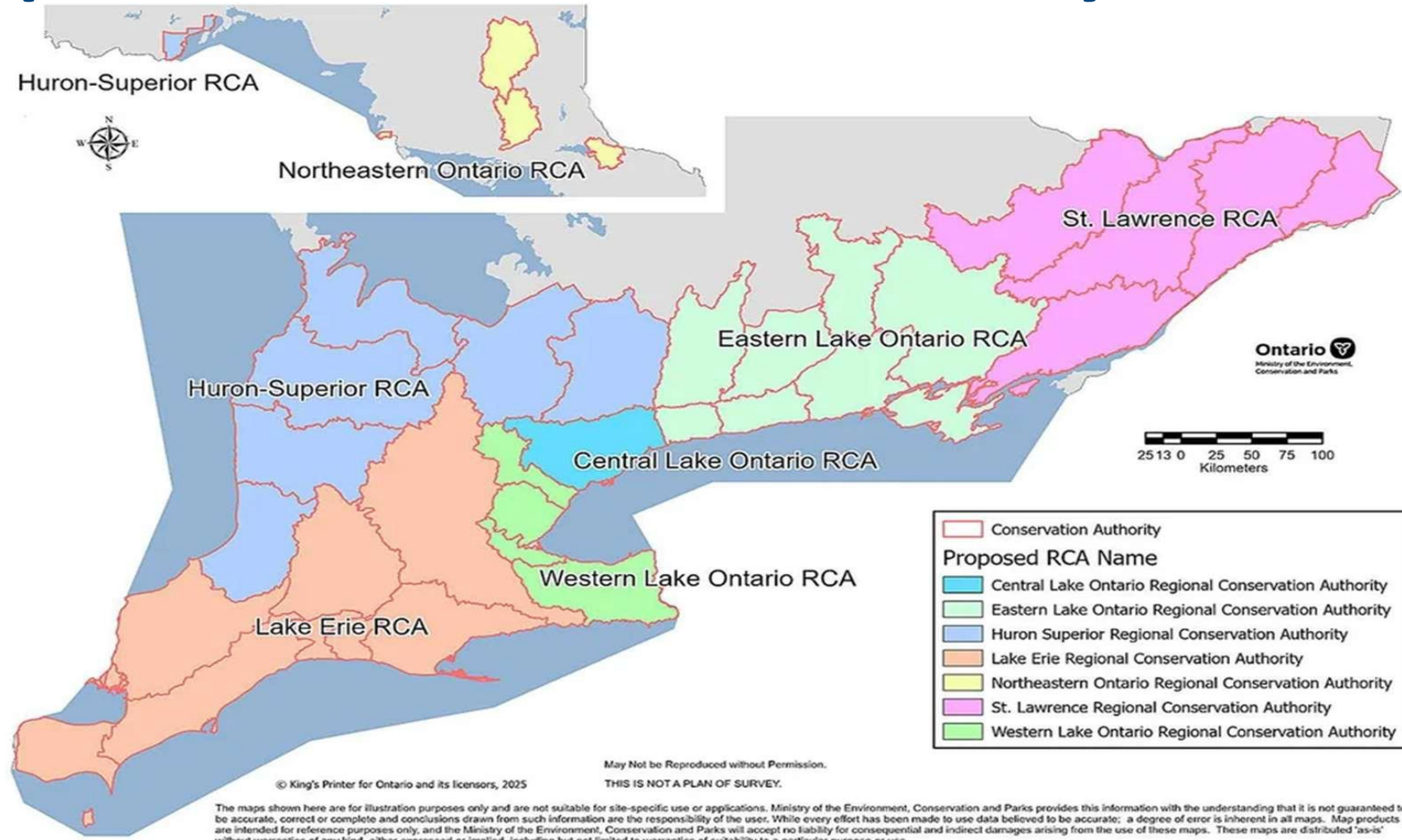
Environmental Registry of Ontario Posting #025-1257

Proposed Consolidation of Conservation Authorities

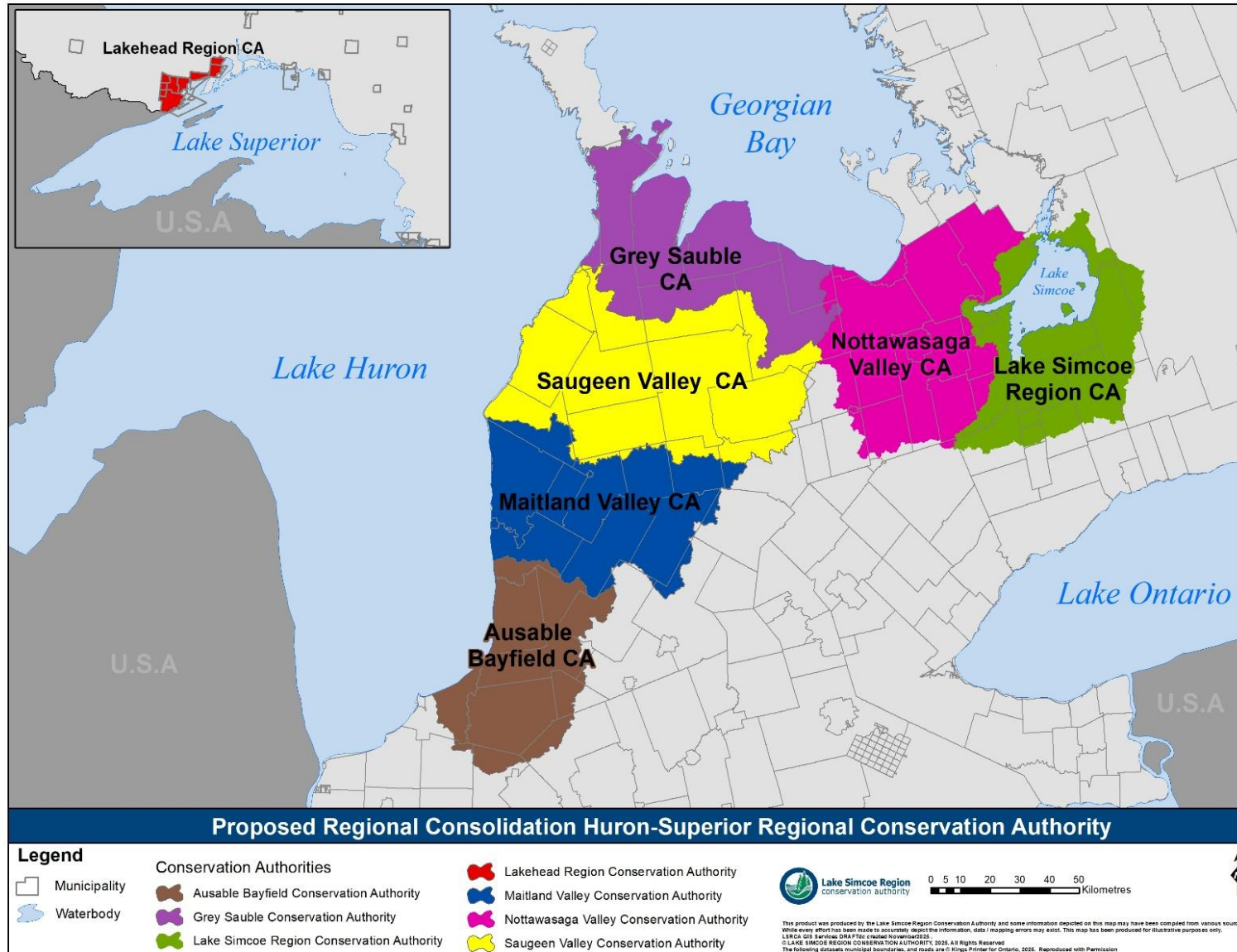
ERO #025-1257

- Proposed regional consolidation of Ontario's CAs
 - From 36 to 7 Regional CAs
- No changes to full extent of CA jurisdictions
- Regional CAs to remain independent organizations operating with municipal governance and oversight
- Regional CAs to continue to provide programs and services

Proposed Conservation Authority Boundaries



Huron-Superior Regional Conservation Authority



Regional Consolidation of CAs - Criteria

- Regional CAs boundaries criteria:
 - **Maintaining watershed-based jurisdictions** – Aligning with natural hydrological boundaries to support effective flood and water management, consistent with drinking water source protection areas and regions
 - **Relationships between conservation authorities and municipalities** – Reducing administrative duplication and overlap for municipalities and conservation authorities to simplify accountability and strengthen local partnerships
 - **Balancing expertise and capacity across conservation authorities** – Enhancing technical skills and resources across conservation authorities to improve service and program delivery
 - **Service Continuity** – Ensuring uninterrupted delivery of local conservation authority programs – including flood forecasting and warning, permitting, and source water protection – through and after consolidation

Regional Consolidation of CAs – Next Steps

- The new Agency would lead the transition to regional CAs with conservation authority, municipal and interested party involvement
- Including guidance/support as follows:
 - Develop a structured process and roadmap outlining steps of the consolidation process, including the common standards and tools for use across CAs
 - Provide support/expertise for CAs on the organizational aspects of consolidation (e.g. governance, HR)
 - Provide provincial-level coordination to address system-wide issues that may arise, to mitigate risk of delays
 - Changes to be initiated after municipal elections in October 2026
 - Existing board members would continue to serve until the expiration of their terms

Next Steps - Timeline

December 22, 2025

- ERO consultation comments Deadline

2025/2026

- Regional Consultation to occur
- Ontario Provincial Agency Forms

Spring 2026

- Anticipated Amendments to the *Conservation Authorities Act*
- Transition process will commence

October 26, 2026

- Municipal Elections
- Current Board appointments remain until end of 2026

2027

- Regional CA Boards anticipated to begin
- Ontario Provincial Agency to guide Regional CAs through transition

Regional Consolidation of CAs - Consultation

- Through ERO #025-1257, the province is seeking feedback on the following discussion questions to inform the planning for the future state of CAs:
 1. What do you see as key factors to support a successful transition and outcome of regional conservation authority consolidation?
 2. What opportunities or benefits may come from a regional conservation authority framework?
 3. Do you have suggestions for how governance could be structured at the regional conservation authority level, including suggestions around board size, make-up and the municipal representative appointment process?
 4. Do you have suggestions on how to maintain a transparent and consultative budgeting process across member municipalities within a regional conservation authority?
 5. How can regional conservation authorities maintain and strengthen relationships with local communities and stakeholders?
- We will develop a response for submission prior to the deadline
- The draft response will be included in the agenda for the December 19, 2025 Board meeting