



Conservation Authorities Consolidation - Update June 2026

The Province released Bill 68, Plan to Protect Ontario Act, in November 2025. Schedule 3 of that bill outlined significant changes to the Conservation Authorities Act. These changes came into effect in April 2026 with the passage of Bill 97, Plan to Protect Ontario Act (Budget Measures). Schedule 3 of that bill provides the changes.

Ontario's 36 CAs are being consolidated into nine Regional CAs by early 2027. Locally, the Upper Thames River Conservation Authority will become part of the Western Lake Erie Regional Conservation Authority (WLERCA), along with the Essex Region, Lower Thames Valley, and St. Clair Region CAs.

Regional CA Governance

Regional CAs will continue to be municipally governed, with participating municipalities appointing Board members and paying CA levies. The definition of participating municipalities has been changed, however, to include upper-tier and single-tier municipalities only. Lower-tier municipalities within a county will no longer be participating.

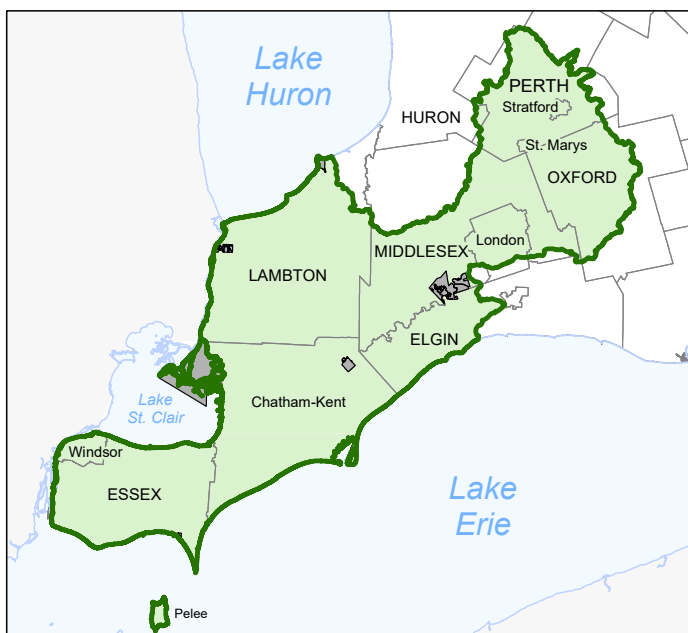
As shown on the map, the participating municipalities within the Western Lake Erie Regional Conservation Authority (WLERCA) will include:

Upper tier – 7 counties, representing 39 lower-tier municipalities

- Essex (7 municipalities)
- Lambton (11 municipalities)
- Elgin (3 municipalities)
- Huron (1 UTRCA municipality)
- Middlesex (7 municipalities including 3 UTRCA municipalities)
- Oxford (7 UTRCA municipalities)
- Perth (3 UTRCA municipalities)

Single tier – 6 municipalities

- Chatham-Kent
- London
- Pelee
- Stratford
- St. Marys
- Windsor



New Provincial Agency

The Province has created the Ontario Provincial Conservation Agency (OPCA) to:

- Provide centralized leadership, tools, and resources to facilitate an organized regional consolidation of conservation authorities,
- Enhance digital and technical resources,
- Provide centralized services to strengthen front-line programs and more predictable services, including permitting,
- Support housing, infrastructure, economic growth, and watershed management.

Minister's Directions

The Minister of the Environment, Conservation, and Parks issued Directions to provide temporary oversight of important activities, helping to maintain stability and prepare for the statutory amalgamation. During the transition period, CA operations will continue as usual. Certain activities within the following categories may require OPCA CEO consent and approval, subject to thresholds, criteria, or conditions established in the directive:

- Governance,
- Organizational changes,
- Contracts and procurements,
- Major capital or financial transactions, including acquisitions and dispositions.

Regional Transition Committees

A Transition Committee must be established for each Regional CA by June 30, 2026, through the following process:

- Each CA appoints one municipally elected official and its CAO/GM,
- OPCA appoints a Project Executive, who will become the inaugural CAO of the Regional CA for up to 24 months.

The committees will develop and implement transition plans to integrate key functions (human resources, finance, assets, IT, etc.), with guidance and resources from OPCA. Transition Committees will dissolve after consolidation.

At its May 2026 meeting, the UTRCA Board of Directors appointed Chair Brian Petrie (Mayor, Town of Ingersoll) and Tracy Annett, General Manager, to represent the UTRCA on the WLERCA Transition Committee.

The role of Transition Committees is focused solely on preparing for amalgamation and does not include formal decision-making authority. The Committees are expected to collaborate closely with CA Boards through shared members, as well as with Project Executives, to ensure that the operational and business needs of each CA are effectively captured and considered throughout the transition.

Transition Planning

The OPCA has contracted Ernst & Young (EY) to guide the transition planning activities and work with CAs to collect data that will inform the transition process.

CAs are required to provide information on six key areas to EY by June 12, 2026:

- Governance and organizational structure,
- Financial performance and procedures,
- Workforce and human resources,
- Operational processes,
- Systems and supporting technology, and
- Asset and infrastructure inventory.

EY will use this information to develop a consolidation plan including sequencing, readiness, and the identification of additional support. Each CA will receive a snapshot of their individual organization at the end of the process. EY will develop a "consolidation playbook" which the Transition Committees will use to develop their respective transition plan.

Board of Directors

The transition process does not introduce any interim changes to how CA Boards are structured or how they operate. Boards will continue to fulfill their existing governance, oversight, and decision-making responsibilities.

To ensure stability and continuity of operations, current CA Boards will remain active until the anticipated establishment of Regional CAs on February 1, 2027. Members currently appointed will continue serving until successor members are officially appointed under the new structure. Any changes in membership resulting from the election will be managed in the same way as they would in any election year.

Key Steps in Process

	Spring 2026	Summer 2026	Fall 2026	Winter 2027
MECP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Royal assent of bill Minister issues directions for temporary guardrails and budgeting Appointment of OPCA Board of Directors and CEO 		Further legislative and regulatory changes	
OPCA	Initial information requests sent to CAs to inform transition committee playbook	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Appointment of project executives Establishes transition committees 	Review of transition plans	Dissolve transition committees
Transition Committee		Develop and submit transition plans		Finalize transition plans
CA		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provision of information per OPCA request Transition committee members appointed within 90 days of Royal Assent 	Provide information to transition committees (if requested)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Completion of 2027 budgets Levies issued
Municipality			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Municipal elections; board members serve until a replacement is appointed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> First members appointed prior to transition date

2027 Budget and Levy Apportionment

The Province has stated that existing apportionment methods will remain unchanged with status quo budgets for 2027, and laid out the following budget timeline:

- CAs approve their budgets prior to December 31, 2026, and issue levies before the transition date.
- On February 1, 2027, the new Regional CA will adopt a combined budget of existing authorities.
- Levy responsibility will move from lower-tier municipalities to upper-tier for the 2028 fiscal year.

The UTRCA has compressed its 2027 budget development schedule:

- August – 2027 Draft Budget goes to UTRCA Board and member municipalities for comment.
- October – 2027 Revised Draft Budget goes to UTRCA Board for approval, along with 2027 fee schedules.
- This schedule is subject to change. The UTRCA will provide updates as information becomes available.

The financial implications and budgetary pressures associated with the consolidation are not yet known. Work will focus on harmonizing financial frameworks and processes.

UTRCA Programs and Services

There is no disruption at the local level to UTRCA's work providing watershed protection and environmental services, including:

- water management;
- environmental planning and regulations;
- conservation areas and trails;
- drinking water source protection;
- watershed monitoring, protection, and management;
- stewardship programs and agricultural extension services; and
- education and partnership programs.

Staff will continue to work collaboratively with our municipal partners through the transition period and beyond, and will reach out to the upper tier municipalities, which may have little experience with or understanding of CAs. The General Managers of the Western Lake Erie Regional CA authorities -- Essex Region, Lower Thames Valley, St. Clair Region, and Upper Thames River -- are meeting regularly, and discussions among staff at the CAs are starting.

Questions?

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