
To: UTRCA Board of Directors
From: Tracy Annett, General Manager
Date: March 24, 2026
File Number: BoD-26-03-19
Agenda #: 8.1
Subject: Update and Decision on the Provincial Proposal to Consolidate Ontario's 36 Conservation Authorities into Regional Conservation Authorities

Recommendation

That the Board of Directors receives the report for information.

Background

Background: In November 2025, the province introduced Bill 68, Plan to Protect Ontario Act which includes Schedule 3 amending the Conservation Authorities Act to establish a Provincial Conservation Agency (OPCA) and posted an [ERO notice](#) proposing the regional consolidation of Ontario's 36 CAs into 7 regional conservation authorities. At that time, it was proposed that UTRCA be consolidated with 8 conservation authorities.

Update

On March 10, 2026, the Ontario government posted a decision on the Environmental Bill of Rights that a decision has been made on the proposed consolidation. The decision indicates that the consolidation boundaries have been refined and are now final (refer to the attachment). Section 6 of the attachment illustrates the new boundaries. Most notably, the mapping now shows UTRCA consolidating with the:

- Lower Thames Valley Conservation Authority (LTVCA)
- St. Clari Region Conservation Authority (SCRCA)
- Essex Region Conservation Authority (ERCA)

On the same day, Minister McCarthy provided the attached letter to the Conservation Authority Chairs.

This spring, the government plans to introduce amendments to the Conservation Authorities Act (CAA) that, if passed, will set out the consolidation of Ontario's CAs as described in the attachment. In addition to the municipalities within UTRCA's watershed jurisdiction, this new consolidation jurisdiction is included in the table below. (Current UTRCA participating municipalities are shown in **bold**). The seven (7) Counties within the Western Lake Erie Regional Conservation Authority represent thirty-nine (39) lower tier / area municipalities.

Upper Tier – 7 Counties*	Single Tier – 6 Municipalities
Essex (7 municipalities) Lambton (11 municipalities) Elgin (3 municipalities) Huron (1 UTRCA municipality) Middlesex (7 municipalities including 3 in UTRCA) Oxford (7 UTRCA municipalities) Perth (3 UTRCA municipalities)	Chatham-Kent (Municipality) London (City) Pelee (Township) Stratford (City) St. Marys (Town) Windsor (City)

NOTE: *represent 39 lower-tier municipalities

The rationale for the refinements and adjustments include consolidating areas with distinct geography, balancing differing priorities, and better alignment with source water protection regions. The notice also references that the ministry plans to propose amendment to the CAA that would:

- Enable the Minister to issue directions re: budget and apportionment for 2027 CA budgets;
- Set out the method for determining BOD composition (ERO notes that BOD composition will be streamlined – between 15 and 20 members with population-based representation);
- Remove certain current governance requirements (70% of appointed members are elected officials and rotating requirements for Chair / VC);
- Allow for Chair/VC to be appointed for 2-yr terms, and up to a maximum of 8 years total served; and,
- Require certain knowledge and experience be considered by municipalities when appointing members to the CA who do not sit on municipal council.

The province has also provided the following information:

- Transition to the consolidations will occur throughout 2026 and will have an effective date of early 2027.
- Transition committees for each regional CA will be established. Each predecessor CA will appoint one municipally elected member and its CAO as members of the transition committee.
- The Ontario Provincial Conservation Agency will appoint a Project Executive to each transition committee and who would become the inaugural CAO for the CA for up to 24 months.
- Local Watershed Councils would be established to ensure watershed management continues to be informed by local knowledge and input.

Next Steps:

In the coming weeks and months, the Ontario government plans to:

- Propose further amendments to the Conservation Authorities Act (CAA) that, if passed, sets out the provincially led amalgamation of the 36 existing conservation authorities to create 9 regional CAs, including transitional governance and activities to be coordinated by the OPCA . (March/April)

- Provide technical briefings to provide further information on the next steps in the planned transition process. (March/April)
- Engage with CAs, municipalities, Indigenous communities and other interested partners to provide updates about the government's plans and consolidation (March April).
- Support the OPCA to coordinate transition planning for consolidation to take effect early 2027 (May 2026-Feb 2027)
- Continue to implement transitions plans (Feb 2027 – onwards).

Summary

At times of change and uncertainty, UTRCA will remain focused on continuing the high quality work we do while preparing for upcoming discussions. During this period, staff will:

- Ensure no disruption in UTRCA's work to protect public safety and environmental health. We remain committed to safeguarding the watershed at the local level.
- Continue to work collaboratively with our municipal partners throughout the transition period and beyond.
- Review and communicate any future changes announced by the Province.
- Maintain business as usual across all UTRCA watershed protection and environmental services, including conservation areas and trails, drinking water source protection, watershed monitoring, watershed management, stewardship programs, agricultural extension services, education programs, and partnership initiatives.

While the announcement is not what we advocated for, we will continue to work constructively with the Province, our peers at ERCA, LTVCA, and SCRCA, Conservation Ontario, and our municipal partners.

Recommended by:

Tracy Annett, General Manager / Secretary-Treasurer

Attachment:

Improving Ontario's Conservation Authorities MECP CA presentation
Correspondence dated March 10, 2026 from Minister McCarthy to CA Chairs.

TECHNICAL BRIEFING

Improving Ontario's Conservation Authority System



**PROTECT
ONTARIO**

Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks

March 10, 2026

Ontario 

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1. Overview: Ontario's conservation authority system

The Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks (MECP) administers the *Conservation Authorities Act* (CAA) and is responsible for overseeing Ontario's 36 existing conservation authorities (CAs).

CAs play a vital role in **watershed management** and protecting communities from **natural hazards** like floods. They also deliver programs and services that further the conservation, restoration, and management of natural resources.

CAs issue **permits** to builders, municipalities, and property owners for development activities such as housing developments and installation of sewage systems in areas affected by risks of natural hazards such as floodplains, shorelines, river and stream valleys, and wetlands. Permitting helps to ensure that development does not happen in unsafe areas and that it does not worsen the impacts of flooding or erosion in surrounding areas.

What is a watershed?

A watershed is an area of land that drains all the streams and rainfall into a common outlet, such as a lake, bay or river.

2. The need for action

The Ontario government is taking action to protect Ontario's economy, workers, and communities by making the province the best place in the G7 to invest, create jobs, and do business. To achieve this, the government is making investments to build local infrastructure and taking action to bring more consistency and transparency to the cost and timelines of building homes.

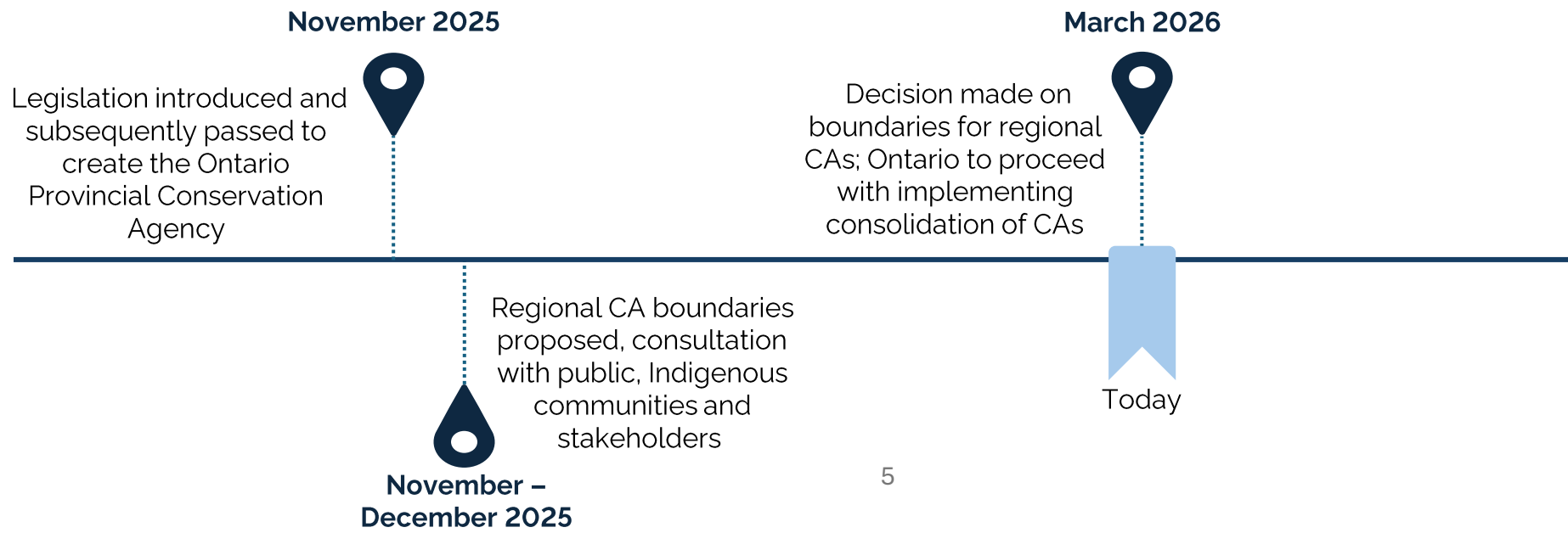
CAs are independent, local public sector organizations with significant variation in capacity, governance, transparency, and reliance on municipal funding. Over time, this has created a fragmented system with inconsistent standards and timelines.

Key challenges under the current framework that this proposal seeks to address include:

- **A patchwork of standards, service delivery:** Each CA has different policies, customer service standards, fees, processes and staffing, and technical capacity leading to unpredictable and inconsistent turnaround times for approvals across all CAs. This can result in uncertainty and delays for builders, landowners, and farmers seeking permits.
- **Outdated and fragmented data systems:** Lack of resources has led to discrepancies in the tools and technology that CAs use, leading 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 forced to fund duplicate corporate functions (e.g., procurement, communications), diverting costs away from front-line conservation and service delivery.
- **Need for more accountability and transparency:** Lack of transparent asset management and inconsistent performance monitoring and reporting.

2. Actions to date

- Ontario is making progress on its commitment to enhance the effectiveness of conservation authorities, creating more consistency and modern standards and ensuring CAs remain strong, effective and ready to meet today's challenges. Since announcing our plan in fall 2025, we have passed legislation to create the Ontario Provincial Conservation Agency (OPCA) to provide centralized leadership and oversight of regional CAs, including coordinating a smooth and organized consolidation and key initiatives to improve the CA system, and we consulted extensively on the proposed regional CA boundaries.
- Consultations included virtual sessions with CAs, municipalities, stakeholders, and Indigenous communities, and regional workshops with CA and municipal leadership led by the Chief Conservation Executive and the Minister. More than 500 people participated, and 14,000+ comments were submitted on the proposed boundaries. We listened and used this feedback to strengthen the plan.
- The government is now moving forward with a framework for the regional consolidation of Ontario's 36 CAs into 9 optimized regional CAs that would deliver more consistent, more efficient, and more cost-effective outcomes for the communities that they serve. In the coming weeks, the government plans to introduce amendments to the CAA that would set out and enable the framework for consolidation of Ontario's CAs.



3. Why consolidation

Under the current system, more than half of all municipalities in areas served by CAs fall within the jurisdiction of two or more CAs, resulting in unnecessary duplication that diverts resources from front line conservation work and service delivery. Individual CAs have significant disparities in size and resources, with some lacking access to the latest tools and technology that support flood risk management and evidence-based decision making.

Consolidation would enable more consistent service delivery and more efficient resource and information sharing, making CAs more responsive to the needs of the communities they serve.

What these changes would mean:

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

What's not changing:

- Where CAs operate (areas currently served by CAs will continue to be served by CAs)
- The programs and services CAs provide, including the responsibility for source water protection, natural hazard and watershed management
- CA management of their lands and trails, providing access to green spaces, recreation and education programs
- Where and how CAs receive funding
- CA relationships with municipalities, developers, landowners
- Each CA being an independent, municipally-governed organization

4. Guiding principles

- The following principles informed the actions the province is taking to improve CAs, in addition to feedback heard during consultation:
 - **Retain local influence** – ensure local knowledge, expertise and interests inform the watershed management and conservation work of CAs
 - **Maintain CA watershed-based jurisdictions** – align with natural hydrological boundaries to support flood/water management. Align with drinking water source protection regions
 - **Reduce administrative overlap and duplication** – streamline requirements and processes for municipalities and conservation authorities
 - **Strengthen CA capacity** – improve and standardize the level of expertise and resources across CAs. Seek to balance the needs and interests of urban, rural, northern and southern watersheds
 - **Continuity of services** – minimize disruptions to CA operations and staffing, ensuring uninterrupted delivery of key programs such as permits, watershed management and trails and recreation for public use
 - **Improve customer service** – enhance consistency and clarity in process and timelines

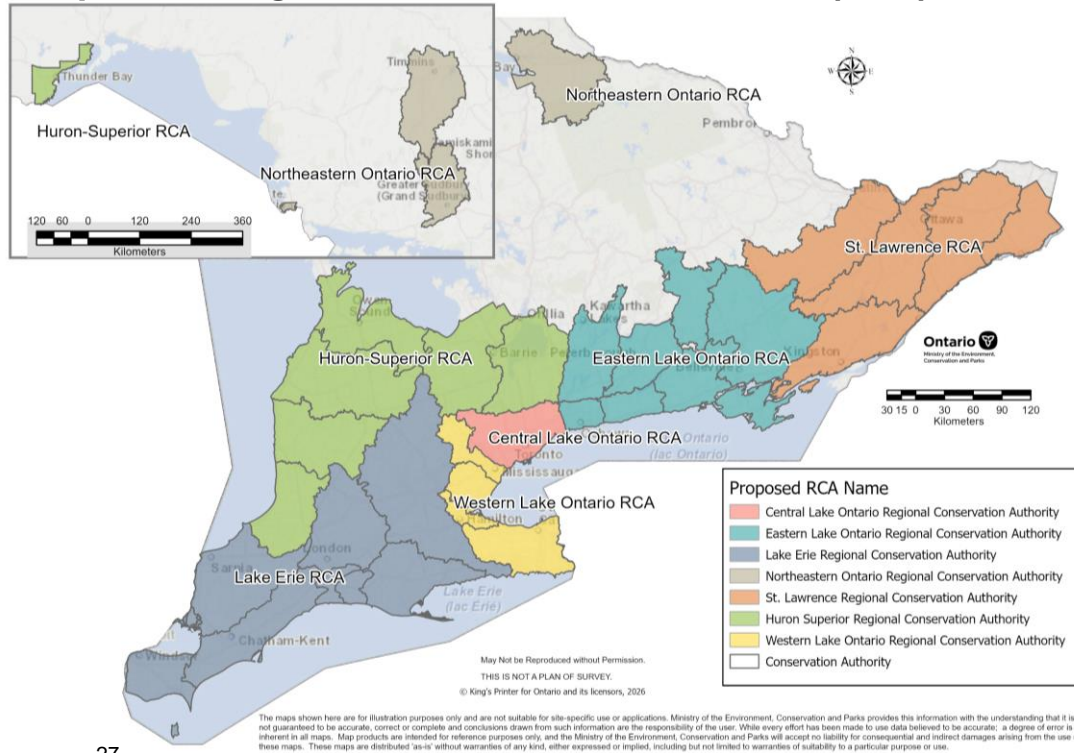
5. Our plan: Improving Ontario's CA system

- The government plans to introduce amendments to the *Conservation Authorities Act* (CAA) that would set out the consolidation of Ontario's CAs in accordance with the framework described in this presentation.
- The plan is for CA consolidation to take effect early 2027, allowing for transition planning to occur throughout 2026. Over time, OPCA will further transform Ontario's CA system, including by developing a single digital permitting platform to provide a faster, more predictable approvals process and improved customer service
- To support regional CAs throughout the transition, the province is providing annual funding to OPCA in the amount of \$3 million, beginning in 2026. This funding will be used by OPCA to support regional CAs as needed during transition. Post-transition, this annual funding will support OPCA to help regional CAs achieve improvements and program standards set by OPCA.

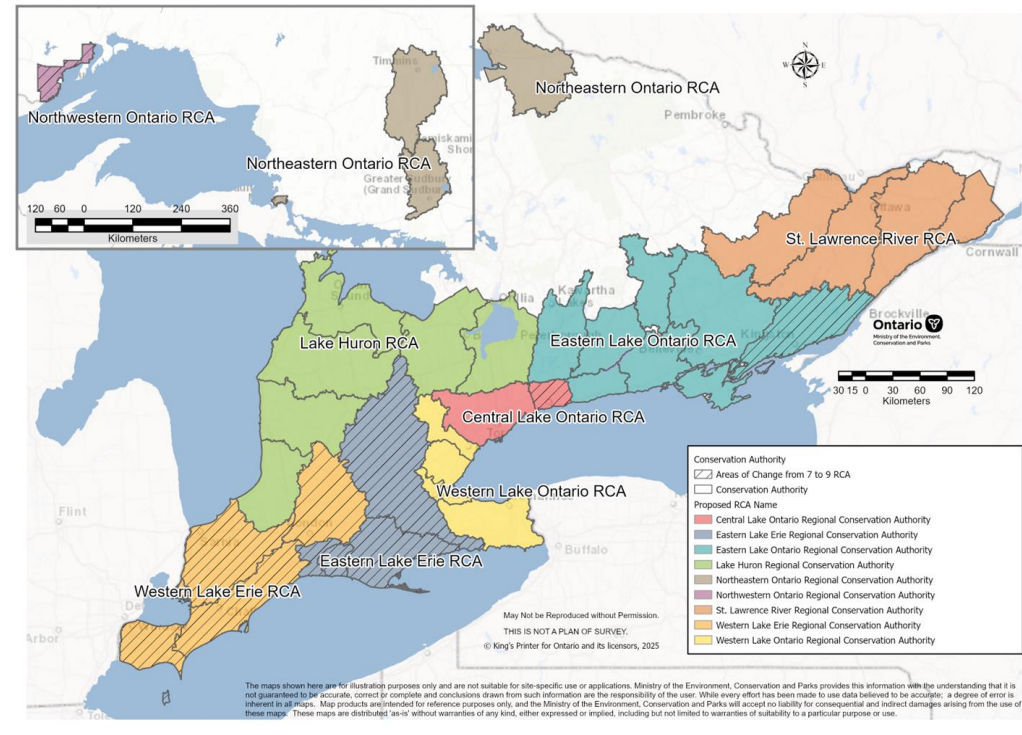
6. Regional CA boundaries

- The regional CA boundaries have been adjusted and refined (from 7 to 9). The feedback received during consultation directly informed the adjustments made to the final regional CA boundaries, which have been optimized to:
 - Accommodate areas with distinct geographies and development contexts
 - Balance differing priorities across rural, urban and northern areas
 - Better align with watersheds and with source protection regions

Proposed 7 Regional Conservation Authorities (RCA)



Final Optimized 9 Regional Conservation Authorities (RCA)



6. Regional CA boundaries: current corresponding CAs

Proposed Regional CAs	List of predecessor (i.e., existing) CAs being consolidated	
Central Lake Ontario Regional Conservation Authority	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Central Lake Ontario CA 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Toronto and Region CA
Eastern Lake Erie Regional Conservation Authority	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Catfish Creek CA Grand River CA 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Kettle Creek CA Long Point Region CA
Eastern Lake Ontario Regional Conservation Authority	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cataraqui Region CA Crowe Valley CA Ganaraska Region CA Kawartha Region CA 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lower Trent RegionCA Otonabee Region CA Quinte Region CA
Lake Huron Regional Conservation Authority	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ausable Bayfield CA Grey Sauble CA Lake Simcoe Region CA 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maitland Valley CA Nottawasaga Valley CA Saugeen Valley CA
Northeastern Ontario Regional Conservation Authority	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mattagami Region CA Nickel District CA 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> North Bay Mattawa CA Sault Ste. Marie Region CA
Northwestern Ontario Regional Conservation Authority	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lakehead Region CA 	
St. Lawrence River Regional Conservation Authority	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mississippi Valley CA Raisin Region CA 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rideau Valley CA South Nation River CA
Western Lake Erie Regional Conservation Authority	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Essex Region CA Lower Thames Valley CA 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> St. Clair Region CA Upper Thames River CA
Western Lake Ontario Regional Conservation Authority	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Credit Valley CA Halton Region CA 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hamilton Region CA Niagara Peninsula CA

7. Regional CA Governance

- Consistent with previous commitments and feedback heard, regional CAs will continue to be municipally governed organizations.
- Under our plan, participating municipalities that are responsible for appointing members (i.e. “the board”) and for paying CA levies would be at the upper-tier (i.e., regional municipalities and counties) and single-tier levels (e.g. cities, towns etc.) This change would mean that lower-tier municipalities (e.g. towns and townships, etc.) within a county would no longer be participating municipalities, as is currently the case where there is a county as the upper-tier municipality.
- Rules for how members are to be selected would be set out in regulation based on each participating municipality's percentage of the population in the regional CA's jurisdiction . Small municipalities are ensured representation by requiring that each participating municipality appoint at least one member. Rules for the number of members may also include:
 - Capping the total number of members on a CA board.
 - Limiting any one municipality's number of members (e.g., to 5) to ensure balanced representation.
- Following the municipal elections on October 26, 2026, newly-elected upper tier municipal councils would select the first members (i.e., “board”) for the new regional CAs prior to the targeted amalgamation date.

7. Regional CA Governance: CAs and municipalities

Regional consolidation of CAs would result in a reduction in the number of municipalities that belong to multiple CAs. This would empower Ontario's CAs in delivering more consistent, more efficient, and more cost-effective outcomes for the communities they serve.

	Current State Regions, single-tier, lower-tier	Consolidated Regions, counties, single-tier	% Change
Number of CAs	36	9	75.0%
Municipalities part of 1 CA	126	57	54.8%
Municipalities part of ≥ 2 CAs	60	16	73.3%
Municipalities part of ≥ 3 CAs	19	4	78.9%
Municipalities part of ≥ 4 CAs	3	1	66.7%
Municipalities part of ≥ 5 CAs	2	0	100%

- Note: Municipalities and associated numbers represent 'participating municipalities' for CAs both in the current state and once consolidated. There is no change in the total number of municipalities that are within a CA's jurisdiction.

7. Regional CA Governance: Watershed Councils

Watershed Councils

- In response to feedback that emphasized the need for regional CAs to continue to rely on the deep local expertise, knowledge, and relationships built, the province plans to mandate that regional CAs create one or more local Watershed Councils to ensure watershed management continues to be informed by local knowledge and input.
- Watershed Councils would assist the CA in identifying local priorities for programs and services to ensure that local interests are considered as part the board's decision-making process.
- Specific requirements for membership composition of Watershed Councils may be set out in regulation (e.g., Indigenous representatives to enable considering Indigenous knowledge, as well as agriculture and development representation to consider other local watershed perspectives),

8. Transition process

Statutory Amalgamation

- With the proposed statutory amalgamation that would create the regional CAs, on the transition date, the former CAs would be amalgamated creating the regional CA ,and legal continuation is provided for:
 - All assets and liabilities of the predecessor CAs
 - All rights and obligations of the predecessor CAs
 - All partnerships, agreements and funding obligations of the predecessor CAs
 - Employees of the predecessor CAs (all rights, duties and liabilities)
 - Permit applications made before the transition date
 - Any hearings underway or hearing requests
- In other words, after the consolidation date, the new Regional CAs would replace the former CAs as legal entities. This approach is intended to avoid disruptions to existing partnerships and agreements with municipalities, Indigenous communities, or others.
- The amalgamation of the predecessor CAs in the new regional CAs would be governed by the *Public Sector Labour Relations Transition Act*, which sets out a clear, structured and neutral framework for dealing with labour relations issues following restructuring of public sector organizations (e.g. the need to rationalize bargaining units).



8. Transition process

To ensure service continuity and limit disruptions, and as informed by consultation feedback, under our plan OPCA will coordinate consolidation by establishing a transition committee and providing resources, tools and guidance to support transition efforts for each regional CA being consolidated.

Transition committees

- Transition committees for each regional CA would prepare for the amalgamation of the predecessor CAs into the new regional CA. Each predecessor CA will appoint one municipally elected member and its CAO or GM (or an alternate if they are not available) to the Transition Committee.
- OPCA will appoint a Project Executive to chair each Transition Committee and who would become the inaugural Chief Administrative Officer of the regional CA for up to 24 months.
- Committees would be dissolved following regional consolidation.

Transition plans

- With guidance from OPCA—including a transition playbook with templates and best practices—Transition Committees would develop and implement transition plans to guide each new regional CA through an orderly, step-by-step integration of its predecessor CAs across key functions such as HR, finance, assets, and IT.

8. Transition process

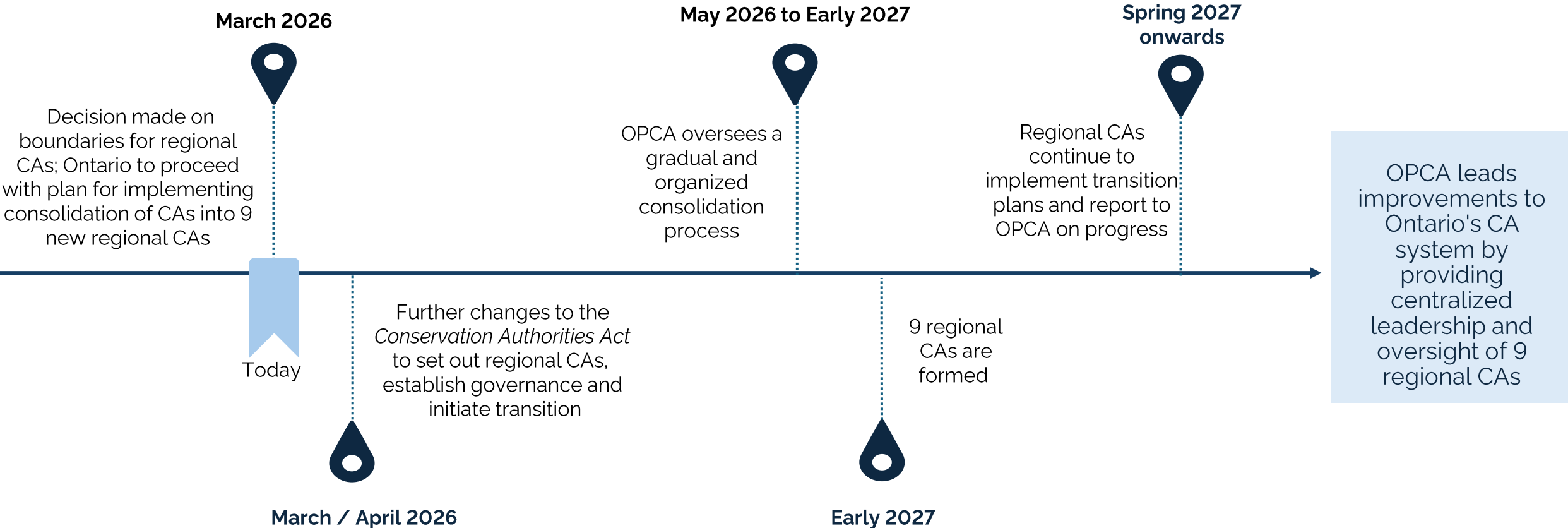
Temporary guardrails

- Our plan includes that temporary guardrails would be applied to extraordinary financial, asset, or employment decisions to mitigate risk and ensure a stable transition to the new regional structure and mitigate risk
- The Minister would be enabled to issue temporary directions to support an orderly CA consolidation. This is not intended to disrupt regular CA business and operations.
- For example, this power could be used to temporarily halt activities such as major land dispositions, significant procurements or material changes to management or organizational structures without review and authorization by the Agency or the Transition Committee.

2027 CA Budgets

- The minister would also be able to issue directions to manage the 2027 budget process for the 36 predecessor CAs, which could be used to provide clarity around timelines (e.g., direct that CA budgeting be completed by December 31, 2026 and levies be issued to the current participating municipalities).

8. Transition process: Timeline



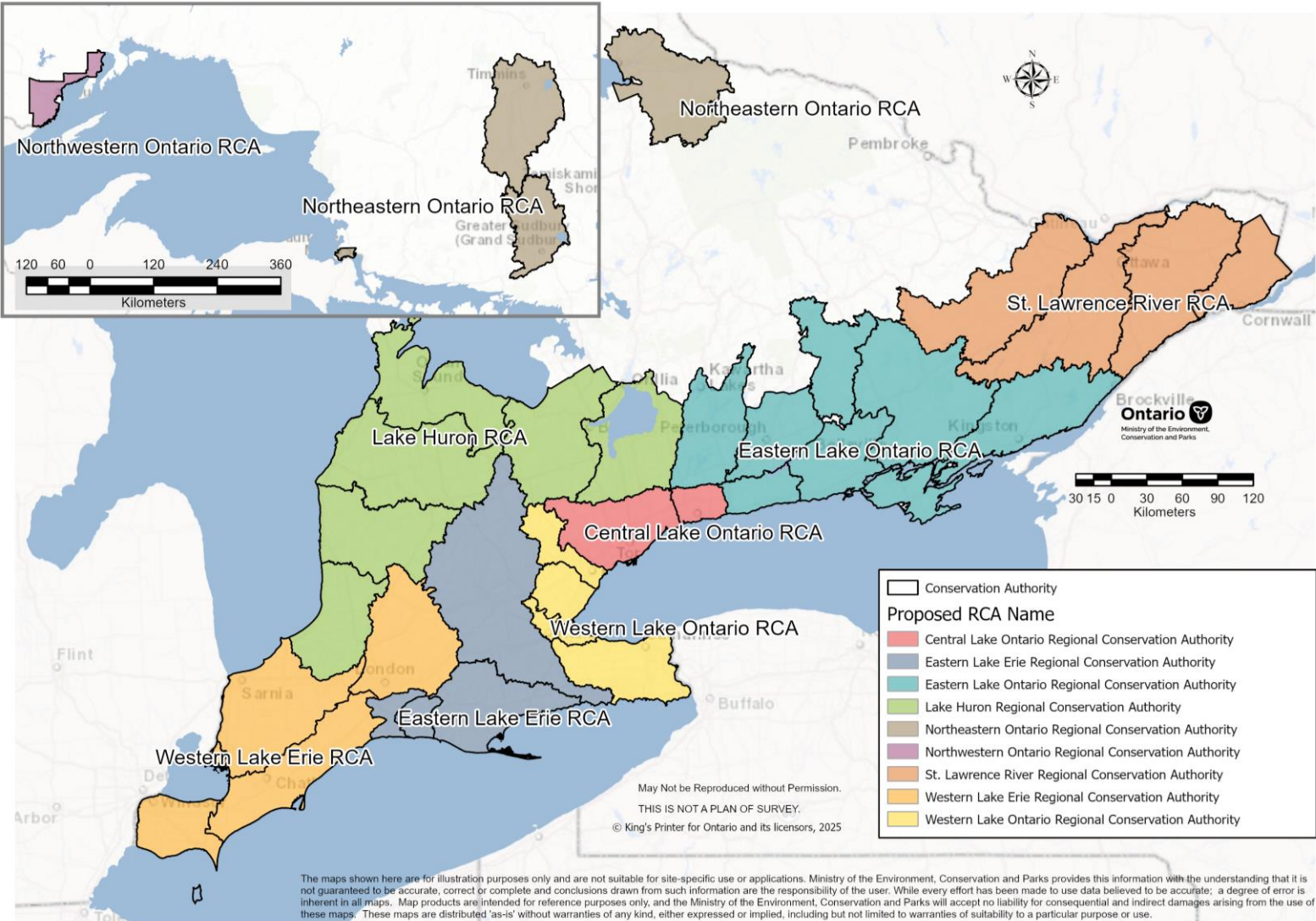
9. Next Steps

- In the coming weeks and months, the provincial government plans to:
 - Propose further amendments to the *Conservation Authorities Act* (CAA) that, if passed, sets out the provincially led amalgamation of the 36 existing conservation authorities to create 9 regional CAs, including transitional governance and activities to be coordinated by the OPCA .
 - Invite you to technical briefings to provide further information on the next steps in the planned transition process.
 - Engage with CAs, municipalities, Indigenous communities and other interested partners to provide updates about the government's plans and consolidation.
 - Support the OPCA to coordinate transition planning for consolidation to take effect early 2027, with minimal disruptions/interruptions to CAs' services and staffing.
- The Office of the Chief Conservation Executive would lead CA transition activities as OPCA becomes fully operational. For questions regarding the plans for consolidation, please contact CCEO@ontario.ca.
- If you have questions about the planned legislative amendments and day-to-day CA business, please reach out to MECP staff via ca.office@ontario.ca.

10. Summary

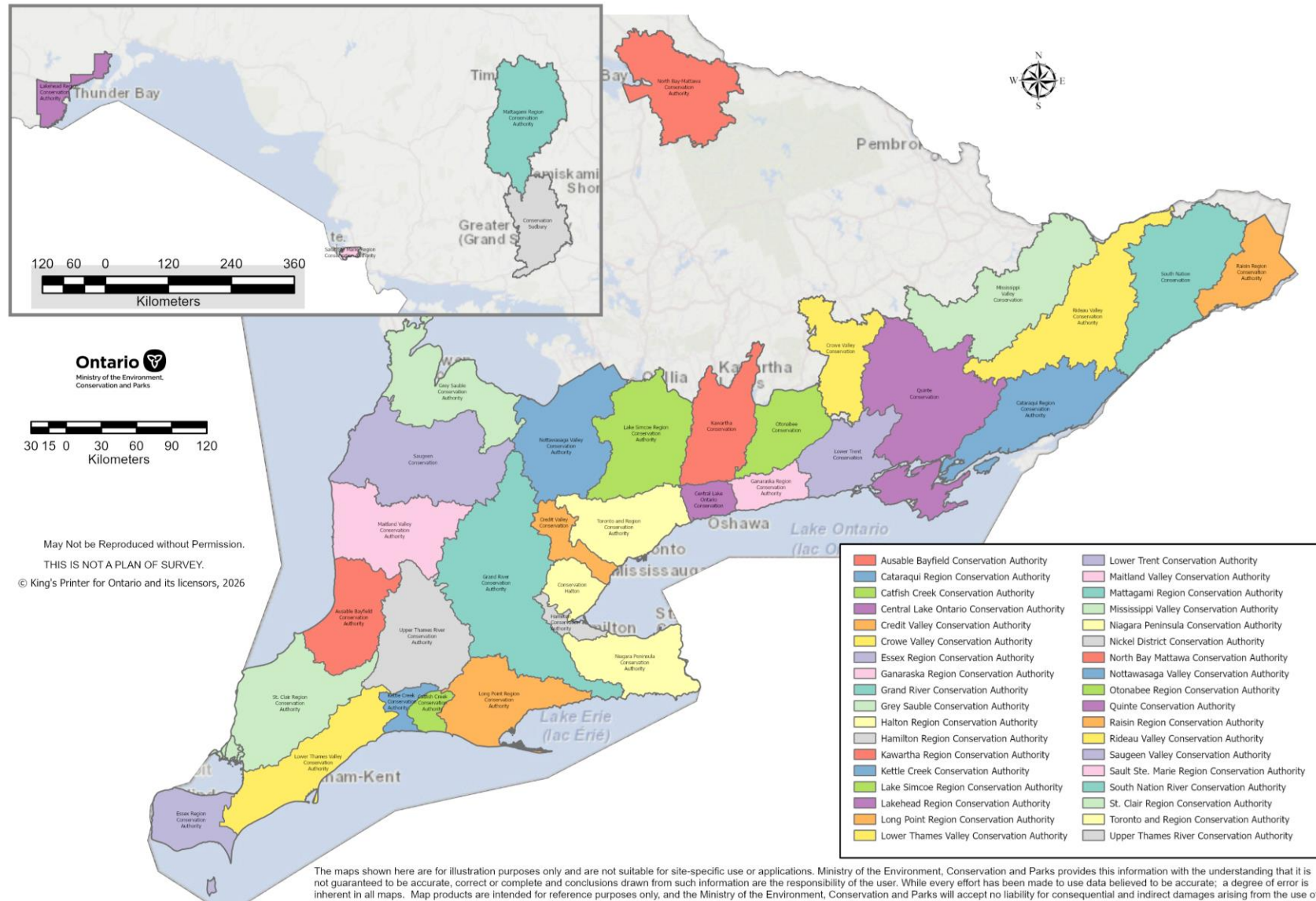
- Ontario's current CA system is fragmented, with inconsistent standards and timelines across 36 individual CAs that can slow down development approvals and risks hampering CAs' abilities to protect their communities from floods and other natural hazards.
- Since announcing our plan in fall 2025, we have consulted extensively. We listened and used this feedback to strengthen our plan, and we are now ready to move forward with plans to introduce amendments to the CAA that would set out and enable the consolidation of Ontario's 36 CAs to create 9 consolidation of Ontario's 36 CAs to create 9 new regional CAs, targeted to take effect in early 2027.
- With centralized leadership and independent oversight of CAs by the new Ontario Provincial Conservation Agency, Ontario's CA system will provide streamlined, consistent, and improved service delivery without any reduction in environmental standards. These changes will better position CAs to support needed housing and infrastructure projects more efficiently while continuing to protect communities from flooding and other natural hazards, fulfilling provincially mandated programs such as drinking water source protection under the *Clean Water Act*, and managing CA-owned lands and recreational trails so that Ontarians have access to local natural areas and outdoor activities.

Appendix: Boundaries for Ontario's 9 new regional CAs*



*Plan is for this to take effect in early 2027, subject to amendments being proposed to the *Conservation Authorities Act*

Appendix: Ontario's Current 36 CAs



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Ministry of the Environment,
Conservation and Parks

Ministère de l'Environnement,
de la Protection de la nature et des
Parcs



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357-2026-754

March 10, 2026

Dear Chairs:

I am writing to provide an update as we move into the next phase of improving Ontario's conservation authority system. This spring, the government intends to introduce legislative amendments to the *Conservation Authorities Act* (CAA) that, if passed, would implement this next phase.

Thank you for taking the time to participate in the consultation process. We listened closely, and the feedback we received directly shaped and strengthened our plan. Based on the feedback, we adjusted the planned regional boundaries—from the originally proposed boundaries that would have created seven regional conservation authorities—and optimized to boundaries that create nine new regional conservation authorities. These planned boundaries would accommodate areas with distinct geographies and development contexts, better balance differing priorities across rural, urban and northern areas and improve alignment with watersheds and with source protection regions.

We are also building in clear mechanisms to ensure local knowledge continues to guide decision-making. The plan is for the newly created regional CAs to create one or more Watershed Councils to ensure watershed planning is guided by local insights. Regional CAs will continue to operate as independent public bodies with municipally appointed boards that maintain strong local representation and oversight.

The planned consolidation to regional conservation authorities is targeted to occur in early 2027 and is designed to strengthen the system—not weaken it—by increasing consistency, modernizing standards, and providing better tools and resources to support the frontline work your teams deliver every day. Under this plan, regional conservation authorities will continue to rely on the deep local expertise, knowledge, and relationships that your staff bring to their communities. Those who know the watershed best will remain central to delivering local programs and on-the-ground support, helping to ensure decisions reflect the unique environmental priorities of each area.

...2

This plan to transition to regional conservation authorities marks the beginning of a renewed relationship—one that builds on local strengths while establishing greater consistency and shared capacity across the province. As part of this plan, the Ontario Provincial Conservation Agency (OPCA) will lead a gradual, carefully managed transition to ensure stability and continuity. Services, programs, and permitting will continue uninterrupted as planning for transition progresses toward early 2027. There will be no cuts to front line jobs. Protecting local service delivery is a guiding principle of this planned transition, and communities will continue to work with the same local teams at conservation authorities they rely on today.

To ensure a smooth and organized transition, the province is providing \$3 million in annual funding, to be administered by OPCA. These resources are planned to be used by OPCA to support conservation authorities throughout the transition period and, in the longer term, will enable regional conservation authorities to achieve program improvements.

Your leadership is vital as we begin this new chapter. I encourage you to share this message with your staff to provide reassurance that their work, expertise, and community relationships remain at the heart of Ontario's conservation system. In the coming weeks, you will be invited to technical briefings to provide further information on the next steps in the planned transition process.

For questions regarding the planned consolidation and the transition process, please contact CCEO@ontario.ca. If you have questions about the planned legislative amendments or day-to-day CA business, please reach out to MECP staff at ca.office@ontario.ca.

Thank you for your continued partnership and commitment. We look forward to working with you over the next year to make important improvements to Ontario's conservation authority system.

Sincerely,



Todd McCarthy
Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks

c: Hassaan Basit, Chief Conservation Executive, MECP
Chloe Stuart, Assistant Deputy Minister, Land and Water Division, MECP