

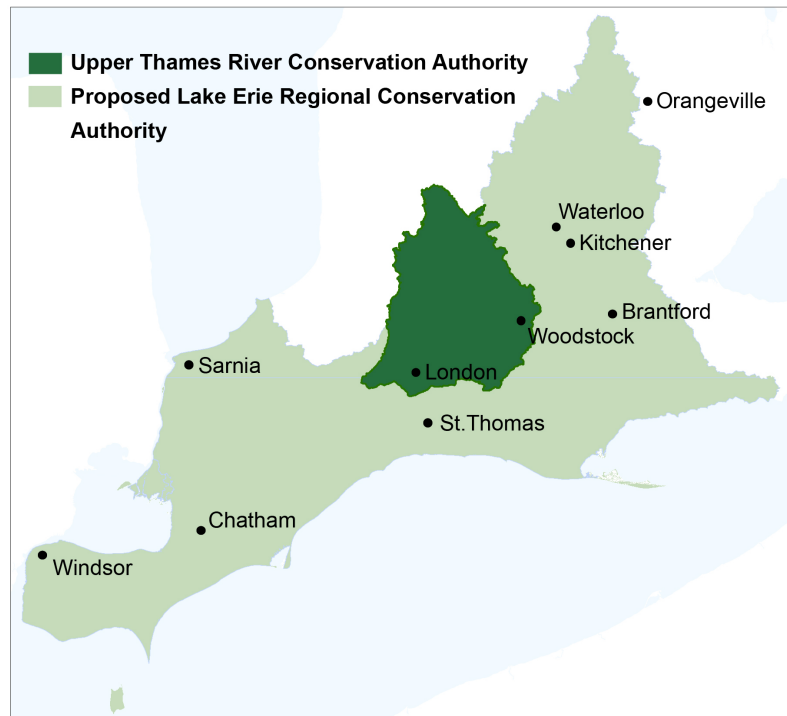


Proposed Consolidation of Conservation Authorities

Overview for Partners and Interest-holders

On November 7, 2025 the province opened public consultation on an Environmental Registry of Ontario (ERO #025-1257) proposal to consolidate Ontario’s 36 conservation authorities into 7 large regional authorities. Under this proposal, a new Lake Erie Regional Conservation Authority would be created by merging eight existing conservation authorities — Catfish Creek, Essex Region, Grand River, Kettle Creek, Long Point Region, Lower Thames Valley, St. Clair Region, and Upper Thames River. This new regional conservation authority would span a large geographic area from Windsor through London, Brantford, and north of Waterloo and include 81 municipalities.

The proposed consolidation follows on the heels of changes made to the Conservation Authorities Act, including the establishment of a new agency, the Ontario Provincial Conservation Agency, to provide leadership, governance, and strategic direction to conservation authorities (CAs). The changes to the Act were part of Bill 68, “Plan to Protect Ontario Act” which was introduced and passed without any consultation.



Your Voice Matters

The UTRCA Board of Directors strongly encourages our watershed partners and interest-holders to carefully evaluate the Province’s proposal to consolidate the CAs. This proposal has serious, long-lasting implications for local watershed management.

ERO #025-1257 is open for public comment until December 22, 2025.

Submit your comments at
ero.ontario.ca/notice/025-1257

Provide comments to your local Member of Provincial Parliament.

Key Messages to Tell the Province

Reduce the Size of the Proposed Region

The proposed Lake Erie Regional Conservation Authority — covering 8 conservation authorities and 81 municipalities — is much too large to remain responsive and effective. The Province should consider smaller, more focused regional models that improve efficiency while preserving local knowledge and relationships.

Ensure Local Representation in Governance

The UTRCA was created in 1947 as a partnership between member municipalities to use local knowledge and expertise to make decisions regarding the management of the watershed's natural resources. The 17 watershed municipalities appoint a board of 15 members who determine the programs and services the UTRCA provides to watershed communities.

A single board representing 81 municipalities will dilute local voices. The governance model must ensure meaningful local representation that balances rural and urban priorities and interests while adding Indigenous voices, so watershed priorities remain community driven.

Keep Conservation Local

Local conservation staff and offices understand the water, land, people, and challenges of the Upper Thames River watershed in ways centralized decision-makers cannot. Decisions made from afar will not reflect the area's unique environmental, agricultural, and community needs. Local expertise is essential for public safety, environmental protection, and the delivery of effective community services.

Protect Existing Programs and Services

The UTRCA delivers programs that directly support the unique requests and needs of watershed landowners, municipalities, and communities. Residents value our species-at-risk initiatives (turtles, fish), environmental education for students, specialized technical advice, and outdoor recreation—these are just some of the programs that may be lost under a centralized, standardized regional model. These locally developed services must be protected. A regional model may lead to reduced service levels, loss of expertise, or diminished community access for local residents.

Support Efficient Planning and Permitting

UTRCA provides timely responses and approvals that meet or exceed provincial timelines. In 2024, 99% of permit applications were completed within the provincial guidelines. Regionalizing permitting must not create delays, bottlenecks, or reduced access to technical expertise.

Ensure Fair and Transparent Funding

A regional funding model must be fair to rural municipalities and avoid cost shifts that disadvantage small communities. Member municipalities contribute 34% of the UTRCA's operating budget through levies and cost-sharing agreements, 34% is self-generated through user fees and donations, and 30% is obtained through applications to foundations and other levels of government to leverage municipal contributions and provide more robust programs to watershed residents. The provincial contributions represent just 2% of the UTRCA's operating budget.

Recognize the Value of UTRCA's Local Assets

The UTRCA owns and/or manages more than 5,790 hectares (14,300 acres) of land within the watershed. Decisions about lands and resources should stay close to the communities that use and care for them.

Maintain the Principles of Integrated Watershed Management

Watershed decisions should be based on science, geography, and local hydrology, not overly large administrative boundaries.

Ask the Province to Listen to Local Communities

The Province should carefully consider input from municipalities, landowners, conservation authorities, and community groups before any final decisions are made.

Questions?

Reach out to Tracy Annett, General Manager, at annettt@thamesriver.ca or 519-451-2800 x253.