

Media Release

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Province Moves to Constrain Conservation Authorities' Programs and Services

NEWMARKET (August 19, 2019) Conservation authorities and Conservation Ontario are stunned by a letter that the Province circulated recommending that conservation authorities start shutting down any programs not related to their 'core mandate' as described by the Province in the proposed changes to the *Conservation Authorities Act* earlier this year.

Conservation authorities (CAs) and their member municipalities received letters from Jeff Yurek, Minister of Environment, Conservation and Parks (MECP), addressed to 'whom it may concern' on Friday evening (August 16) recommending that CAs start to wind down any programs not directly related to their 'core mandate'.

"This is confusing and extremely disappointing," said Kim Gavine, General Manager of Conservation Ontario, the Association which represents Ontario's 36 conservation authorities. Conservation authorities provide a wide variety of watershed management programs in partnership with all levels of government. These programs help to reduce or prevent the costly and devastating damages of flooding, protect water resources, help to reduce pollution from getting to the Great Lakes and support healthy watersheds.

"We've been caught completely by surprise," Gavine said. "We've been working for months in good faith with the government to make a number of planning and development approvals streamlining changes to support their agenda to eliminate the deficit and implement the Housing Strategy." There was no consultation with Conservation Ontario or the CAs about this letter before it was circulated.

"I can only assume they are trying to avoid criticism about downloading conservation authorities' programs and services to municipalities," she said. Conservation authorities' provincial funding for natural hazards was reduced by 50 percent earlier this year.

Gavine pointed out that what the government is proposing isn't taking into consideration the fact that the CA Act is still a work in progress.

"The changes being proposed by the government to the *Conservation Authorities Act* haven't even been proclaimed and we are only starting discussions about the regulations that go with the legislation which will specify which actual programs and services are mandatory," she said. After mandatory programs and services are agreed upon by the Province and conservation

authorities, then CAs can begin to negotiate the remaining non-mandatory programs with their member municipalities.

“It was a very pre-emptive move that disregards the process and relationship that conservation authorities and municipalities have together.”

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