



**ONTARIO
RIVERS
ALLIANCE**

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By Email: Julia.Holder@Ontario.ca
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Dear Ms. Holder:

Re: Conservation Authorities Act Review Discussion Paper
EBR 012-4509

Ontario Rivers Alliance (ORA) is a Not-for-Profit grassroots organization acting as a voice for several organizations, stewardships, associations, and private and First Nations citizens who have come together to protect, conserve and restore healthy river ecosystems all across Ontario.

ORA is very supportive of the excellent work being done by the Conservation Authorities (CAs) across the province. The importance and scope of the work they perform has become ever more vital and significant since the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry (MNR) and Ministry of Environment and Climate Change (MOECC) have streamlined and moved to a more regional focus. The CAs operate in the local communities, and are the feet-on-the-ground that are necessary and vital to maintaining a safe and healthy watershed.

ORA is pleased to have this opportunity to offer our comments and recommendations on the issues of concern:

1. Governance:

Most aspects of the current governance model appear to be working well; however, there are some areas where improvement is needed:

- The CAs and their Board of Directors must remain autonomous and unbiased, and make decisions in the best interests of the watershed and its inhabitants, and not necessarily that of the municipality or regulators. In particular, CAs need to remain independent from government agencies and



municipalities in their decision making; however, a collaboration and integration/sharing of resources would be useful.

- The term of the CA should be in alignment with the term for municipalities, i.e., a 4-year term.
- Should study other environmental governance models to fine tune our system.

2. Funding Mechanisms:

Most CAs already in operation seem to function reasonably well; however, the scope of services and programs they provide vary greatly across the province because of inconsistent and unbalanced funding practices. It is apparent that there is a huge disparity in the funding and capacity of the northern CAs in comparison to those in other parts of the province. CAs provide a great service and benefit to the province and communities; however, they need adequate funding and staffing to effectively carry out their core mandate, as well as other important programs.

Smaller municipalities and unorganized townships may not have a large enough population and tax base to start a CA under the current funding formula. This is not workable because there are huge gaps in the north where there are no CAs, and yet the need could be great because of mining, pipeline, hydro and forestry issues that place extra risk and pressure on water resources.

Smaller municipalities may not be able to match MNRF funding, making it difficult, if not impossible, to fund or start-up a viable CA. Most watersheds in Ontario are not covered by a CA, and many others are not adequately funded; therefore.

- A funding formula dependent on a municipal tax base must be replaced by stable federal and provincial core capacity funding for CA mandated functions/services/programs.
- Smaller municipalities must have assistance that would make it possible to start up a CA, especially if there are environmental concerns as a result of industry, mining, and other development.
- Must increase provincial funding from the 1997 value.
- A portion of any fines or fees should go back to the CA to help fund programs and services.
- Dollars collected through a carbon pricing program would be an excellent way to fund CAs.
- CAs should be able to tap into other provincial/federal infrastructure funding, as well as the MNRF Special Purpose account.
- CAs should not be saddled with fund-raising issues because it detracts from their key roles and responsibilities.
- CAs need direct access to the Ontario Trillium Foundation funding, with an amount set aside, especially for CAs in the north.

3. Roles and Responsibilities

The CAs collaborate and work well with a number of ministries and pieces of legislation; however:



- As noted above, it is apparent that those CAs with a stronger funding base are able to take on more responsibilities. It is imperative that core programming, services, and funding opportunities should be standard and consistent across the province.
- In order to reduce confusion and overlap it is essential that there are formal policy guidelines in place to clearly set out the roles and responsibilities of the regulators in relation to one another. This way they can all work efficiently and in harmony with one another.
- Roles and responsibilities across all CAs should be consistent.
- CA's responsibilities should be those relating to public safety and environmental protection, monitoring, compliance, and enforcement.
- CAs need a clear mandate to be strong caretakers of watershed health and public safety.
- The public should be educated on CA's roles and responsibilities.

Additional roles and responsibilities:

- CAs should have the authority to issue stop work orders, compliance orders and permits, and to monitor and enforce.
- Need the ability to lay a charge in the event of a threat to the watershed, or in the event of non-compliance of an order.
- It is essential that CAs not only protect and monitor public source drinking water, but should also protect private drinking water intakes and sources, i.e., aquifers, rivers and lakes.
- Addressing climate change and its impacts is essential.
- Encourage low impact development, green infrastructure and the protection of natural heritage.

4. Other Comments:

- Climate change issues (drought and flooding) threaten infrastructure, water quality and quantity, as well as public health and safety. Climate change should be addressed in the Act and regulations, and be a key area of consideration for CAs.
- The Act must consider a 200 to 250-year flood event standard as opposed to 100-years, which is no longer adequate due to climate change and its impacts.
- CAs all need to be watershed based to have a broader perspective of ecosystem management.
- The definition of wetlands in the Act must be updated and harmonized with other government policy and guidelines.
- Public and First Nation participation in CAs is essential, with opportunities to comment on issues and concerns related to CAs and their watersheds through regularly scheduled meetings, open houses and/or workshops.
- The public must have the right to appeal a decision made by a CA.
- Land vested in a CA should not be subject to taxes or levies by the municipality.
- Act should be consistent with the Provincial Policy Statement.



- All dams within a watershed impacting on water quality and water quantity, should be licensed, permitted, monitored and repaired or removed by the CAs.
- CA's require funding for vital functions:
 - Scientific monitoring of water quality and water quantity
 - Watershed studies
 - Source water protection
 - Enforcement of rules and regulations to protect wetlands and waterways
 - Up-to-date floodplain mapping
 - Dam monitoring, maintenance and decommissioning
 - Low water and emergency response
 - Public education

In closing, ORA would like to emphasize that the Conservation Authorities serve a crucial role within Ontario communities and watersheds, and we would like to see a more even and fair playing field across the province when it comes to funding and services.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide comments on this important EBR posting.

Respectfully,

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