

# News Release

For immediate release  
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## Proposed Changes to Conservation Authorities Act Pose Risk to Environment & Public Safety

On November 5, 2020, the provincial government announced changes to the Conservation Authorities Act (CA Act) and the Planning Act via [Bill 229: Protect, Support and Recover From COVID 19 \(Budget Measures Act\)](#). The proposed changes significantly impact the role and ability of conservation authorities to ensure a watershed-based approach to conserving Ontario's environment and ensuring people and property are safe from natural hazards.

In these last few months, there has been an overwhelming use of Cataraqi Conservation properties and appreciation for conserving the natural spaces within conservation authority jurisdictions. In an era of rapid climate change, conservation authorities are important agencies tasked with protecting Ontario's fragile ecosystems. Their science-based watershed information helps to steer development to appropriate places where it will not harm the environment or create risks to residents. As currently set forth by the Province, these proposed changes to the CA Act would:

- Remove and/or significantly hinder the conservation authorities' role in regulating development and engaging in review and appeal of municipal planning applications on environmentally sensitive lands.
- Allow the Minister to make decisions on permit appeals and issue permits without watershed data and expertise from the conservation authorities.
- Remove conservation authorities' voice in appeal decisions around municipal planning applications while complicating the process. This will put more people and infrastructure at risk of flooding and erosion and add additional threats to Ontario's biodiversity.
- Fundamentally change the role for municipally appointed conservation authority Board members. The Province is directing that Members would now make decisions in the best interest of the municipalities and not the science-based watershed approach. This is contradictory to the purpose of conservation authorities and the provincial mandate to protect and conserve the environment.

Amendments proposed by the Province to conservation authority core mandates could also mean drastic changes to how important programs and services are funded and delivered. Cataraqi Conservation is disappointed to see changes that would not include conservation education, stewardship such as watershed monitoring, and public programming in the core mandate, which is contradictory to the science-based watershed approach to protect Ontario's environment. Hands-on learning opportunities and stewardship allow for a better understanding of the importance and fragility of our natural environment, the need to preserve it, as well as the benefits of being out in nature to the overall health and wellbeing of our communities. Cataraqi Conservation sees the importance of these programs to our community and will work with our municipal partners to continue this work for the benefit of our local environment.

Supporting information to better understand the rationale behind the proposed amendments and pending regulations have not yet been provided by the Province. Cataraqi Conservation understands the need for continuously improving our business model, however, there are substantial concerns that there may be unintended consequences from these changes that are both unsafe for our watershed community and will negatively impact the environment.



As a result of these concerns, Cataraqi Conservation, our fellow conservation authorities, and Conservation Ontario encourage our partner municipalities, residents and supporters to reach out to the Premier, the Minister of Finance, the Minister of Environment, Conservation and Parks, the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry, as well as their local MPPs to request them to repeal Schedule 6 of Bill 229: *Protect, Support and Recover from COVID 19 (Budget Act Measure)* and allow for additional review.

To learn more visit:

Environmental Registry of Ontario – Updating the Conservation Authorities Act  
<https://ero.ontario.ca/notice/019-2646>

Conservation Authorities Act – Conservation Matters  
<https://conservationontario.ca/policy-priorities/conservation-authorities-act>

- 30 -

Cataraqi Conservation is a community-based environmental protection and advisory agency, created in 1964 by the Province of Ontario at the request of municipalities within the Cataraqi watershed, to provide expertise and resources to aid in the protection of life and property from natural hazards. Cataraqi Conservation staff includes land use planners, engineers, biologists, foresters, and educators, along with dedicated volunteer groups who are guided by a Full Authority Board comprised of municipally elected councillors and appointed citizens. One of 36 Conservation Authorities in Ontario, our mandate is to safeguard and enhance the well-being of our watershed communities through the protection and restoration of the natural environment.

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