

## MEDIA RELEASE

**For Release:** Immediately

### 70 YEARS OF COLLABORATIVE LAND USE PLANNING ON THE CUSP OF BEING COMPROMISED

**November 25, 2020 - Formosa, ON** – The Province has announced changes to the *Conservation Authorities Act* in Schedule 6 of Bill 229: Protect, Support and Recover from COVID-19 Act (Budget Measures), 2020 that will significantly impact the ability of conservation authorities (CAs) to protect people, property, and the environment in the future.

“This is a fundamental time in the history of our Province”, said Dan Gieruszak, Chair of the Saugeen Valley Conservation Authority (SVCA), “the changes to the *Conservation Authorities Act* will impact the future of environmental protection in the Province of Ontario and is likely to have unintended consequences. Our local environments protect us from extreme local weather events caused by global climate change. We have significant examples across the Province of extreme weather in recent years and it appears the Province has not responded to feedback provided through consultations. At a time when funding should be increased to provide more robust science-based decision making, it appears the Province is headed in the other direction. Therefore, SVCA is requesting the repeal of Schedule 6 from Bill 229”.

“Since 1956, Ontario’s conservation authorities have defined and defended floodplains to ensure both public safety and property protection,” said Jennifer Stephens, General Manager of the Saugeen Valley Conservation Authority. “Seventy years of collaborative land use planning with the intent to keep our communities safe is on the cusp of being compromised by the proposed changes.”

Stephens explained that conservation authorities do their work on a watershed basis and that makes us a unique entity in Ontario. CAs use science-based watershed information to safeguard Ontario communities from upstream to downstream.

The Province has proposed changes that will negatively impact the current permit review process, which would in fact run contrary to the government’s desire to help modernize conservation authorities and ensure they operate with greater focus and efficiency. In good faith, the SVCA and Conservation Authorities across Ontario have taken steps to achieve greater focus and efficiency, to reduce costs to member municipalities, so it is disheartening to see the changes from the Province do not support these bold initiatives.

#### Watershed Member Municipalities

Municipality of Arran-Elderslie, Municipality of Brockton, Township of Chatsworth, Municipality of Grey Highlands, Town of Hanover, Township of Howick, Municipality of Morris-Turnberry, Municipality of South Bruce, Township of Huron-Kinloss, Municipality of Kincardine, Town of Minto, Township of Wellington North, Town of Saugeen Shores, Township of Southgate, Municipality of West Grey

“If the Province intends to take on the decision-making role through the revised appeal process, we have not seen evidence that they are adding science and engineering expertise to ensure people and property are as safe or safer with these changes. We have always supported the reduction of red tape – but not at the expense of people and property,” said Gieruszak.

Fundamentally, by shifting the conservation authority role in the plan review process as proposed will result in a fragmented approach to environment protection, not only within watersheds, but across the Province.

It is important to have your voice heard. Saugeen Valley Conservation Authority encourages residents and watershed partners to reach out to the Premier, the Minister of Finance, the Minister of Environment, Conservation and Parks, the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry and the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, as well as local MPPs to request them to repeal Schedule 6 of the *Bill 229: Protect, Support and Recover from COVID 19 Act (Budget Measures Act)*, 2020.

To learn more about the proposed changes to the *Conservation Authorities Act*, the public is encouraged to visit Conservation Ontario’s website at <https://conservationontario.ca/policy-priorities/conservation-authorities-act>.

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