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For Immediate Release

CAs Advised to “Wind Down” Community Programs That Include Environmental Education, Water Quality Monitoring & Tree Planting

Grey Sauble Conservation Authority staff and directors were shocked by a letter that was sent out to all 36 conservation authorities (CA), addressed “To Whom it May Concern” and asking them to “wind-down” non-core programs and not to proceed with any increases to levies or fees.

“Non-core” programs that are at risk of elimination include water quality testing, environmental education programs (e.g. Day Camps), stewardship projects, and tree planting on non-CA land. Most of these “non-core” programs are currently provided on a cost-recovery basis and help to subsidize “core” programs.

After a very brief consultation process in the Spring, the current provincial government made changes to the Conservation Authorities Act, despite appeals from both opposition parties. These changes state that CAs can only levy for “Core” programs that relate to Natural Hazards, including development and flood review; Drinking Water Source Protection, which is currently funded by the Province; and the Management of lands owned by conservation authorities.

These recent changes to the Conservation Authorities Act already jeopardize the valuable watershed-based programming approach by requiring case-by-case agreements with individual municipalities to continue “non-core” programs. The watershed-based approach that conservation authorities were established to operate under provides wholistic management of natural resources on a local scale.

The letter sent on Friday directly contradicts the new legislation and states that conservation authorities should begin to “wind down those activities that fall outside the scope of (their) core mandate”.

This letter came just days ahead of the Association of Municipalities of Ontario Conference in which Grey County CAO Kim Wingrove will be giving a delegation to the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks (MECP) to encourage the Ministry to reconsider certain changes to the Conservation Authorities Act which will restrict conservation authorities’ ability to efficiently deliver community-based watershed management programs. The delegation will also ask the Ministry to involve Ontario’s conservation authorities in the development of legislative changes, including program-based regulations that will impact the business of conservation in Ontario.

Cathy Little, municipal councillor and Chair of the Grey Sauble Conservation Authority Board of Directors said “It is extremely disappointing that the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks continues to preemptively make changes without meaningful consultation either with CAs or with Conservation Ontario. The recent letter from Minister Yurek advising “winding down” of CA programs and services, which would include water quality monitoring, land and water stewardship, and environmental education, makes no sense at a time when watershed municipalities are becoming increasingly concerned about the environmental and economic health and safety of their communities in the face of a changing climate. It is very unfortunate that

the long-standing, mutually supportive relationship and cost-effective partnering that we enjoy with our member municipalities is in jeopardy of being dismantled.”

Under the current funding system, most of Ontario’s conservation authorities leverage municipal levy dollars by more than 2:1 through partnerships, grants, and self-generated revenues. Last spring authorities were hit hard when the Provincial budget cut funding for flood forecasting by 50 percent.

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FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT:

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Background:

Our vision is a healthy watershed environment in balance with the needs of society.

Our mission, in partnership with the stakeholders of the watershed, is to promote and undertake sustainable management of renewable natural resources and to provide responsible leadership to enhance biodiversity and environmental awareness.