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May 9, 2019

For Immediate Release

Grey Sauble Conservation Authority Delegation at Grey County Council

As local leaders and regulators, Conservation Authorities (CAs) recognize that living beside a river, lake, shoreline or escarpment is a privilege and with that comes responsibility. Flooding and erosion are costly and dangerous to the entire community, necessitating responsible development by land owners and proactive natural resources stewardship.

There have been recent 50% cuts to provincial natural hazards transfer payments to Ontario's 36 conservation authorities. Conservation authorities' flood risk reduction work protects public health and safety, working hand in hand with municipal emergency management, planning staff and others. Furthermore, climate change threats are increasing year by year, and funding cuts could let down our guard right when it is needed the most. Flooding threatens lives, homes and livelihoods. It costs all levels of government millions of dollars each year in emergency management costs and damages, even with a long-standing flood management program that is backed by strong watershed planning and programs.

Rural areas with smaller conservation authorities may suffer disproportionately with these cuts. At Grey Sauble Conservation Authority (GSCA), the Water Management Department flood-related work consists of one person with support from other departments, and it is not feasible to cut front line staff. A recent review of conservation authority land management identified that GSCA provides our local community with substantial recreational opportunities and science-based expertise, with less than 1% of provincial CA funding, and less than 1% of the overall Conservation Authority staffing resources. Further, with less than 1% of the provincial population living in our watershed, GSCA has limited ability to generate additional revenues.

It is important to provide government decision-makers with our perspective. A recent statement by Minister Yakabuski, Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry, concluded that, *"On average, provincial funding accounts for less than 10 per cent of a conservation authority's overall budget. This reduction will not interfere with the core programs that conservation authorities are mandated to provide and Ontarians depend on."* If the Conservation Authority diverts funding from other programs to cover this deficiency in public safety funding then other valued local programs such as education, recreational dams, stewardship, water quality testing, and more could be impacted.

The creation of CAs recognized that water does not stop flowing at political boundaries. Members of the Board of Directors are appointed by all involved municipalities, and this integrated watershed management governance provides an essential multi-municipality perspective on which program investments will most benefit our watersheds. Recent proposed legislative changes on the Environmental Registry of Ontario would also limit the powers of CA boards other than for programs related to natural hazards, conservation-owned Lands and drinking water protection.

This would mean that other programs, such as children's environmental education; water quality and wetlands monitoring; and stewardship work would need individual agreements and accounting with each municipality that participates, consuming resources that should be used for delivery, and undermining the mandate, premise and value of multi-municipality conservation authorities.

GSCA Chair Cathy Little and CAO Sonya Skinner, upon direction from both GSCA and Saugeen Valley Conservation Authority Boards of Directors recently presented this information to Grey County council and received a resolution of support. This included an invitation for the province to acknowledge the continued value of multi-municipality watershed governance and municipal levy funding model, that there is a strong and positive provincial role in flood risk

reduction programs, and a request to reinstate flood-related provincial funding. This information will be forwarded to the province's request for comments on the Environmental Registry of Ontario posting "modernizing conservation authority operations" (ERO #013-5018).

The public and other organizations are also requested to express their support online at the ERO website and to local MPPs and their council members.

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FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT:

Grey Sauble Conservation Authority
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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.