Bill 68 and Proposed Changes to the Conservation Authorities Act and Ontario's Conservation Authorities

Bill 68 Amendments to CAA

- Introduced on November 6, 2025 – Plan to Protect Ontario Act (Budget Measures)
- Schedule 3 of Bill 68 changes CAA to create Ontario Provincial Conservation Agency. The Objects of the Agency are:

1. Oversee the governance of authorities and other aspects of authorities such as their operations, including the programs and services they provide.
2. Oversee the transition to a regional watershed-based framework for authorities in Ontario.
3. Promote consistent policies, standards, and fees for programs and services provided by authorities.
4. Assess and report on the effectiveness of authorities.
5. Oversee and evaluate the financial performance of authorities.

Bill 68 Amendments to CAA

- Objects of the Agency are (continued):

6. Guide and evaluate the strategic planning by authorities to ensure it aligns with provincial objectives.
7. Support the development and implementation of a standardized and centralized system for processing applications for permits issued by authorities.
8. Lead the development and implementation of digital strategies and shared services.
9. Support strategic investment in programs and services provided by authorities.
10. Advise the Government of Ontario in respect of the programs and services authorities provide.

Bill 68 Amendments to CAA

- The Minister can issue directions to the Agency
- The Agency can issue directions to one or more authorities, which authorities must comply with, including but not limited to:

1. Key performance indicators (KPIs), key results and service delivery targets.
2. Service standards.
3. Information Technology.
4. Procurement.
5. Training of members and employees.
6. Budgeting.
7. Asset Management Planning.
8. Strategic Planning (to align with Provincial Interests not local).

Bill 68 Amendments to CAA

- Agency may determine its costs and apportion these to the conservation authorities.
- As of November 19, 2025 Bill 68 has had first reading and second reading and is being debated. Third reading and Royal Assent expected late November or early December.

ERO Posting 025-1257 – Proposed Boundaries for regional consolidation of CAs

- November 7, 2025: MECP posted this on the ERO.
- Ontario's current 36 CAs would be consolidated into 7 regional CAs.
- Consultation period is open until December 22, 2025.
- Feedback requested on:
  - Key factors to support a successful transition
  - Opportunities or benefits from this structure
  - Suggestions for a governance model
  - Suggestions on maintaining a transparent, consultative budgeting process
  - How can regional model strengthen local relationships

Ontario's 36 Conservation Authorities

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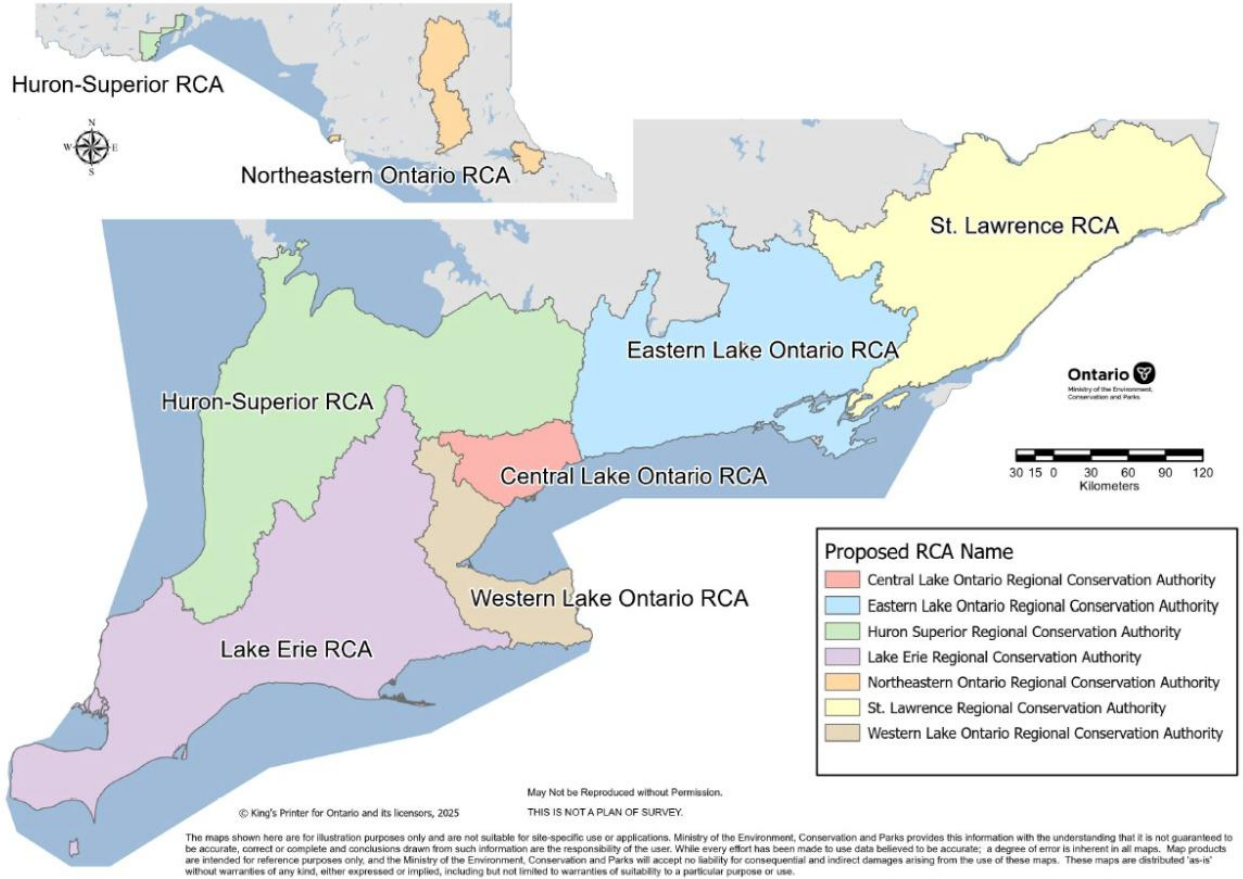
Proposed 7 Regional Conservation Authorities



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Rough Approximation of Huron-Superior Region

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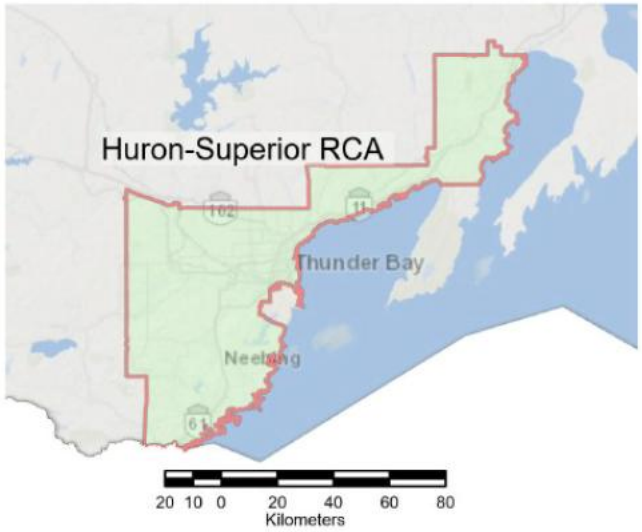
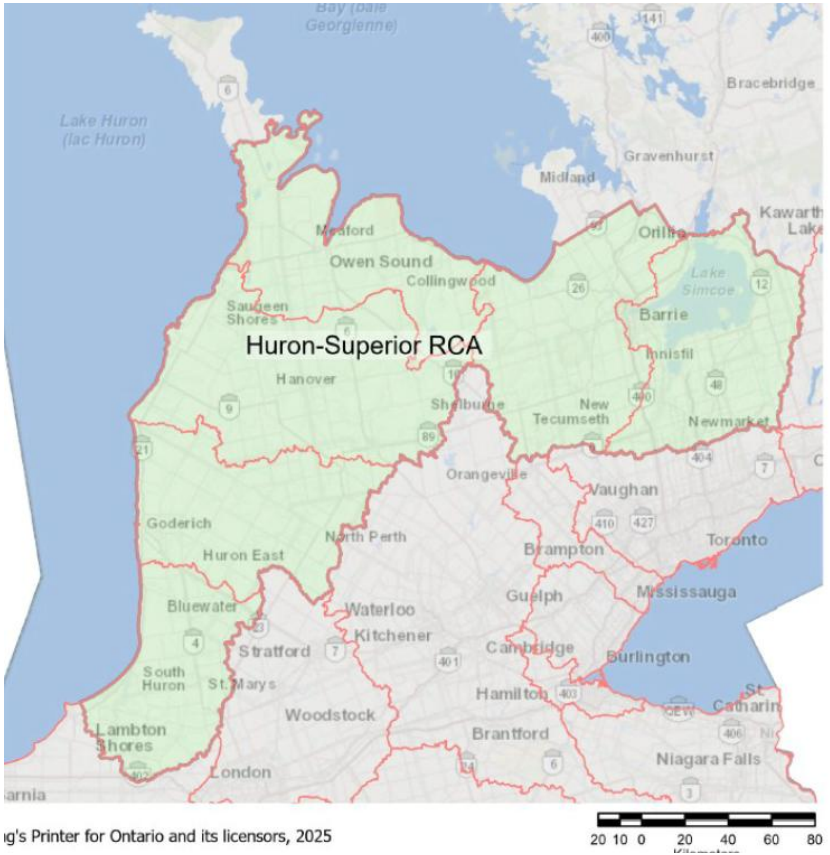
Huron-Superior Regional CA





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What is a Watershed? Why does it matter?

Water flows Downstream…

- A watershed is simply a catchment area
- When rain falls, it either infiltrates, evaporates, or runs off
- What happens on your property might affect your neighbours and vice-versa

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Fundamental Principles of Conservation Authorities

Local Initiative:

- *Two or more municipalities sharing a watershed petition the Minister to establish a conservation authority.*

Cost Sharing:

- *The Conservation Authorities Act, 1946 stipulated that the costs of projects should be shared by municipalities and by the provincial government.*
- *This division of costs changed over time. Now GSCA covers half the cost and seeks funding for the remainder.*

Watershed Jurisdiction:

- *Conservation Authorities were to have jurisdiction over one or more watersheds.*
- *By its power to establish regulations, an authority has been able to protect life and property, river valleys from building encroachment and erosion problems.*

Ontario's Conservation Authorities

- 36 Conservation Authorities throughout Ontario
- Over 14-Million people live in a CA jurisdiction.
- Complete ~32,000 Planning and Permit Reviews Annually
- Manage over $3.8-Billion worth of flood control and prevention infrastructure
- Protect lives and Prevent more than $150-million per year in flood damages and disruption
- Work with landowners to plant over 1.3-M trees annually
- Offer 3,500 km worth of trail for people to enjoy, hosting almost 10-M visitors annually

GSCA BACKGROUND

- Started in 1957 and 1958 as the North Grey Region Conservation Authority and the Sauble Valley Conservation Authority, respectively.
- Two Authorities amalgamated in 1985.
- Eight Member Municipalities
- 11 Board Members (all elected officials) ensures a democratic process with a weighted budget vote.
- > 3100 Square Kilometers
- Five major rivers and over 155km of Shoreline
- Employs 28 Full and Part Time Staff (plus seasonal staff)
- $4.2M Annual Budget

Items for your Consideration

- Current 3200 sq km area would become 23,400 sq km area – how can we maintain “boots on the ground front line” service to community?
- 8 member municipalities becomes 80. How do you maintain your municipal/community voice?
- If changes are permit driven, why restructure the whole organization?
- Who governs the new authorities, local boards, regional boards, or the OPCA?
- Will local offices remain to allow local community service?
- Will local autonomy and accountability be lost?

Items for your Consideration

- What happens to current reserves?
- What are the debt profiles and/or liabilities of the new Regional CA?
- How are donations handled?
- How are local landholdings preserved?
- How is AMP prioritized?
- Who subsidizes who in the new funding models? How does apportionment work?
- How does more bureaucracy improve efficiency?
- How do we maintain important Category 3 programming across 80 municipalities?

Items for your Consideration

Thinking Regionally Commentary_458_0.pdf

Fraser Insitute - Municipal Amalgamations in Ontario

Municipal amalgamations lead to higher costs, experts warn |

Discredited ideas and Utopian ideals driving municipal amalgamations,

Citizens-Attitudes-Towards-Municipal-Amalgamation

Municipal amalgamations and their effects: a literature review
Merging Municipalities: Is Bigger Better?

The Complex Issue of Municipal Amalgamation: Analyzing the Pros and Cons for Communities in Niagara Region - Lincolnmain

Fix Governance 1: Municipal Amalgamation Didn't Really Work. Here are 3 Responses.