



## ***MEDIA RELEASE***

### **Proposed Changes to Conservation Authorities Act and Funding Cuts Will Impact Maitland Conservation Services**

*April 25, 2019*

The provincial government is proposing changes to the Conservation Authorities Act that could profoundly impact Maitland Conservation's services and activities. The proposed changes include defining the core mandatory programs and services provided by Conservation Authorities to be:

- natural hazard protection and management which encompasses Maitland Conservation's Flood and Erosion Safety Services
- conservation and management of Conservation Authority lands
- Drinking Water Source Protection

This would mean that Maitland Conservation could only levy member municipalities for these mandatory services. The remainder of the Conservation Authority's services, including watershed stewardship initiatives, would be considered non-mandatory. It would be up to the discretion of each municipality as to whether or not they support these activities.

Maitland Conservation's Members have expressed concern that the proposed mandatory programs do not reflect the extent of conservation work that is needed across the Maitland and Nine Mile River watersheds. In particular they are disappointed that stewardship services have not been included as a mandatory service. One of the primary reasons for the formation of Conservation Authorities was so municipalities and residents could work together on a watershed basis to conserve water and related land resources such as floodplains, river valleys and wetlands.

80 % of the Maitland and Nine Mile watersheds are used for agriculture. Maitland Conservation is working with landowners and municipalities to help keep soil and nutrients on the land and out of drains, rivers and Lake Huron. The Conservation Authority currently offers a range of stewardship services to landowners including providing support for windbreaks, living snow fences, rural stormwater management, grassed waterways, stream buffers and cover crops. These types of stewardship projects are critical for protecting both soil health and water quality. There is over 470,000 acres of prime agricultural land in the Maitland and Nine Mile River watersheds valued at close to \$4.7 billion. The Conservation Authority's stewardship work focusses on protecting this resource for the future.

The Drinking Water Source Protection Program was established by the provincial government under the Clean Water Act. The program focusses on ensuring drinking water is protected in multiple ways. This means protecting sources of municipal drinking water such as wells, lakes and rivers. Since it was established in 2006, the program has been funded by the province. The province is now proposing that it become a mandatory service that Conservation Authorities will have to levy their municipalities for. This will place an additional burden on municipalities.

In addition to the changes to the Conservation Authorities Act, Maitland Conservation is also dealing with a 48% reduction in its transfer payment from the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry (MNRF). The Conservation Authority receives an annual grant of \$70,556 from the

Province. This amount has been frozen since 1998. The grant is supposed to cover the Province's share of MNR support for Flood and Erosion Safety Services. These services include flood forecasting and warning to municipalities, flood emergency planning support to municipalities and preventative maintenance for flood and erosion control infrastructure in Listowel and Goderich. The Conservation Authority has been notified by the Province that this grant will be reduced to \$36,464 for 2019.

In Maitland Conservation's area of jurisdiction there are several thousand residents that work and live in flood prone areas. These areas have \$176 million worth of assessment, spread over 15 communities. In addition, it is estimated that \$366 million worth of land and development along the Lake Huron shoreline is at risk from bluff collapse, gully erosion or shoreline erosion.

Maitland Conservation has a network of stream and precipitation gauges to maintain that are strategically spread out across the Maitland and Nine Mile River watersheds. This equipment and associated software is valued at approximately \$500,000.

David Turton, Chair of Maitland Conservation, contends that Flood and Erosion Safety Services need to be strengthened. "Locally we are experiencing more intense rainfall events and more frequent flooding as a result of climate change impacts," said Turton. "The grant we have been receiving for Flood and Erosion Safety Services has not changed in 20 years. We have been extraordinarily frugal over the years but to provide the level of services that are needed to protect life and property we need an investment in flood and erosion safety services, not a reduction," said Turton.

Conservation Authorities were originally developed to be a partnership between the Province and municipalities to conserve watershed resources as well as to reduce the potential for loss of life, property damage and social disruption from flooding and erosion.

The proposed changes to the Conservation Authorities Act can be viewed at <https://ero.ontario.ca/notice/013-5018> Comments on the proposed changes may be submitted until May 20, 2019.

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For information please contact:

Phil Beard, General Manager - Secretary Treasurer  
[pbeard@mvca.on.ca](mailto:pbeard@mvca.on.ca)  
519-335-3557 ext. 231

or

David Turton, Chair  
[dpturton@wightman.ca](mailto:dpturton@wightman.ca)