



CONSERVATION ONTARIO

2019 Annual Report



conservationontario.ca

Photo credit: Aerial Axis

ADDRESSING THE CHALLENGES OF 2019

Throughout 2019, flooding was the focus of work for Conservation Ontario and the conservation authorities (CAs). It was a very tough year for many Ontario residents and businesses because of extreme flooding and record high Great Lakes levels. And, instead of subsiding, in a number of areas it grew worse with many flood events continuing on into the summer and even the fall.

Ironically, just as flooding was ramping up in early April, conservation authorities' provincial funding for natural hazards was cut in half with the Ontario spring budget. At the same time, the Ministry of Environment, Conservation and Parks (MECP) posted their proposed amendments to the *Conservation Authorities Act* (Modernizing Conservation Authority Operations – *Conservation Authorities Act*) to the Environmental Registry for review. The Province proposed focusing the mandatory programs and services of conservation authorities.

Conservation Ontario clearly communicated the concerns of conservation authorities to the Province, among them being the need to preserve the watershed approach and watershed management programs of conservation authorities. Support for

conservation authorities' work was loud and clear from partner municipalities, other agencies and the general public. By September, conservation authorities were invited by the MECP Minister to have individual consultations. We're very grateful for the work of our partners and friends throughout the year.

An assessment of the 2019 flood events was eventually carried out by a provincially appointed Flood Advisor. He also evaluated Ontario's flood management framework and released his report in late 2019. The report recognized the value of the conservation authority model and strongly supported the preventative, watershed-based approach taken by conservation authorities to manage the risk of flooding.

2019 was a challenging time for conservation authorities and no final decisions have been made yet about their programs and services. A lot of work still has to be done to fine-tune which activities are required for CAs to be able to deliver the proposed mandatory programs and services.

We were very pleased to see that the conservation authorities are highly valued organizations by loyal residents and that they are key to helping many other agencies such as municipalities and environmental groups to achieve their goals and outcomes. We are very appreciative of everyone who submitted responses to consultations and posted very generously online.



KIM GAVINE,
GENERAL MANAGER



WAYNE EMMERSON,
BOARD OF DIRECTORS CHAIR

CONSERVATION AUTHORITIES' FLOOD RESPONSIBILITIES

SOURCE WATER PROTECTION

Provincial funding of just over \$6 million for Conservation Ontario and the conservation authorities was confirmed in 2019 for Drinking Water Source Protection (DWSP). Source water protection was confirmed as a mandatory program and service under the amended *Conservation Authorities Act*.

A DWSP climate change vulnerability assessment tool was developed in 2019. Pilot studies were done using the tool in a selection of conservation authorities and municipalities. Training was also provided

to CA and Provincial staff on climate data sources, stations and analysis.

Conservation Ontario continued to co-chair the Road Salt Advisory Committee with the Ontario Good Roads Association (OGRA). Other members include the Association of Municipalities (AMO), conservation authorities and municipalities.

Monitor streamflow, rainfall and snow packs

Forecast flooding and issue warnings

Floodplain mapping

Manage and operate \$3.8 billion in flood infrastructure such as dams and dykes

Provide planning support and advice to the Province, municipalities and the federal government to minimize flood impacts

Regulate development activities in floodplains

Contribute to municipal emergency planning and preparedness activities as well as recovery activities

Inform and educate the public about flooding

Protect, restore and rehabilitate natural cover that contributes to reducing the impacts of flooding



FLOODING

WORK OF CONSERVATION AUTHORITIES IS CRITICAL TO THE SUCCESS OF ONTARIO'S FLOOD MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK

Ontario's Special Advisor on Flooding

In his 2019 Report to the Province, Ontario's Special Advisor on Flooding, Douglas McNeil, recognized that the watershed approach, conservation authority model, flood standards and the use of floodplain policy were integral elements of a successful flood management program in Ontario. The report was released in November 2019 and included 66 recommendations including that the Province consult with conservation authorities on their application of the natural hazards-based approach and risk-based approach to flood management. A number of conservation authorities had an opportunity to meet with Mr. McNeil in their watersheds prior to the final report. As well, Conservation Ontario met with him and submitted written comments. Following the publication of the report in December, CO provided initial feedback to the Province and promoted the report on social media. More work will be done in 2020.

2019 Cuts to Conservation Authority Natural Hazards' Provincial Funding

However, maintaining and improving flood management in Ontario requires appropriate policy and program support. Conservation authorities' transfer payments for the natural hazards program were cut by 50% in April 2019. This was at the beginning of an extreme flood season for many areas in Ontario which prompted the review by the Flood Advisor.

Conservation authorities are key partners in Ontario's flood management activities along with all levels of government and Emergency Management Ontario.



WATER AND EROSION CONTROL INFRASTRUCTURE PROGRAM

The Water and Erosion Control Infrastructure (WECI) database was managed by Conservation Ontario for the 2019-2020 WEI funding application review process. The Committee reviewed 122 funding applications from 28 CAs for 2019-2020 with total project costs around \$18.75 million. The Province approved 51 safety and repair projects with a value of \$10 million for 19 conservation authorities. No studies were funded.

2019 FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES FOR CONSERVATION AUTHORITIES



In 2019, Federal funding support from a variety of programs was provided to a number of conservation authorities and their municipal partners to help to keep flood and erosion hazards from becoming disasters.

FLOODPLAIN MAPPING BENEFITS

In 2019 The National Disaster Mitigation Program (NDMP) and the Disaster Mitigation and Adaptation Fund (DMAF) were instrumental in helping to reduce and/or prevent flooding in Ontario.

The NDMP has significantly advanced improvements in floodplain mapping in Ontario. A total of 192 NDMP projects were funded in this province. Conservation authorities were involved in 127 of these as proponents and 81 of the projects were targeted to flood mapping.

Floodplain mapping provides significant returns on investment because it keeps people and businesses out of flood-prone areas, thereby avoiding significant costs from damages and business disruptions. Floodplain maps inform risk assessment as well as guide land-use planning.

INFRASTRUCTURE BENEFITS

The NDMP and DMAF programs have also allowed conservation authorities to implement smaller scale projects (such as dykes, erosion control and storm water / low impact development) as well as multiple infrastructure projects within large urban communities – especially for stormwater management.



CONSERVATION AUTHORITIES ACT

Much of 2019 was spent on responding to amendments to the *Conservation Authorities Act*. The Province progressed from a proposal to amend the Act in April to actual amendments and a new Act in June. The new sections of the Act will take effect once enabling regulations are in place.

A key amendment to the Act identifies the mandatory programs and services provided by conservation authorities as natural hazards management, conservation and management of conservation lands, drinking water source protection, and protection of the Lake Simcoe watershed. Further, amendment to the 'other programs and services' subsection of the Act includes a requirement for an agreement with all municipalities if municipal levy is proposed to be used to fund the program and service. There are additional clauses that provide for a transition plan to enable compliance within a timeframe to be prescribed in regulation.

As well, some new sections for oversight will allow the Minister to appoint an investigator to audit and report on a conservation authority.



HIGHLIGHTS OF CONSERVATION ONTARIO'S WORK IN 2019 AROUND THIS:

- Organized and participated in meetings with MECP staff (CAA Modernization of Operations) and with MNRF staff (Section 28 Regulations) on their respective Environmental Registry of Ontario postings and with political staff and Ministers. Provided a presentation to the Standing Committee resulting in a positive amendment to the new CAA (June 2019),
- Provided ongoing updates and presentations on the new CAA to key stakeholders (e.g. AMO CA Task Force, Ontario Federation of Agriculture) and at Latonnell 2019 and CAU,
- Engaged with AMO, OHBA, OFA, DUC, Greenbelt Foundation, Natural Assets initiatives, GIO, ALUS, Ontario Soil and Crop Improvement Association, Great Lakes Protection Act Alliance and the general public around the promotion of CA programs and services specific to each,
- Prepared material to support advocacy with the new Minister of MECP and CA meetings that occurred throughout the Fall 2019,
- Supported conservation authorities during their consultation process with the MECP (September – December), and
- Prepared draft text for mandatory program and service regulations for discussion purposes.

IMPROVING ACCOUNTABILITY, TRANSPARENCY AND TIMELINES

Conservation Ontario worked with conservation authorities, and the development, construction, and municipal sectors to make improvements to CA plan review and permitting activities. The conservation authorities are committed to improving accountability, transparency and consistency while speeding up approvals of development applications and not jeopardizing public health and safety or the environment in the process.

CO CLIENT SERVICE AND STREAMLINING INITIATIVE - PLANNING AND REGULATIONS

Support for the Planning and Regulations business area was coordinated through a Steering Committee of CAOs and a Timely Review and Approvals Task Force. Policy and program development support included:

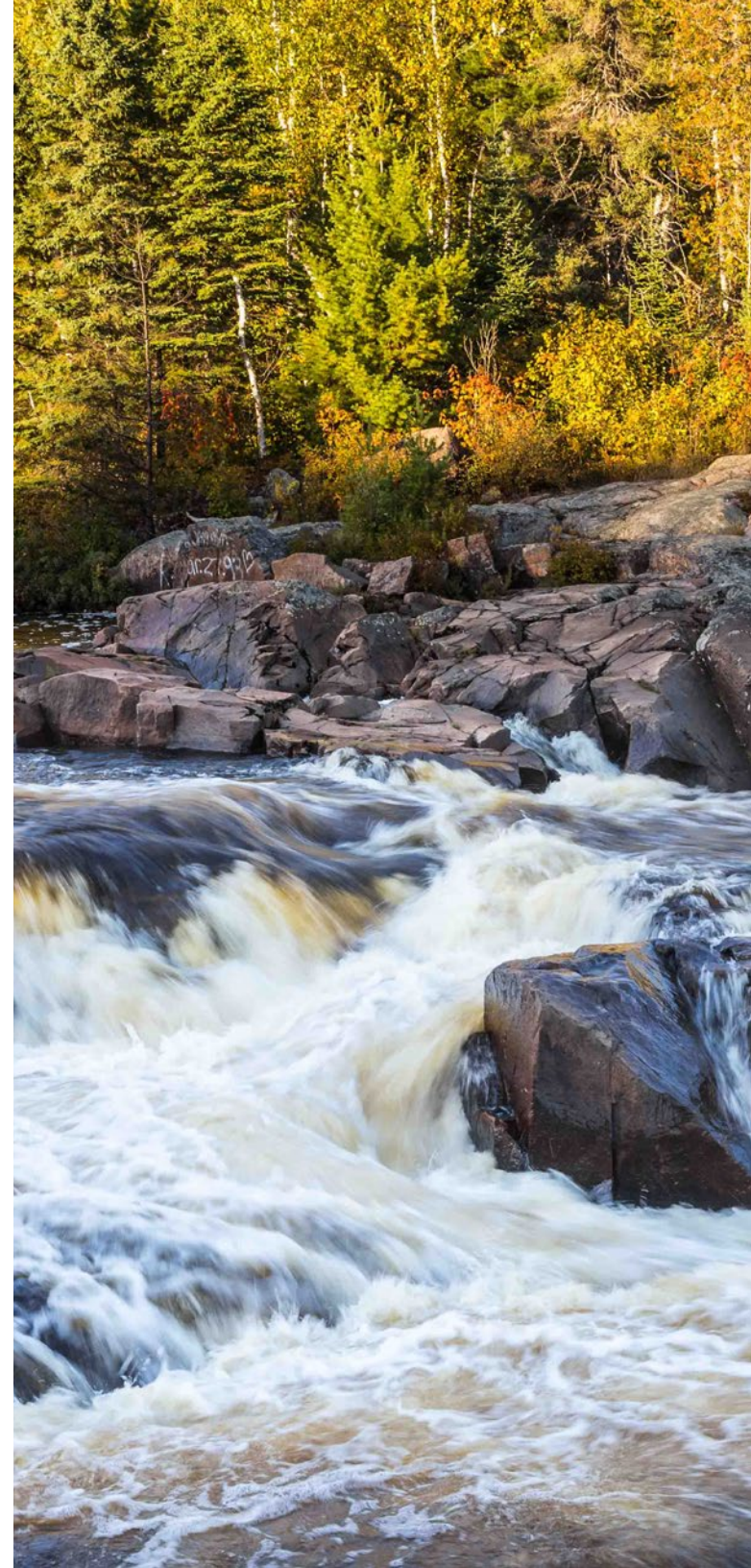
5 Templates/Guidelines:

- CA-Municipality MOU Template for Planning and Development Reviews,
- Client Service Standards for CA Plan and Permit Review,
- Guideline for CA Fee Administration Policies for Plan Review and Permitting,
- Template for CA Planning Comments, and,
- Annual Reporting on Timelines Template.

Client-Centric Checklist – for CAs in high growth areas. Includes a client-centric CA review and approval process checklist of CA policies, agreements, reports and other tools.

Reduced Permit Review Timelines – new 2019 targets to be reported on in 2020 by CAs located in high growth areas.

Client Service Training – over 300 staff from 35 CAs at eight regional sessions.



POLICY & PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT AND SUPPORTING CA BUSINESS AREAS

COLLECTIVE POLICY INPUT

Conservation Ontario identifies opportunities and responds to issues and government policy initiatives impacting conservation authority business; coordinating and developing collective CA positions. In 2019, CO focused on:

Conservation Authorities Act Modernization of Operations and Section 28 regulations

Flood Management

Excess Soil Management

Planning Act/Housing Supply Related Improvements (including Provincial Policy Statement PPS)

Environmental Assessment Act

Endangered Species Act

Made In Ontario Environment Plan (including Climate Change)

Modernization of various Regulations under various Acts (e.g. Nutrient Management, Lakes & Rivers Improvement Act)

Aggregate Resources Act

Conservation Ontario also submitted CO's Class EA Annual Review Report to the Ministry of Environment, Conservation and Parks on the use of the Class Environmental Assessment for Remedial Flood and Erosion Control Projects and considered streamlining improvements to CO's Class EA in consultation with MECP.





TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES PROVIDED TO CONSERVATION AUTHORITY STAFF:

Level 1 Provincial Offences Officer Training

(24 staff from 17 CAs)

Pre-Latornell Workshop: Section 28 Regulations Workshop - Case Studies and Provincial Updates

(59 CA staff / 24 CAs)

CO Client-centric Customer Service Training – 8 regional workshops

(321 CA staff from 35 CAs)

OBBN Partner Workshop

(34 CA staff from 23 CAs)

WEBINARS

CO Client Service Guidelines

(101 CA staff from 33 CAs)

Local Planning Appeals Tribunal

(46 CA staff from 27 CAs)

CONSERVATION AUTHORITIES UNIVERSITY

Conservation Ontario continued to work with CAs to deliver the 2019/2020 Conservation Authorities University (CAU) program targeted to CA senior staff management training. A total of 34 staff from 21 CAs participated in the training. In 2019, the course focused on Governance (delivered in December) and there was a Special Indigenous Awareness two-day workshop also hosted which included 48 CA staff from 25 CAs. Training continues in 2020.

SUPPORTING SHARED CORPORATE SERVICES

CONSERVATION AUTHORITY TRAINING PRIORITIES IDENTIFIED

Conservation Ontario's 2019 Training Strategy was based on feedback from conservation authorities who identified both their current and future professional development needs.

Currently, conservation authorities derive their training from a number of different sources: Conservation Ontario, the Latonnell Conservation Symposium, other professional events and workshops, CA-sponsored training, partner-sponsored training or their own in-house training.

Conservation authorities are currently looking for more affordable CA-specific training across multiple disciplines. Moving forward, Conservation Ontario will incorporate training priorities into the next CO Strategic Plan, building upon the results of this strategy as well as successful training opportunities already underway and CA training requirements developing as a result of potential legislative amendments.

The development of the Training Strategy was identified as a priority by conservation authorities in Conservation Ontario's 2016-2020 Strategic Plan.

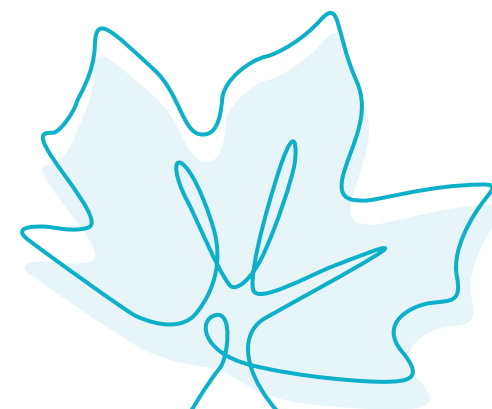
2019 CACIS: SHARING KNOWLEDGE

The 2019 Conservation Authority Collaborative Information Sessions (CACIS) conference brought together CAs, Municipal/Provincial/Federal government partners, and relevant vendors/sponsors and provided an opportunity for knowledge sharing which is vital for our information management and GIS community.

The event featured 40 presentations by 11 different CAs, 6 Municipal/Provincial/Federal government partners, 12 vendors/sponsors and CO. It was hosted by the South-Central Ontario CA (SCOCA) GIS/IT regional working group.

CREATING EFFICIENCIES

In addition to maintaining and renewing existing bulk purchase arrangements with partners like Esri Canada, VertiGIS (formerly Latitude Geographics) and the Province of Ontario (for regional imagery acquisition), Conservation Ontario was successful in making new connections for CAs in the area of group purchasing including with Public Sector Digest (asset management solutions) and CDW Canada (information technology procurement) – saving CAs in excess of \$300,000 collectively.





CONNECTING PEOPLE TO NATURE IS GOOD FOR THE MIND AND BODY

Conservation Ontario worked with conservation authorities to publish the 2019 Guide to Ontario's Conservation Areas. The Guide features a wide range of activities and information in over 270 conservation areas which are open for to the general public. Copies of the Guide were also provided to various Regional Tourism Organizations (RTO) offices and it is available to download at conservationontario.ca.



#StepIntoNature

2019 HEALTHY HIKES CAMPAIGN

Conservation Ontario and the conservation authorities ran a 2019 Health Hikes social media campaign focused on mental health benefits of nature, outdoor activities and events, benefits of greenspaces, mindfulness and outdoor education. The campaign ran from early May to the end of October. Almost all conservation authorities participated sharing the many infographics created by CO and even hosting some events in their local conservation areas.

GETTING SOCIAL

Conservation Ontario's Social Media Round-up

f *Ontario's Conservation Areas:*
8,270 followers

f *Conservation Ontario:*
2,004 followers

t **28,509 followers**

@ **10,786 followers**





LATORNELL
CONSERVATION SYMPOSIUM

2019 LATORNELL CONSERVATION SYMPOSIUM

CURRENTS OF CHANGE: INSPIRING, CREATING, TRANSFORMING

At this year's Laturnell Conservation Symposium, delegates and presenters were asked to share their research and experiences in order to refresh, motivate and inspire the shifts we need to make in order to transform our approaches and match the pace at which our challenges change. Just over 600 people attended this year's event. Keynote speakers included Rebecca Thomas (Mi'kmaw Poet and Activist), Dave Meslin (Political Entrepreneur and Engagement Specialist) and Dr. Peter Beckett (Restoration Ecologist).

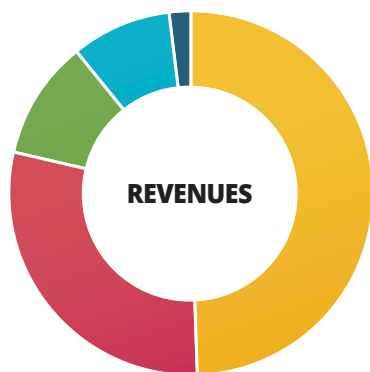
2019 Laturnell Leadership Award Recipients: Don Huff, Bruce Mackenzie, Mike Puddister and John Parish. Master of Ceremonies: Brian Denney (2018 Leadership Award Recipient).

Young Conservation Professionals (YCP) Program: 12 people graduated and were recognized at a special ceremony.



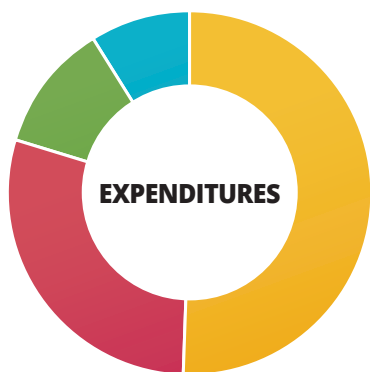
2019 FINANCIALS

CONSERVATION ONTARIO



49%	Membership Fees	\$1,322,000
29%	Special Projects	\$779,872
11%	Latarnell Symposium	\$282,675
9%	Source Water Protection	\$234,655
2%	Other	\$49,512

TOTAL **\$2,668,714**



50%	Operations	\$1,326,005
29%	Special Projects	\$763,083
12%	Latarnell Symposium	\$302,606
9%	Source Water Protection	\$226,705

TOTAL **\$2,618,399**



WORKING TOGETHER WITH PARTNER AGENCIES

In 2019, building and developing partnerships and collaborations continued to be important to the varied business areas of conservation authorities and also to Conservation Ontario's work on behalf of CAs.

- Continued to collaborate with Forests Ontario who worked with conservation authorities to plant over two million trees across the province in 2019. CO and CAs also work and plan with other organizations such as nurseries and the Forest Gene Conservation Council to ensure CAs have the necessary seed and stock.
- Continued to work with Ducks Unlimited Canada in the delivery of local wetland projects and in promoting the need for wetlands as natural infrastructure to reducing flood risks and nutrient loading to the Great Lakes.
- Continued to work with Ontario Soil and Crop Improvement Association, 4R Nutrient Stewardship Initiative promoting the engagement of CAs as key local delivery agents for many agricultural environmental initiatives that address soil health and water quality and habitat for species at risk.
- Continued to engage with organizations and initiatives that encourage private sector leadership and solutions for reducing flood risk. These organizations include the Insurance Bureau of Canada, Institute for Catastrophic Loss Reduction and Intact Centre for Climate Adaptation as well as Partners for Action and Canadian Standards Association.
- Worked closely with many other planning, education, public health and parks agencies under the EcoHealth Ontario collaborative. A new website was launched (www.ecohealthontario.ca), work was done to develop a new 'theory of change' and research was underway to build a conceptual framework for using greenspaces to build the business case for ecohealth.



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