

November 27, 2020

Premier of Ontario
Legislative Building
Queen's Park
Toronto ON M7A 1A1

Dear Premier Ford:

I'm upset to hear about your plans to effectively disempower our local Conservation Authorities by the inclusion of Schedule 6 in your current budget bill. The inclusion of this schedule goes against everything conservatives are supposed to believe in: local decision-making, local investment, and local support. The Conservation Authorities are our representatives for our local environment. By the inclusion of Schedule 6, you are taking away power from the people and consolidating it at Queen's Park. This can only be to consolidate your power away from the people you represent. I ask that you remove Schedule 6 before the final vote on your budget bill. I include my reasoning and the letter I have written to explain to others why we need to care about the inclusion of this schedule in your omnibus bill.

Authority of the People:

While we are dealing with the pandemic and the multitude of things in our daily lives, Doug Ford is about to change forever a system of conservation management that has served Ontario well since 1949. Before I go into the details, the first thing to understand about Conservation Authorities is that they only exist through the will of the people—that's us.

Back in the 1940's, citizens were concerned with the state of Ontario's natural resources. Poor land, water and forestry practices during the 1930's and 1940's, drought and deforestation, led to extensive soil loss and flooding. People were upset and this resulted in the Conservation Authorities Act of 1946.

As per the act, a Conservation Authority could only be formed if residents reached a point where they were willing to request the government of Ontario to form an Authority. In doing this, local residents also had to contribute to the Authority and assume the burden of running the body known as the Conservation Authority. People living close to the problems were required to recognize and solve them. Solutions were to be from the ground up, not imposed from above.

Because of this arrangement, cost sharing was to be between the municipalities—our most local and direct form of government—and by the provincial government. To this day, most of the funding comes from the municipality.

But it was Hurricane Hazel in 1954 that mobilized the need for managing Ontario's watersheds on a regional basis. The Conservation Authorities Act was amended to enable Conservation Authorities to acquire lands for recreation and conservation, and to

regulate that land for the safety of the community: to protect life and property, river valleys from building encroachment and erosion problems.

Since their implementation, Conservation Authorities were set up to have jurisdiction over one or more watersheds. By its power to establish regulations, Conservation authorities are charged with flood management within their watershed. As the climate changes and we see more and more flooding, this issue is just as important today as it was after Hurricane Hazel. Whatever your thoughts on climate change, we can all acknowledge the increase in flooding and other natural weather events. If not properly managed, people can lose their homes, their lives, soil is eroded, infrastructure is damaged. And it is the taxpayer who will end up paying for the recovery, not the developers.

Yet Doug Ford is set to take the authority away from our Conservation Authorities, away from us, the people. In the current Bill 229, an omnibus budget bill, there exists Schedule 6 which will take away our ability to protect our wetlands, our forests, our wildlife habitat and natural spaces and give huge new powers to developers.

Because this is hidden in the budget bill, it is not getting the attention it deserves. And it is about to be passed quickly.

Remember, the Conservation Authorities exist because of the will of the people. We, the people, need to stand up for our rights, for our local representation. We do not need Queen's Park managing our resources. And this affects all of us: farmers, hunters, naturalists. We should all be calling Bill Walker's office, writing letters to our Premier, asking them to remove Schedule 6 from the Budget Bill. And we have to do it now, before it's too late.

I would also ask our local councils to be requesting the same. This affects us all.

For more information and for much of the source of this letter, please visit: conservationontario.ca.

Sincerely,

Diane Ferguson, CPA, CA
235467 Conc. 2c
Williamsford, ON
N0H 2V0
519-794-3331