

November 30, 2020

Procedural Services Branch
99 Wellesley Street West
Room 1405, Whitney Block
Toronto, ON M7A 1A2

Dear Ministers:

RE: Conservation Authorities Act (CAA) - Schedule 6 of omnibus Budget Bill 229

I am writing to you today regarding the Conservation Authorities Act and the changes intended for it. My husband and I are residents of Toronto and also own farm land outside of Orangeville.

It has been a difficult year for our province, country and the whole world. We were told to stay away from our loved ones, family and friends. Some of us lost our jobs, lost loved ones and lost our way of life. We lost our freedom to come and go as we pleased. We were told to stay indoors and to avoid gatherings.

However, the one thing we were allowed to do was go for walks. Wildlife, our water, air, and overall nature improved. To name a few:

- Wildlife came down from hills and mountains to roam and explore (check out a town in Wales)
- the canals in Venice became more clear
 - o BBC News states:
Residents of Venice are noticing a vast improvement in the quality of the famous canals that run through the city, which are running clear for the first time in years, and fish can even be seen in the usually murky waters.
The coronavirus lockdown has left Venice streets empty, and a drastic drop in water traffic means sediment in the canals has been able to settle.
- air has become clear and clean in certain countries - National Geographic writes:
 - o *From China's Hubei province to industrial northern Italy and beyond, pollution levels have plummeted as lockdowns aimed at slowing the viral spread have shuttered businesses and trapped billions of people at home. In India, where air pollution is among the world's worst, "people are reporting seeing the Himalayas for the first time from where they live," Lauri Myllyvirta, lead analyst at the Helsinki-based Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air, said in an email.*

We need to rethink what we want to do with the Conservation Authorities Act. We need to remember why this was established in the first place:

The Conservation Authorities Act, 1946 was legislated by the province of Ontario in response to concerns expressed by agricultural, naturalist and sports groups who highlighted that much of the renewable natural resources of the province were in an unhealthy state as a result of poor land, water and forestry practices during the 1930s and 1940s. The combined impacts of drought and deforestation led to extensive soil loss and flooding.

The conservation authorities are important to us. The environment and nature is quiet. It is there and we don't know how much we need it until we REALLY need it. The conservation authorities keep it alive and if it was not for them, then how could we have endured the pandemic and still endure it.

We don't need over-development, more condos, more smog. We need to keep healthy and alive. All medical professionals suggest going for walks, clear our minds, sit under a tree, look at the water, look at nature.

If we don't have that, what do we have. Take a moment and think of what we have already endured. Look at nature and the watershed and we need their help for us to heal. Don't take away the Conservation Authorities that have kept them there for us all these years.

In an article in GLOW dated May 22, 2020, the article THERE ARE CROSS-BENEFITS TO PROTECTING COASTAL WETLANDS IN THE WAKE OF COVID-19 states the following:

*Beyond speculation about any effects of direct associations with the animals linked to this virus, **coastal wetlands provide many more benefits that help humanity and increase social well-being and resilience.** These benefits can minimise the risk of compounding stressors when future pandemics arise and, in doing so, avoid pushing us beyond a societal breaking point under such circumstances.*

Coastal wetlands support fisheries, with healthier wetlands linked to higher fish catches. They also minimise our exposure to, and impacts from, other catastrophes like storm events, tsunamis, and climate change. Events that are difficult to manage even without the added stress of emerging diseases.

Ultimately, improving protection of coastal wetlands as the world reboots from COVID-19 lockdowns could lead to improved food security, social and environmental resilience, and reduce the risk of new disease emergence. And these are just some of the cross-benefits that healthy coastal wetland ecosystems provide in the face of catastrophe and uncertainty.

We need wetlands and we need the people to help us save them. They have been around since 1946, please remember why they came to be and how well they have helped us. Keeping the water safe, keep us safe.

Thank you for your time.

Carmine Vescio and Linda Gargaro.