

ONTARIO FEDERATION OF ANGLERS & HUNTERS



Ontario Conservation Centre

P.O. Box 2800, 4601 Guthrie Drive, Peterborough, Ontario K9J 8L5
Phone: (705) 748.6324 • Fax: (705) 748.9577 • Visit: www.ofah.org • Email: ofah@ofah.org

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October 19, 2015

Ms. Julia Holder
Policy Analyst
Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry
Natural Resources Conservation Policy Branch
300 Water Street
Peterborough, Ontario
K9J 8M5

Dear Ms. Holder:

Subject: EBR Registry 012-4509: Conservation Authorities Act Review Discussion Paper

On behalf of the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters (OFAH), its 100,000 members, subscribers and supporters, and 725 member clubs, we have reviewed the Conservation Authorities Act Review Discussion Paper, and ask that our comments be weighed accordingly.

General Comments

We recognize the valuable work of Conservation Authorities (CAs) and the OFAH has had many successful partnerships as a result. We also support the purpose of this review, which is to identify opportunities to improve the existing legislative, regulatory and policy framework that currently governs conservation authorities and the programs and services they deliver.

Governance

We understand that changes to the Act, policies, and general practices over time have resulted in less direct provincial oversight. In our opinion, the oversight of CAs must continue to be shared between the province and the municipalities that form the authorities. The Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry (MNRF) must continue to have primary responsibility for establishing a conservation authority, defining the powers of a conservation authority, and directing and monitoring provincially-approved programs.

An enhanced relationship between the MNRF and the authorities is essential to ensure there is better coordination (and delivery) of provincial policies and objectives in CA programs and activities. To clarify, we are not suggesting the MNRF become more involved in the day-to-day operations of CAs. In fact, an enhanced relationship should not create further capacity issues, but help uphold all CAs to a standard program at a minimum.

Ideally, we would like to see provincial representatives (e.g. MNRF) again on all authority boards. This would provide a mechanism for information transfer, as well as a degree of consistency on CA boards. We recognize the role of provincial representatives may be different than in the past, and we are not suggesting making CAs an agency of the province.

There is significant variability in the size and number of municipal representatives on individual CA boards. In some cases, the members of a board may not provide the most accurate representation of the surrounding population and watershed needs. For instance, if there are certain land use practices that are prevalent in the watershed (e.g. agriculture), it should be reflected in the representation of the board.

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Activities and programs undertaken by the CA should continue to be directed by the CA board in accordance with the Act and other provincial legislation, policies, etc. While the general manager or chief administrative officer is responsible for the oversight of the day-to-day operational needs and delivery of the programs, they (as well as staff) are not responsible for decision-making at the watershed level.

Funding Mechanisms

While we recognize provincial funding has significantly declined since the 1990s, and current CA budgets are largely comprised of municipal levies and other self-generated revenues, the variability in CA capacity and resourcing to provide a range of programs and services is a concern. We understand the CA funding requirements vary depending on size and management requirements of a watershed, population levels, etc., but we recommend a minimum standard program for all authorities to deliver, recognizing that small CAs will require greater supplemental funding. Consistent provincial support for CAs is required to ensure they can effectively deliver on provincially-coordinated programs and activities.

Roles and Responsibilities

We agree CAs have played a significant role in conserving Ontario’s natural resources through stewardship efforts, and watershed management planning and practices; however, there is an opportunity through this review to better define those roles and responsibilities to eliminate overlap with government agencies, as well as identify and address any gaps that could be efficiently filled by CAs (e.g. regulatory role).

The scope afforded to projects/programs in the Act may be too broad and by providing each individual CA with the flexibility to develop local resource management programs there is no consistency. Programs should be developed with local stakeholder input and should complement/align with provincial strategic direction, policies, regulations, etc. This will require enhanced and consistent government agency (MNRF, Ministry of Environment and Climate Change, Fisheries and Oceans Canada) participation and support for the implementation and enforcement of relevant policies, regulations, and legislation where there is any level of shared responsibility with CAs. Government agencies must provide CAs with clear direction with respect to their roles and responsibilities (e.g. permitting, compliance, etc.) in this regard. This will help the CAs, the public, industry, and other stakeholders to better understand who is responsible for what.

For example, we recognize under section 28 of the Act that CAs are responsible for regulating *development, interference with wetlands and alternations to shorelines and watercourses*; however, enforcement of section 28 regulations is still not well-defined. If CAs are to have an effective regulatory role they must also have the tools (and resources) necessary to monitor and enforce compliance.

Other Areas of Interest

Fishing, hunting, and trapping are safe and compatible conservation activities in multi-use areas. CAs have an opportunity to recognize, celebrate, and benefit from these traditional heritage activities on CA properties. CAs should look for ways to enhance fishing, hunting, and trapping opportunities to offer more diverse activities, better engage local residents, protect ecological integrity, and generate a multitude of socio-economic benefits. In particular, we recommend that co-managed MNRF properties must include provincial guidelines for input on decision-making related to provincial land use agreements to ensure that activities such as fishing, hunting, and trapping continue on these lands. Where these opportunities have been lost, the province and CAs should work together to restore traditional uses (e.g. training and trialing of sporting dogs).

Any definition of conservation or “conservation of land” should include the protection, **use and management** of natural resources to supply benefits at optimal sustainable levels for present and future generations of Ontarians.

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In closing, this review should not result in the further downloading of responsibility (or added regulatory burden) to CAs. While it is important to recognize CAs as front line organizations working on the ground, the MNRF is still responsible for the management and regulation of Ontario's fish and wildlife resources, and this should be better reflected in the review.

We appreciate the opportunity to comment on the review of the *Conservation Authorities Act*, and we would be happy to discuss any aspect of our response with you further.

Yours in Conservation,



Dawn Sucee
Fish and Wildlife Biologist

DS/gh

cc: OFAH Board of Directors
OFAH Land Use/Access/Trails Advisory Committee
Angelo Lombardo, OFAH Executive Director
Matt DeMille, OFAH Manager, Fish & Wildlife Services