



May 1, 2026

BY EMAIL

Essex Region Conservation Authority
311 - 360 Fairview Avenue West
Essex, ON N8M 1Y6
Email: admin@erca.org

Re: Amalgamation of Conservation Authorities and Changes to the *Conservation Authorities Act*

At its Regular Council Meeting held on April 20, 2026, Council supported the enclosed correspondence.

Council accordingly passed the following resolution:

R26-04-166

Moved By Councillor Verbeek
Seconded By Councillor Allard

That the correspondence from the Essex Region Conservation regarding amalgamation of Ontario Conservation Authorities and changes to the *Conservation Authorities Act*, be received and supported.

Carried

I trust you will find this satisfactory. If you have any questions or comments, please feel free to contact the undersigned.

Yours truly,



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "jml", written in a cursive style.

Joseph Malandrucolo
Director, Legal and Legislative Services/Clerk
jmalandrucolo@essex.ca

Enclosure

cc. Molly Allaire, Essex Region Conservation Authority Chair mallaire@amherstburg.ca



Essex Region Conservation Authority

Board of Directors

BD06/26

From: Tim Byrne, CAO/Secretary-Treasurer

Date: Thursday, April 2, 2026

Subject: Amalgamation of Conservation Authorities and Changes to the CA Act

Compliance Action: [Bill 97, Plan to Protect Ontario Act \(Budget Measures\), 2026](#)

Recommendation: THAT Report BD06/26 be received for Member's information.

Summary

- Bill 97 introduces the legislative framework the regional consolidation of Ontario's conservation authorities, including governance and transition provisions.
- ERCA is proposed to be amalgamated with Upper Thames River, Lower Thames Valley, and St. Clair Region Conservation Authorities to form the Western Lake Erie Regional Conservation Authority.
- The legislation provides for the continuation of employees, agreements, assets, liabilities and legal proceedings through the transition to the new authority.
- Governance of the new regional authority will be through municipal appointments, with lower-tier municipalities represented through upper-tier municipalities rather than by direct appointment.
- The Ontario Provincial Conservation Agency (OPCA) has been established to coordinate and support the transition to the new regional framework.
- Several implementation details including board composition limits, Watershed Councils, and transition-period processes, remain subject to regulation and/or Ministerial direction.

Discussion

On March 10, 2026, Minister McCarthy announced the Province's decision on ERO #025-1257 regarding proposed boundaries for the regional consolidation of Ontario's conservation authorities. The announcement also indicated that legislation would be introduced to establish nine Regional Conservation Authorities and amend and *Conservation Authorities Act*.

On March 26, 2026, the Province introduced [Bill 97, Plan to Protect Ontario Act \(Budget Measures\), 2026](#). Schedule 3 amends the *Conservation Authorities Act* by adding a new Part I.1 respecting regional consolidation and related transition, governance and regulation-making matters and provides for the amalgamation into eight new Regional Conservation Authorities. The legislation also continues the

Lakehead Region Conservation Authority under the name Northwestern Ontario Regional Conservation Authority, rather than creating it as a new Authority through amalgamation

Schedule 3 also adds regulation-making authority to the Act for both the Lieutenant Governor in Council and the Minister to prescribe implementation details related to transition, governance and watershed councils.

By way of background, in November 2025, [Bill 68, Plan to Protect Ontario Act \(Budget Measures\), 2025 \(No. 2\), S.O. 2025, c. 15](#), provided for the creation of the Ontario Provincial Conservation Agency (OPCA) to oversee conservation authorities, including their governance, strategic planning, operations, and programs and services, oversee the transition to a regional watershed-based framework in Ontario and promote consistent policies, standards and fees, as well as support shared services and centralized digital systems, including a single provincial permitting platform.

To support OPCA in fulfilling this mandate and leading the transition to a regional watershed-based framework, the Province has committed specific, time-limited funding. In his March 10th, 2026, announcement, the Minister committed to providing OPCA with \$20-million start-up funding to support implementation of the transition to nine consolidated authorities. The Minister also committed to \$3 million in annual funding to support OPCA in assisting conservation authorities through the transition to the new model and in meeting new provincial standards and advancing required system-wide improvements.

As at the date of this report, Bill 97 is being debated in Second Reading and is expected to receive Royal Assent in the coming week. Bill 97 introduces the legislative framework for the regional consolidation of conservation authorities, including governance and transition provisions. The following sections provide a summary of the key changes.

Amalgamation

The Western Lake Erie Regional Conservation Authority (WLERCA) will merge Essex Region Conservation Authority (ERCA), the Upper Thames River (UTRCA), Lower Thames Valley (LTVCA, and St. Clair Region (SCRCA) Conservation Authorities. Plans for the amalgamation are to begin in May 2026 and be completed by early 2027. The target date for the amalgamation of conservation authorities is February 1, 2027, or such later date as may be prescribed by regulation.

Under Bill 97, the new Regional Conservation Authorities would replace the former Conservation Authorities as legal entities. The following rules apply on and after the transition date for each authority to ensure continuity of existing partnerships and agreements with municipalities, Indigenous groups and other stakeholders:

- 1) All rights, obligations, assets and liabilities of the predecessor authorities will be transferred to the new authority.
- 2) Any legal action in favor or against a predecessor authority will be enforced by or against the new authority.
- 3) **Any staff employed by the predecessor authority immediately before the transition date will become employees of the new authority and employees are not considered**

constructively dismissed due to the amalgamation. The Public Sector Labour Relations Transition Act will apply to predecessor authorities under the new Regional Authority.

- 4) Advisory boards of a predecessor authority continue under the new authority.
- 5) Agreements and MOU's will continue under the new authority.
- 6) Area of jurisdiction of the new authority are formed by the collective areas of jurisdiction of predecessor authorities.
- 7) Participating municipalities of the new authority shall be the single tier municipalities and upper-tier municipalities located in whole or part within the area of jurisdiction.**
- 8) Any agreement with a lower tier municipality prior to amalgamation will be transferred to upper-tier participating municipality.
- 9) Debts due to predecessor authority becomes a debt due to the new authority.
- 10) Application for permit or request for hearing made prior to the transition date is continued as an application to the new authority.
- 11) Where the predecessor authority was party to a hearing, review, appeal that was requested or commenced before the transition date, the new authority is deemed to be the party.
- 12) Appointed Provincial Offences Officers will become officers under the new authority.
- 13) Proceedings under the Provincial Offences Act will be continued under the new authority.

Other rules, including those related to transition may be prescribed by regulation which is anticipated to follow shortly after the legislation is passed.

Regional Governance Structure

The First Members of each new Regional Conservation Authority, and of the continued authority, are to be appointed by participating municipalities' councils in accordance with the regulation.

The number of members of a Regional Conservation Authority to be appointed by the participating municipalities' councils is based on the population of the participating municipality. Regulations will be forthcoming to define the minimum and maximum members to be appointed from both single-tier municipalities (i.e. Windsor, Pelee) and upper-tier municipalities (i.e. the County of Essex representing lower-tier municipalities such as Amherstburg, Essex, Kingsville, Lakeshore, Lasalle, Leamington and Tecumseh). As representation on the board is based on population, and that Township of Pelee is a single-tier municipality, it is anticipated that regulations will confirm the Township's representation on the Regional Conservation Authority board.

The new Regional Conservation Authority, WLERCA, will continue to be governed and funded by local municipalities, however, representation of lower-tier municipalities will be provided through the upper-tier municipality, with the County of Essex appointing the board member(s) on their behalf, rather than through direct appointment. Within the larger Regional Conservation Authority, every municipality will be required to appoint at least one board member. Regulations may also limit the number of board members as well as cap the number of members from one municipality. Section 14 of the Act requires that 70% of the appointees must be council members.

The legislation also permits limited non-council appointments, including a Ministerial agricultural sector representative, subject to conditions and voting restrictions prescribed in the Act and regulations.

Section 14 (6) of the Act permits participating municipalities of a Regional Conservation Authority, by unanimous agreement, to adopt an alternative method for determining the number of board members appointed by each municipality. Any alternative governance arrangement must comply with requirements and limitations prescribed by regulation, including overall board size limits.

Board Members may be appointed for terms of up to four years and are eligible for reappointment. A Chair and Vice Chair will be elected in accordance with the authority's by-laws and may hold office for a term of up to two years at a time, subject to a cumulative maximum of eight years serviced in either role.

During the transition period, a **Project Executive (PE)** appointed by the OPCA will serve as CAO of the Regional Conservation Authority for up to two years. Following the transition period, the board will appoint a CAO in accordance with the authority's by-laws.

Watershed Councils

Bill 97 requires each new Regional Conservation Authority to establish one or more Watershed Councils. Watershed Councils are intended to provide advice to the Authority on local priorities related to programs and services and to ensure that local and regional interests are considered as part of the authority's decision-making.

The legislation anticipates that a range of perspectives may be represented on Watershed Councils, including Indigenous representation and stakeholders from sectors such as agriculture and development. **The composition, mandate, powers, duties and procedures of Watershed Councils are not prescribed in the Act and will be established through regulation.**

Watershed Councils are advisory in nature and do not replace board governance or municipal representation. Further details regarding their role and operation are expected following the issuance of regulations.

Transition Team

The OPCA will be responsible for coordinating the transition to each new Regional Conservation Authority. As part of this process, OPCA will appoint a Project Executive (PE) and establish a Transition Committee for each regional authority.

The Transition Committee will include the CAO (or designate) and one elected official from each predecessor authority, along with any additional members appointed by OPCA as it considers advisable. The PE will chair the Transition Committee, which is required to develop a transition plan to be implemented by the new Regional Authority. OPCA will provide resources, tools, and guidance to support transition planning and may require the submission or progress reports. Where a transition plan is not developed within the timelines set by OPCA, the Agency may prepare the transition plan on behalf of the Committee.

The PE is not an employee of OPCA and will be compensated in accordance with terms agreed to with the Agency. Following consolidation, the PE will serve as CEO of the new Regional Conservation Authority during the transition period, as described above.

Prohibitions during the Transition Period

During the transition period, actions to establish a conservation authority, enlarge the area of jurisdiction of an authority, amalgamate an authority or dissolve an authority are prohibited.

Additionally, during the transition period, the Minister may issue directions to conservation authorities. On March 10, 2026, the Minister issued a written direction imposing a fee freeze on planning, development and permitting fees, effective that date (attached).

The statutory prohibitions and the Minister's authority to issue directions will be repealed on a day to be named by order of the Lieutenant Governor in Council.

Temporary Guardrails

The province has advised conservation authority boards that "temporary guardrails" are in place during the transition period to support a stable transition to the new regional structure. These guardrails are administrative in nature and relate to decisions involving "extraordinary" financial, asset or employment matters. Examples of these guardrails include: halting major land dispositions, significant procurement decisions or material changes to management or organizational structure, without review and authorization by the OPCA or the Transition Committee.

2027 Budgets

It is anticipated that the Minister will be issuing directions to Conservation Authorities to manage the 2027 budget process which could be used to provide clarity around timelines (i.e. CA budget to be completed by December 31, 2026 and levies be issued to current participating municipalities).

Next Steps

Following Royal Assent of Bill 97, ERCA will be required to appoint the two members to the Transition Team (CAO or designate plus one member who is an elected official) within 90 days. Further details related to governance, Watershed Councils and transition planning are expected to be issued through regulation and/or Minister's Directives which would be expected to follow shortly thereafter.

The CAO and Chair were invited to an Information Session hosted by the Ministry of Environment Conservation and Parks (MECP) on Thursday, April 9, 2025. The intent of the session was to provide:

- An overview of the proposed legislative amendments and associated changes
- A high-level summary of the proposed transition path and key milestones
- Next steps

As this session coincided with the scheduled board meeting, the CAO will provide a verbal update to the Board on any additional information available at this time.

This report is provided for the Board's information, with further updates to be brought forward as additional regulatory or Ministerial direction becomes available.

Approved By:



Tim Byrne, CAO/Secretary Treasurer

Attachments:

- Email from MECP regarding ERO Decision Notice on the Proposed Boundaries for the Regional Consolidation of Ontario's Conservation Authorities (ERO 025-1257) dated March 10, 2026
- Letter from The Honorable Todd McCarthy, Minister MECP regarding Minister's direction for conservation authorities regarding fee changes associated with planning, development, and permitting fees dated March 10, 2026

From: [ca.office \(MECP\)](#)
Cc: [ca.office \(MECP\)](#)
Subject: **Decision Notice on the Proposed Boundaries for the Regional Consolidation of Ontario's Conservation Authorities**
Date: March 10, 2026 3:04:16 PM

Greetings,

We are writing to inform you that a decision notice has been posted to the Environmental Registry of Ontario (ERO) regarding the proposal notice posting #025-1257 on the "Proposed boundaries for the regional consolidation of Ontario's conservation authorities."

The proposal initially consulted on by the government proposed boundaries that would have resulted in seven regional conservation authorities. As a result of the feedback received during consultation, the province adjusted the boundaries to accommodate areas with distinct geographies and development contexts, to better balance differing priorities across rural, urban and northern areas and improve alignment with watersheds and with source protection regions. The government is now planning to move forward with consolidation to create nine optimized regional CAs. A map showing the planned boundaries and the nine new CAs is available at [Ontario Provincial Conservation Agency | ontario.ca](#).

In the coming weeks, the government plans to introduce amendments to the *Conservation Authorities Act (CAA)* that would implement the consolidation and set out a smooth path to consolidation to ensure service continuity for communities. Consolidation is targeted to take effect in early 2027 to allow transition planning to occur over the next year. The government's plan would ensure a clear, coordinated and successful transition led by the Ontario Provincial Conservation Agency (OPCA), that would minimize disruptions to CA staffing, services, permitting processes and with all existing partnerships and obligations carried forward to maintain service stability. A summary of the consolidation plan, and details on transition, are included in the decision notice [Proposed boundaries for the regional consolidation of Ontario's conservation authorities | Environmental Registry of Ontario](#).

The government's plans to consolidate CAs build on recent progress Ontario has made to improve the CA system, including establishing OPCA to provide centralized leadership and oversight for Ontario's CAs. Under these plans, the important work that conservation authorities do to protect people and property from the risks of flooding and other natural hazards would not change. The nine new regional CAs would continue to operate as independent, municipally governed organizations and to fulfill their provincially mandated programs such as managing flooding and other natural hazards, drinking water source protection under the *Clean Water Act*, watershed management programs, and the management of their lands and recreational trails, ensuring public access to local natural areas and outdoor activities.

The province is committed to supporting conservation authorities throughout this process and ensuring local knowledge informs next steps. In the coming weeks you

will be invited to technical briefings to provide further information on the next steps in the planned transition process.

For questions regarding the plans for consolidation, please contact CCEO@ontario.ca. If you have questions about the planned legislative amendments and day-to-day CA business, please reach out to MECP staff via ca.office@ontario.ca.

We thank you for taking the time to share with us your perspectives during the consultations that helped to shape this plan and look forward to working closely with you over the next year.

Sincerely,

Chloe Stuart
ADM, Land and Water Division
Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks

Hassaan Basit
Chief Conservation Executive
Office of the Chief Conservation Executive

Ministry of the Environment,
Conservation and Parks

Ministère de l'Environnement, de la
Protection de la nature et des Parcs

Office of the Minister

Bureau du ministre

777 Bay Street, 5th Floor
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777, rue Bay, 5^e étage
Toronto ON M7A 2J3
Tél. : 416 314-6790



357-2026-736

March 10, 2026

TO: Conservation authorities as listed in Appendix A to the Attachment A
“Minister’s Direction Issued Pursuant to Section 21.3 of the *Conservation
Authorities Act*”

SUBJECT: Minister’s direction for conservation authorities regarding fee changes associated
with planning, development, and permitting fees

I am writing with regards to conservation authority planning, development and permitting fees. Pursuant to my authority under subsection 21.3 (1) of the *Conservation Authorities Act*, I am issuing a new Direction, attached to this letter as Attachment A. This Direction is consistent with the Directions that were previously in place for the 2023, 2024 and 2025 calendar years.

The purpose of this Direction, which is effective from March 10, 2026, to February 28, 2027, is to require a conservation authority not to change the amount of the fee it charges or the manner in which it determines the fee for any program or service related to reviewing and commenting on planning and development related proposals or land use planning policies, or for permits issued by conservation authorities. This Direction is intended to support less costly approvals in order to help increase housing supply and affordability in Ontario.

This Direction applies to the conservation authorities listed in Appendix A, who are encouraged to make the Direction publicly available on the Governance section of their websites.

If you have any questions regarding this Direction, please contact the ministry at ca.office@ontario.ca.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Todd McCarthy". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the left and a long vertical stroke extending downwards to the right.

Todd McCarthy
Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks

c: The Honourable Rob Flack, Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing

**Minister's Direction Issued Pursuant to Section 21.3 of the *Conservation Authorities Act*
(this "Direction")**

WHEREAS section 21.2 of the *Conservation Authorities Act* permits a conservation authority to charge a fee for a program or service if the program or service is included in the Minister's list of classes of programs and services in respect of which a conservation authority may charge a fee;

AND WHEREAS subsections 21.2 (6) and 21.2 (7) of the *Conservation Authorities Act* provide that a conservation authority shall adopt a written fee policy that includes a fee schedule listing the programs and services that it provides in respect of which it charges a fee, and the amount of the fee charged for each program or service or the manner in which the fee is determined (a "**Fee Schedule**");

AND WHEREAS subsection 21.2 (10) of the *Conservation Authorities Act* provides that a conservation authority may make a change to the list of fees set out in the fee schedule or to the amount of any fee or the manner in which a fee is determined, provided the authority shall give notice of the proposed change to the public in a manner it considers appropriate;

AND WHEREAS section 21.3 of the *Conservation Authorities Act* provides the Minister with the authority to give a written direction to an authority directing it not to change the amount of any fee it charges under subsection 21.2 (10), in respect of a program or service set out in the list referred to in subsection 21.2 (2), for the period specified in the direction;

NOW THEREFORE pursuant to the authority of the Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks under section 21.3, the conservation authorities set out under Appendix "A" of this Direction (the "**conservation authorities**" or each, a "**conservation authority**") are hereby directed as follows:

Fee Changes Prohibition

1. Commencing on the Effective Date and for the duration of the Term of this Direction, a conservation authority is prohibited from making a change under subsection 21.2 (10) of the *Conservation Authorities Act* to the amount of any fee or the manner in which a fee is determined in its fee schedule if such a change would have the effect of changing the fee amount for the programs and services described in paragraphs 2 and 3 of this Direction.

Program and Service Fees Impacted

2. This Direction applies to any fee set out in the Fee Schedule of a conservation authority, including without limitation fees for any mandatory program or service (Category 1), municipal program or service (Category 2), or conservation authority recommended program or service (Category 3) related to reviewing and commenting on planning and

Attachment A

development related proposals, applications, or land use planning policies, or for conservation authority permitting.

3. For greater certainty, this Direction applies to any fees in respect of the following programs or services provided under the Mandatory Programs and Services regulation ([O. Reg. 686/21](#)):
 - a. Section 6: programs and services related to reviewing applications and proposals under the *Aggregate Resources Act*, *Drainage Act*, *Environmental Assessment Act*, and the *Niagara Escarpment Planning and Development Act*, for the purpose of commenting on the risks related to natural hazards arising from the proposal,
 - b. Section 7: programs and services related to ensuring that decisions under the *Planning Act* are consistent with the natural hazards policies in the policy statements issued under section 3 of the *Planning Act* and are in conformance with any natural hazard policies included in a provincial plan as defined in section 1 of that Act,
 - c. Section 8: programs and services related to conservation authority duties, functions, and responsibilities to administer and enforce section 28 and its regulations, section 28.0.1, and section 30.1 of the *Conservation Authorities Act*,
 - d. Paragraph 4 of subsection 13 (3): programs and services related to reviewing and commenting on any proposal made under another Act for the purpose of determining whether the proposal relates to a significant drinking water threat or may impact any drinking water sources protected by a source protection plan, and
 - e. Subparagraph 4 iv of section 15: programs and services related to reviewing and commenting on proposals made under other Acts for the purpose of determining the proposal's impact on the Lake Simcoe Protection Plan and the Lake Simcoe watershed.

Application

4. This Direction, applies to all conservation authorities in Ontario, listed in Appendix "A" to this Direction.
5. For greater certainty, this Direction also applies to the conservation authorities listed in Appendix "A" to this Direction when such conservation authorities are meeting as a source protection authority under the *Clean Water Act, 2006*.

Effective Date and Term

6. This Direction is effective from March 10, 2026 (the "**Effective Date**").
7. The term of this Direction is the period from the Effective Date to February 28, 2027 (the "**Term**").

Attachment A

Amendments

8. This Direction may be amended in writing from time to time at the sole discretion of the Minister.

**HIS MAJESTY THE KING IN RIGHT OF ONTARIO
as represented by the
Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks**

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Todd McCarthy". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal flourish extending to the left.

Todd McCarthy
Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks
March 10, 2026

APPENDIX A

LIST OF CONSERVATION AUTHORITIES TO WHICH THE DIRECTION APPLIES

Ausable Bayfield CA

R.R. #3
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Exeter ON N0M 1S5
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dheinbuck@abca.on.ca

Cataraqui Region CA

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Glenburnie ON K0H 1S0
David Ellingwood
dellingwood@cra.ca

Catfish Creek CA

R.R. #5
8079 Springwater Road
Aylmer ON N5H 2R4
Dusty Underhill
generalmanager@catfishcreek.ca

Central Lake Ontario CA

100 Whiting Avenue
Oshawa ON L1H 3T3
Chris Darling
cdarling@cloca.com

Credit Valley CA

1255 Old Derry Rd
Mississauga ON L5N 6R4
Terri LeRoux
terri.leroux@cvc.ca

Crowe Valley CA

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Marmora ON K0K 2M0
Janette Loveys Smith
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Essex Region CA

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Tim Byrne
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Ganaraska Region CA

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Linda Laliberte
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Grand River CA

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Samantha Lawson
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Grey Sauble CA

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Tim Lanthier
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Halton Region CA

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Chandra Sharma
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Hamilton Region CA

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Lisa Burnside
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Kawartha Region CA

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Mark Majchrowski
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Kettle Creek CA

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Elizabeth VanHooren
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Lake Simcoe Region CA

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Lakehead Region CA

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Tammy Cook
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Long Point Region CA

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Judy Maxwell
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Lower Thames Valley CA

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Mark Peacock
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Lower Trent Region CA

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Phil Beard
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Mattagami Region CA

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David Vallier
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Mississippi Valley CA

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Niagara Peninsula CA

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Nickel District CA

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North Bay-Mattawa CA

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Quinte Region CA

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Raisin Region CA

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Rideau Valley CA

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Manotick ON K4M 1A5
Sommer Casgrain-Robertson
sommer.casgrain-robertson@rvca.ca

Saugeen Valley CA

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Erik Downing
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Sault Ste. Marie Region CA

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Sault Ste. Marie ON P6A 6J8
Corrina Barrett
cbarrett@ssmrca.ca

South Nation River CA

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Finch ON K0C 1K0
Carl Bickerdike
cbickerdike@nation.on.ca

St. Clair Region CA

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Strathroy ON N7G 3P9
Ken Phillips
kphillips@scrca.on.ca

Toronto and Region CA

101 Exchange Avenue
Vaughan ON L4K 5R6
John MacKenzie
john.mackenzie@trca.ca

Upper Thames River CA

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Tracey Annett
annettt@thamesriver.on.ca



April 9, 2026

Meeting of the ERCA Board of Directors

Conservation Authorities Amalgamation and Changes to the CA Act

Resolution No. 47/26

Moved by Kieran McKenzie

Seconded by Jim Morrison

WHEREAS the Board supports the Province's objectives of modernization and increased efficiency in the delivery of programs and services;

AND WHEREAS the Minister has provided verbal assurances that local offices will remain open, that no front-line jobs will be lost, that local programs and services will continue, and that local relationships and expertise will be retained, and the Board seeks clarity regarding how these assurances will be formally secured through binding legislative, regulatory, or policy mechanisms;

AND WHEREAS the Board remains concerned that the proposed watershed boundaries, while improved from earlier proposals, remain too large and may undermine effective, locally informed watershed-based management;

AND WHEREAS the proposed removal of lower-tier municipalities as participating municipalities risks the loss of direct local input into strategic and budgetary decision-making, weakens rural representation, and limits meaningful local influence over watershed-based planning, despite these municipalities having to continue to contribute funding;

AND WHEREAS the proposed implementation timeline is extremely aggressive and would benefit from fulsome consultation and meaningful dialogue with affected municipalities, industry experts, and stakeholders to ensure programs, services, and local expertise are protected, and that governance restructuring of this scale is informed by timely, constructive engagement with affected municipalities, industry experts, and stakeholders;

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Board supports the Province's modernization objectives provided they do not compromise local representation, expertise, service delivery, or accountability;

AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT the Board urges the Province to formally entrench the Minister's assurances to ensure long-term protection of local offices, staff, programs, services, and local knowledge;

AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT the Board recommends reconsideration of watershed boundary scale, retention of meaningful

participation for lower-tier municipalities, and an expedited and robust consultation process and meaningful dialogue with affected municipalities, industry experts, and stakeholders to ensure programs, services, and local expertise are protected to minimize unintended consequences;

AND BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED THAT this resolution be communicated to the Minister, the Ontario Provincial Conservation Agency, local MPPs, local municipalities and Board of Directors of the proposed Western Lake Erie Conservation Authority as a formal statement of the Board's position.

-CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

I, Nicole Kupnicki, Manager, Human Resources & Council Services of the Essex Region Conservation Authority, do hereby certify this to be a true and complete copy of Resolution No. 47/26, passed by the Essex Region Conservation Authority Meeting of the Board of Directors on the 9th day of April, 2026.

DATED at Essex, Ontario
this 10th day of April, 2026.



Nicole Kupnicki

Conservation Authorities Act Changes

Bill 97, Plan to Protect Ontario Act (Budget Measures), 2026

April 2, 2026

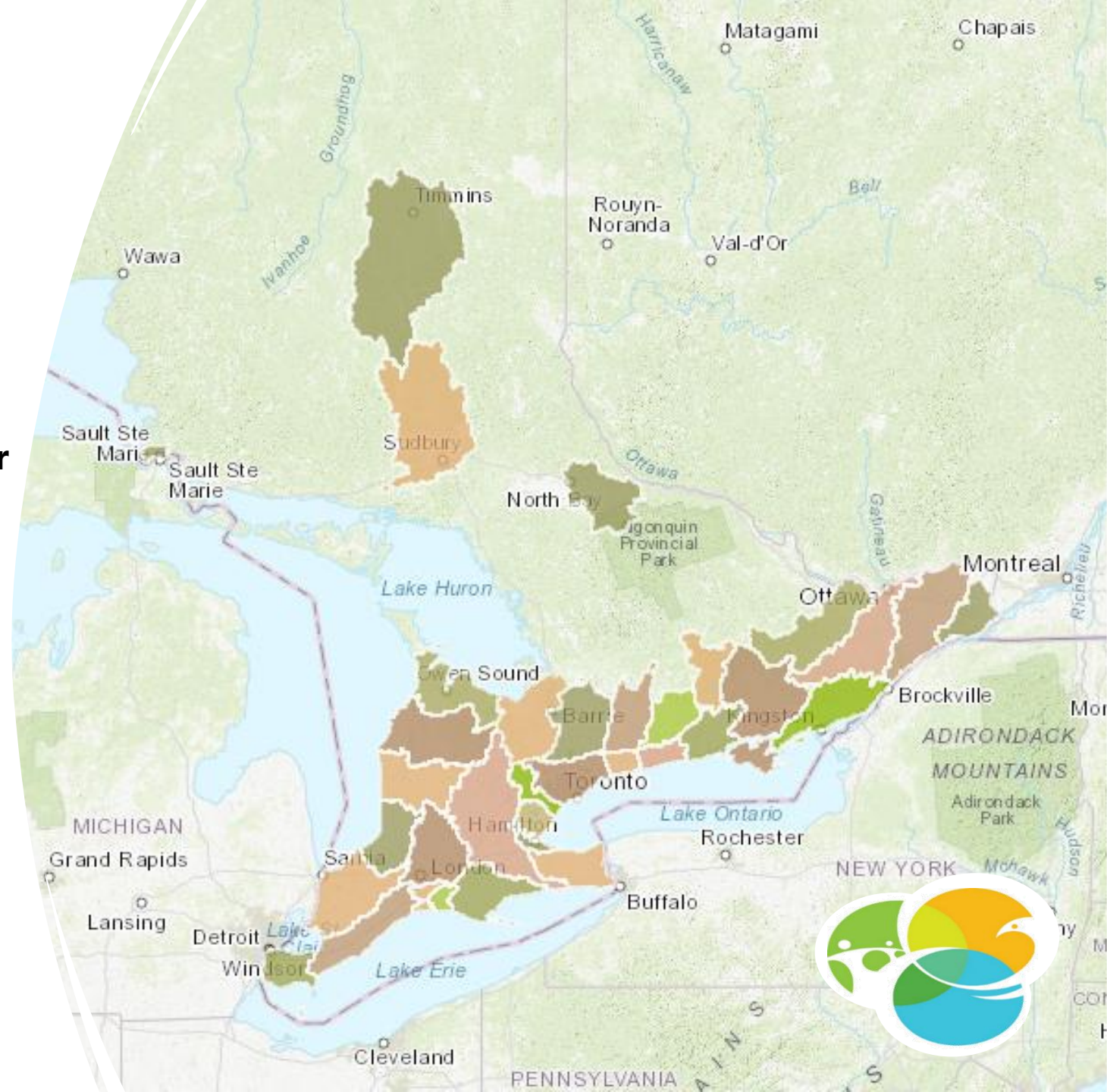
Tim Byrne
C.A.O. / Secretary-Treasurer

Essex Region Conservation Authority



Current CA Landscape

- CAs are established through the *Conservation Authorities Act, 1946*.
- **Allows municipalities to join and form a CA to undertake the legislated mandates under the Act.**
- Original inception – response to impacts of drought and deforestation causing soil loss and flooding 1930s and '40s
- 36 CAs in Ontario (31 in SW Ontario)
- All CAs exist to “deliver programs and services that further the conservation, restoration, development, and management of natural resources in Ontario watersheds with focus on local watershed issues.
- Operate using an **Integrated Watershed Approach**



Conservation Authority Governance (Current)

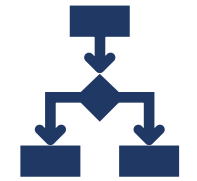
Conservation Authorities Act



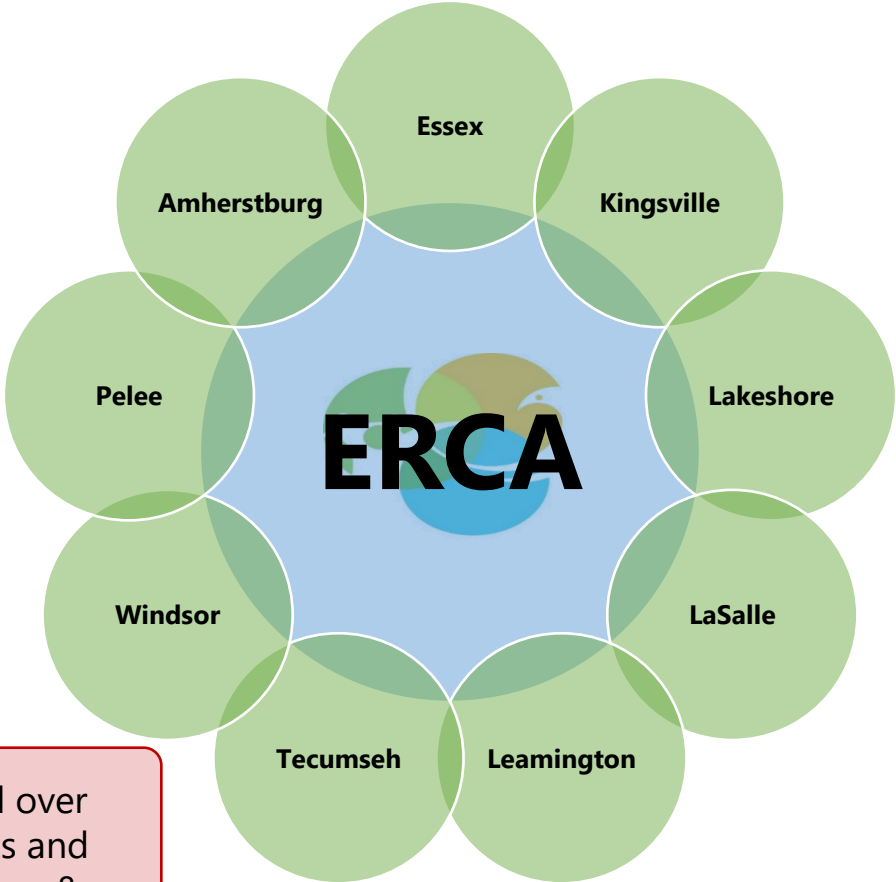
Municipalities within a watershed vote to establish a CA



CA Board of Directors
(appointed municipal councillors)






Conservation Authority Administration



Control over budgets and programs & services that are important locally



Bill 68 & ERO# 025-1257

Instrument of Change		Description	Status
	<p>Bill 68 Plan to Protect Ontario Act (Budget Measures), 2025 (No. 2)</p>	<p>18 Schedules with amendments to various statutes. <u>Schedule 3 amends the Conservation Authorities Act with the creation of a new provincial agency (OPCA).</u></p>	<p>Royal Assent – Nov. 27, 2025 3rd Reading – Nov. 25, 2025 2nd Reading – Nov. 24, 2025 1st Reading – Nov. 5, 2025</p>
	<p>ERO No. 025-1257 Proposed boundaries for the regional consolidation of Ontario's conservation authorities</p>	<p>Amended to reduce from 36 CAs to 7 CAs through amalgamation, with the intent to improve front-line services.</p>	<p>Decision issued – Mar. 10, 2026.</p>
	<p>Bill 97 Plan to Protect Ontario Act (Budget Measures), 2026</p>	<p>Consolidation of 36 CA's to 9 regional CA's</p>	<p>Royal Assent – TBD April 2026 3rd Reading – TBD April 2026 Referred to Standing Committee 2nd Reading – April 2, 2026 1st Reading – Mar. 26, 2026</p>

Ontario Provincial Conservation Agency (OPCA)



- Created/enabled through Royal Assent of Bill 68.
- Oversee the amalgamated CAs (governance, finances, performance, strategic vision, etc.)
- Funded with \$20M provincially with an additional \$3M annually to assist CAs with transition
- Appoints Project Executives to each Regional CA to facilitate the Transition Plan

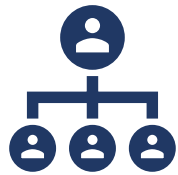


Conservation Authority Governance

Conservation Authorities Act



Ontario Provincial Conservation Agency (OPCA)



Western Lake Erie Regional Conservation Authority (WLERCA)

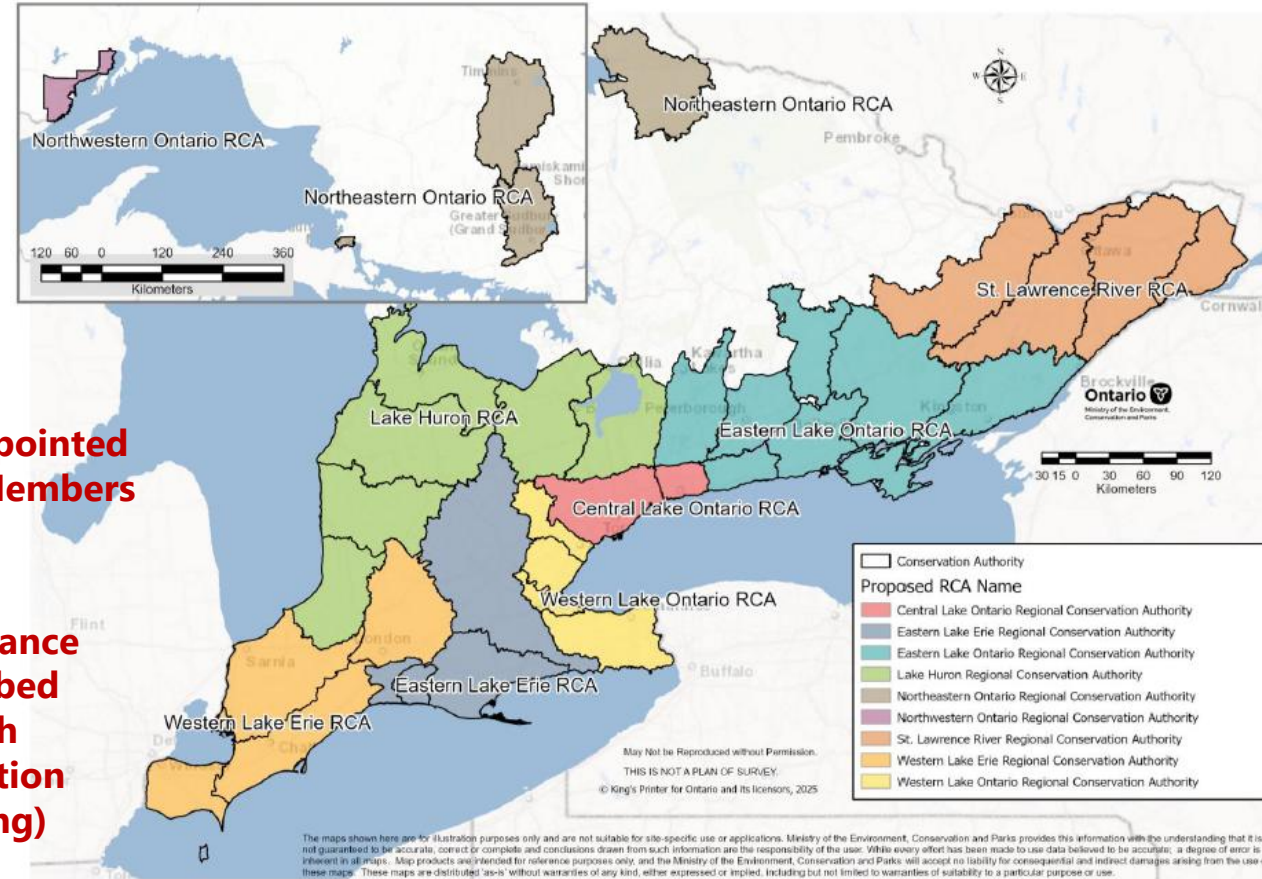


Upper Tier & Single Tier municipalities

5-12 appointed Board Members

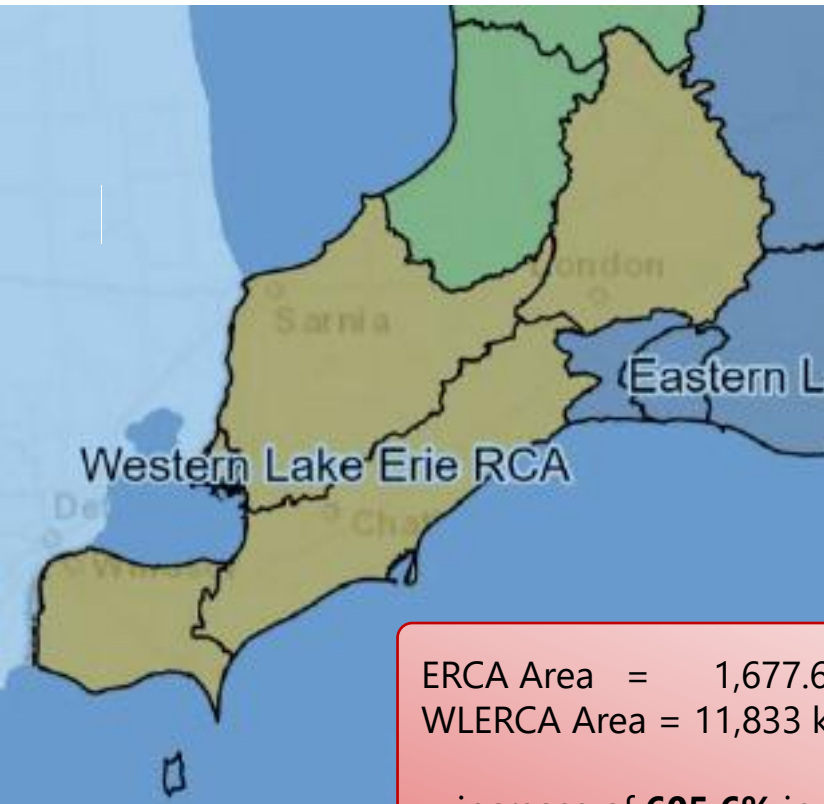
Board governance prescribed through Regulation (pending)

Lower Tier municipalities to be represented by Upper Tier Municipality (i.e. County of Essex)



Western Lake Erie Region Conservation Authority

Current conservation authorities that would make up the Western Lake Erie Region Conservation Authority



(WLERCA):

- Essex Region CA
- Lower Thames Valley CA
- St. Clair Region CA
- Upper Thames River CA

ERCA Area = 1,677.61 km²
WLERCA Area = 11,833 km²

~ increase of **605.6%** in land area

Single-Tier Municipalities

These cities operate independently of a county structure:

- City of Windsor
- Municipality of Chatham-Kent
- City of Sarnia
- City of London
- City of Stratford
- Town of St. Marys
- Township of Pelee

Upper-Tier Municipalities (Counties)

These counties are composed of multiple lower-tier member municipalities that fall within the new regional boundary:

- Essex County (including 7 member municipalities)
- Lambton County
- Middlesex County
- Oxford County
- Perth County



Transitional matters



New Authority assumes rights, obligations, assets and liabilities of the predecessor Authority



Participating municipalities are single and upper-tiers within the jurisdiction.



Amalgamation does not constitute a breach or termination of contract / agreement in place.



Agreements and MOUs continue with the new Authority substituted as a party to the agreement / MOU



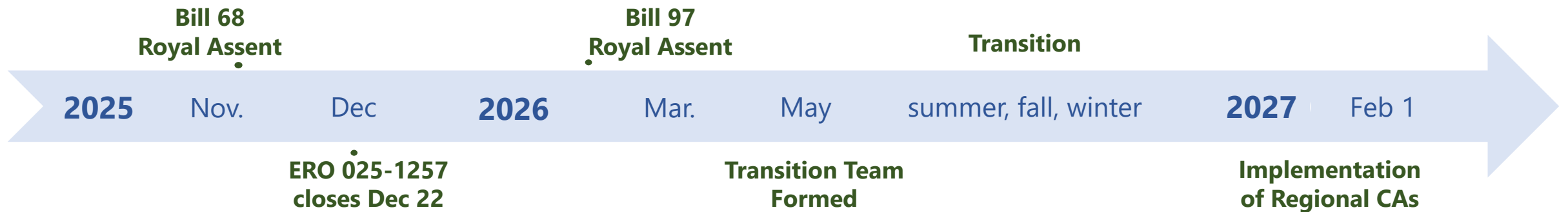
Prohibitions during transition period – requests for establishment of an authority, and meetings to enlarge, amalgamate or dissolve an authority



Minister may issue directions (i.e. prohibiting CA decisions, governing budgetary and apportionment matters, etc.)

First Steps

- OPCA to oversee CA Amalgamation, including transition plans and governance
- OPCA to appoint Project Executive for the region(s)
- OPCA to oversee transition from 36 to 9 CAs



Transition Committee

- Each CA will need to **appoint 2 members to the Transition Committee within 90 days** of Bill 97 Royal Assent (GM/CAO or designate + elected official)
- OPCA may appoint members (if the above is not completed or as they consider advisable). Members can be replaced by their appointing body
- OPCA may issue direction to Committee (roles, responsibilities, practices, etc.)
- Dissolution of a transition committee by OPCA not to be earlier than the transition date (i.e., February 1, 2027, or later date prescribed in regulation)



Transition Committee – Transition Plan

- Committees must develop a transition plan for submission and review by OPCA (date to be specified).
- OPCA will review and may provide edits / comments
- Final copy of Plan to be provided to OPCA and predecessor CAs. Also, to members of new Authority on or after transition date
- Summary of transition plan also provided to all current and new participating municipalities
- New CAs will implement the transition plan and may request amendments to OPCA
- Progress reports to OPCA required further to OPCA direction (requirements)



What will not change during transition

- Advisory boards of predecessor CA will continue
- Employees of predecessor CA employed at the time of amalgamation will continue (no break in service)
- “Other” Programs and Services agreements in place between a lower-tier and CA continue between the new CA and applicable upper-tier
- Permit applications underway
- Requests for hearings
- Provincial Offences Officers appointed
- *Provincial Offences Act* proceedings commenced



Transition Committee – Project Executive

- Project Executives (PE) appointed by the OPCA to serve as Chair of Transition Committee
- PE is not an employee of the OPCA and shall be paid compensation and expenses as agreed to with the OPCA
- PE may request information from predecessor CAs (cooperation required)
- OPCA may replace the PE
- On the transition date (February 1, 2027, or later date per regulation), the PE will become the new CAO of the new Authority for a term of up to 2-years
- During 2-year term, OPCA may remove and replace CAO, or, if no replacement named, new CA will appoint CAO



Governance Matters

- Regulations will establish **methods for appointment of members** (number of members, minimum, maximum per municipality and maximum overall).
- Method for determining number of members **based on municipal population in proportion to the total population within CA area of jurisdiction.**
- All participating municipalities may enter into **alternative agreement** re: appointment of members. Agreement provided to Agency and on website.
- Legislation (and potentially regulations) set out **matters for municipalities to consider** when appointing member not on council.



Governance Matters (continued)

- **Members are appointed for a term up to four years**, and members can be replaced by their appointing council. Members are eligible for re-appointment.
- **Chairs and vice chairs may serve a term of two years, and not more than eight years total** (whether served consecutively or otherwise)
- Minister may appoint additional **agricultural sector member** with same voting limitations as in current CA Act.
- Authority **will appoint CAO** responsible for duties as provided in CA by-laws
- Authority shall establish **one or more watershed council**.
- Authorities **shall make by-laws** necessary for proper administration.



Governance Matters – First Members

- Participating municipalities need to appoint members by the day before the transition date.
- Regulations establish a method for determining # of members, (minimum of 1 each).
- Method for determining # of members based on municipal population within area of jurisdiction (AoJ), in proportion to the total population in AoJ.
- Regulations will establish a maximum # to be appointed by a single participating municipality, as well as by all participating municipalities.
- Members appointed for term up to 4 years.
- Municipal councils need to notify the OPCA of appointments in writing.



Overview / Current understanding

Upon Royal Assent of Bill 97

- Transition rules
- Transition Committees
- Project Executives
- Transition Plans
- First CAO
- New Chair/Vice Chair provisions
- Amendments to fees paid to the Agency
- Amendments to Agency liability
- Regulation-making authorities

On a date named by Order of the Lieutenant Governor in Council

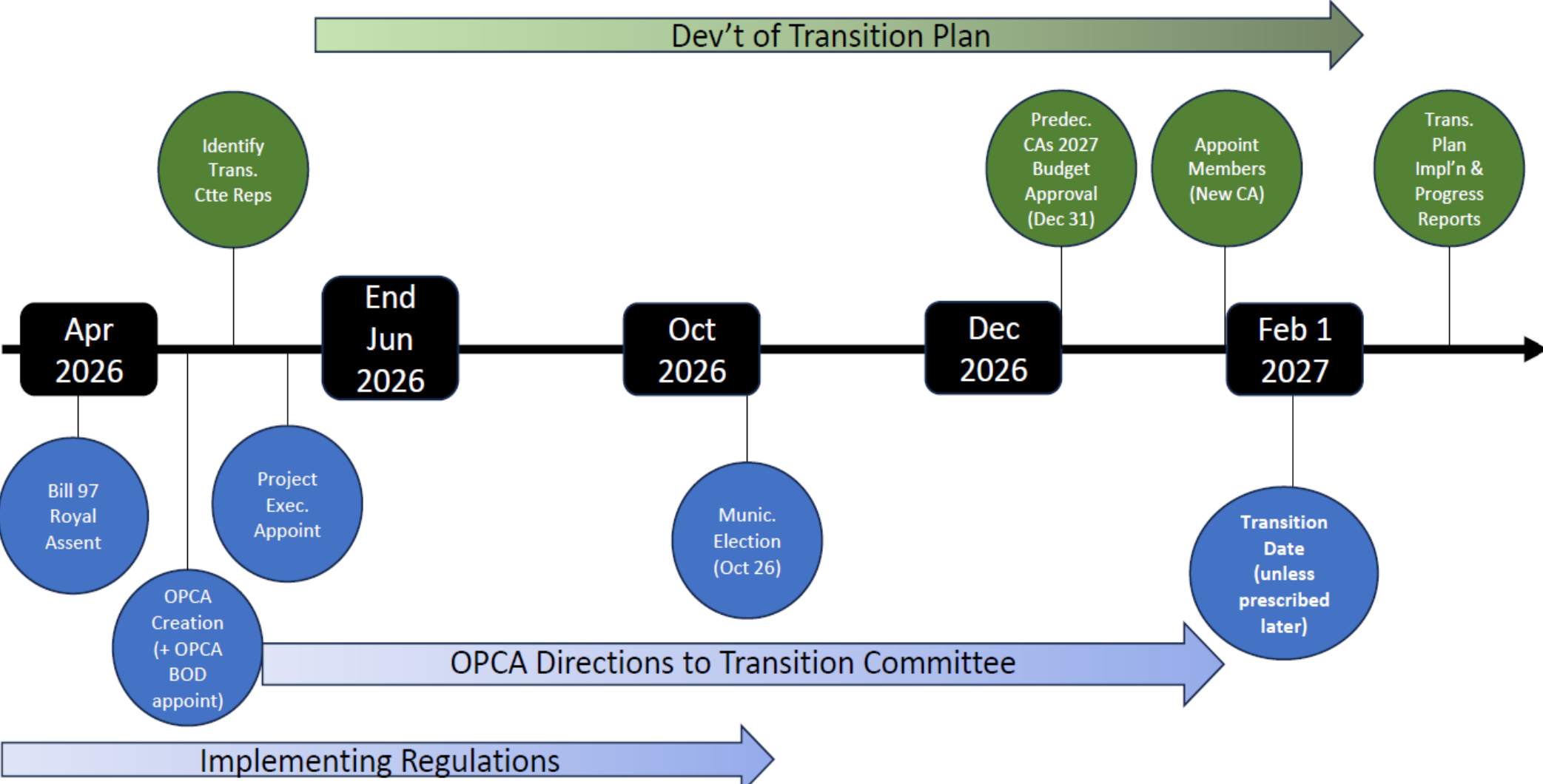
- Remainder of Schedule 3, e.g.,
- First Members of New Authority
 - Members of Authority, minimum number, etc. [S. 14(1)]
 - CAO
 - Watershed Councils



Timeline (with assumptions)

CA Actions

Govt Actions



Contact Information

Tim Byrne
C.A.O. / Secretary-Treasurer
Tbyrne@erca.org



Thank you



From: [Molly Allaire](#)
To: [council@leamington.ca](#); [Clerks](#); [DRogers@kingsville.ca](#); [KDeYong@kingsville.ca](#); [TGaffan@kingsville.ca](#); [DJarvis-Chausse@kingsville.ca](#); [SLOWrie@kingsville.ca](#); [TNeufeld@kingsville.ca](#); [LPatterson@kingsville.ca](#); [clerks@tecumseh.ca](#); [kristine.horst@pelee.ca](#); [CouncilEmailGroup](#); [PublicService@lakeshore.ca](#); [tbailey@lakeshore.ca](#); [kwalstedt@lakeshore.ca](#); [rncnamara@lakeshore.ca](#); [mhoffman@lakeshore.ca](#); [ksantarossa@lakeshore.ca](#); [jkerr@lakeshore.ca](#); [iruston@lakeshore.ca](#); [lvogler@lakeshore.ca](#); [info@lasalle.ca](#)
Subject: Raise your voice, please pass along to all of council
Date: April 2, 2026 4:40:52 PM

WARNING: This email originated from someone who is not sending from a Town of Essex email address. Reply only if you recognize the senders email address. Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognize the sender, the senders email address and know the content is safe.

CAUTION: This email originated from outside your organization. Exercise caution when opening attachments or clicking links, especially from unknown senders.

Hello,

My name is Molly Allaire, and I am the current chair of the Essex Region Conservation Authority.

As you may be aware, the current provincial government is proposing to amalgamate Ontario's 36 conservation authorities into nine. I am reaching out to ask for your support in helping protect the Essex Region Conservation Authority. I strongly believe in local governance and the importance of maintaining decision-making at the community level.

I am asking you to please take a moment to share the message below with your constituents on your social media and encourage them to send it to our local MPPs. It only takes a couple of minutes, and it's important that they hear directly from our communities. Please send an email from yourselves as well.

Now is the time to demonstrate that there is strong municipal and public support for maintaining our local conservation authority. I truly believe this effort is not over.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Molly Allaire

Raise your concerns!

- Request that Schedule 3 Conservation Authorities Act be extracted from Bill 97 to allow the province to work collaboratively and meaningfully with municipalities, Conservation Authorities, First Nations and civil society organizations to develop real solutions that protect public safety, support smart planning, maintain local trust and enable effective watershed management.
- Modernizing services and improving coordination doesn't require disrupting the current

structure of our local conservation authorities when one considers the significant risks and unknown costs.

- Dismantling watershed-based Conservation Authorities and assuming a new, larger structure will somehow produce better outcomes is not based on any evidence or business case.
- Thoughtful, locally informed refinement of the existing system will serve Ontarians far better than a disruptive, top-down consolidation that risks weakening the very protections people and ecosystems now rely on.

Call and Write!

- Doug Ford at 647-612-3673(mobile); 416-745-2859 (Etobicoke office); 416-325-1941 (Office of the Premier) or email premier@ontario.ca
- Minister Todd McCarthy at 416-314-6790 Office of the Ministry of Environment, Conservation and Parks or minister.mecp@ontario.ca
- Dan Duncan, Special Advisor to Minister McCarthy at dan.duncan@ontario.ca
- Hassaan Basit, Chief Conservation Executive, Ontario Provincial Conservation Agency at 437-908-6217 or Hassaan.Basit@ontario.ca
- Lisa Gretzky: lgretzky-co@ndp.on.ca
- Andrew Dowie: andrew.dowie@pc.ola.org
- Anthony Leardi: anthony.leardi@pc.ola.org

Molly Allaire

Councillor

Town of Amherstburg

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