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**For Immediate Release**

### **Ontario Communities Put at Risk by Changes to Conservation Authorities Act**

The Province has introduced changes to the *Conservation Authorities Act*, under the 2020 Provincial Budget Bill, Bill 229, that will limit the conservation authorities' ability to protect people, property, and the environment. Most of these changes have come with no warning or consultations and have raised concerns with Grey Sauble Conservation Authority (GSCA), who believes these actions by the Province lack transparency and will put communities across Ontario at risk. It is important for all Ontarians to understand how they may be impacted by these proposed changes to the *Conservation Authorities Act* and know who they should contact to express their concern.

GSCA has identified several major issues related to these proposed changes that the public and municipalities in Ontario should be concerned about and prepared to act on.

Changes imposed by this Bill would allow the Province to determine which municipally or self-funded programs conservation authorities can undertake. This undermines the ability of local Boards and Councils to define the programs that are beneficial to their local watershed communities. This Provincial overreach may have significant impacts on public safety, the local environment and resilience to climate change.

Changes to the development permit process include permit appeals to be submitted directly to the Minister of Natural Resources & Forestry (Minister) and for power to be given to the Minister to issue their own permits. This has the potential for significant negative impacts on Ontarians as it lacks transparency and could add political motivation to permit decisions while removing the use of background information, local watershed knowledge, and scientific expertise on which conservation authority staff currently make these decisions. Further, this change would allow bypassing of the hearing process and could result in development in unsafe locations such as flood plains and the destruction of environmental features.

The Province has also introduced new fee appeal methods that may cause a significant administrative burden on staff and hearing boards, ultimately leading to delays in development reviews. Ontario's conservation authorities are tasked with keeping local communities safe from the impacts of natural hazards. Amendments to the *Planning Act* that remove the ability of conservation authorities to appeal planning decisions will dramatically reduce the ability of conservation authorities to provide this service.

Tim Lanthier, Chief Administrative Officer for Grey Sauble Conservation Authority states, "The changes being proposed by the Province will effectively undo decades of thoughtful planning to keep our communities safe." Further, Ontario's ability to adapt to and mitigate the effects of climate change will be hampered by these changes that undermine the work of conservation authorities to keep development out of high flood risk areas and for protecting natural infrastructure such as wetlands. These actions directly contradict the Made in Ontario Environment Plan that promotes building resilience for the costs and impacts of Climate Change.

The importance of safe and healthy communities, as well as access to nature for personal well-being has become extremely evident this year, which highlights the value that conservation authorities provide across Ontario. "If you value the work of conservation authorities to protect the environment and to protect our communities from the impacts of natural hazards, it is vital that you speak up now. Call your MPP, email your councilors, or go to GSCA's website to advocate for the removal of Schedule 6 from Bill 229" – Lanthier.

For more information on these changes and to find out how to take action, visit: [www.greysable.on.ca](http://www.greysable.on.ca)

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**For more information:**

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**Background:**

Our vision is a healthy watershed environment in balance with the needs of society.

Our mission, in partnership with the stakeholders of the watershed, is to promote and undertake sustainable management of renewable natural resources and to provide responsible leadership to enhance biodiversity and environmental awareness.