

Media Release

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Province Misses Chance to Respond to Ontarians' Concerns About the Environment

NEWMARKET, ON (December 8, 2020) - The Province just missed a chance to show they are listening to Ontarians who care about their environment.

Ontario's *Budget Measures Act* (Bill 229) was passed today with Schedule 6 intact, and in fact, bolstered with the addition of Minister Zoning Orders' which could force a conservation authority to issue a permit even if it goes against their provincially-delegated responsibility to protect people, infrastructure and the environment. This is in addition to the already concerning amendments which included new powers for the Minister to bypass conservation authorities and issue permits as well as curtailing the CAs' ability to appeal to the Local Planning Appeal Tribunal.

"The Budget Bill is all about financial recovery from pandemic conditions and this could have easily been accomplished in ways that didn't sacrifice Ontario's environment and our unique watershed approach" says Kim Gavine, General Manager of Conservation Ontario, the agency which represents conservation authorities.

"A more proactive approach may have been to use this bill to support the development of a stream of new, greener economic activities that would boost the economy *and* help to build environmental resilience, not break it down," Gavine suggested.

Conservation authorities had hoped that the Province would respond to calls from conservation authorities, municipalities, environmental agencies, agricultural agencies, Indigenous organizations and thousands of individual Ontarians and withdraw Schedule 6 from the Budget Bill.

"Our challenge, now, will be to operationalize the Province's amendments which we're quite certain will create additional delays and costs for municipalities, applicants and conservation authorities, themselves," Gavine points out. "Using an overburdened tribunal system (Local Planning Appeal Tribunal), allowing applicants to appeal CA decisions directly to the Minister and – ensuring compliance around the Minister's permits will be some of what creates those delays and costs."

Gavine pointed out that the amendments diminish the roles and responsibilities of conservation authorities and of Ontario's much lauded science-based watershed approach and this was quite evident to the people who contacted the Province over the past few weeks to complain.

"It was really fantastic to see the wide range of people and agencies who understood the importance of what was happening," Gavine says. "They immediately picked up on both the short and long-term impacts of these changes and were very direct in their messages to the Province. It's unfortunate that it wasn't enough."

Gavine points out that CAs and Conservation Ontario now have to direct their attention to the regulations that provide the details around the changes to the *Conservation Authorities Act* and says she hopes they will get the attention, assessment and public input that they deserve.

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For more information on the changes being proposed in Schedule 6:
<https://conservationontario.ca/policy-priorities/conservation-authorities-act>

To see the support for conservation authorities and watershed management:
<https://conservationontario.ca/policy-priorities/conservation-authorities-act/support-for-conservation-authorities>

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