



25 July 2011

Mr. Tim Hudak, MPP
Niagara West – Glanbrook
Leader of the Official Opposition
Legislative Building
Room 381
Queen's Park
Toronto ON M7A 1A8

Dear Mr. Hudak:

I am writing about a comment that was attributed to you in a recent article in the Eastern Ontario AgriNews. It was reported that you replied to a question concerning how you would strip conservation authorities of their power, "This is not going to be easy, but it's the right thing, and we are going to do it." During a time in our history where societies around the planet are being deluged with natural disasters of flooding, drought and famine, to suggest that Ontario's preventive approach is excessive "red tape and bureaucracy" and "an abuse of power that needs to be curtailed" is very troubling.

Conservation Ontario released a report in 2009 entitled "*Protecting People and Property – A Business Case for Investing in Flood and Erosion Control in Ontario.*" The report, prepared for Conservation Ontario by Mr. M. Fortin, an independent consulting economist, identified that Ontario's Conservation Authorities manage \$2.7 billion in flood and erosion damage prevention infrastructure, and operate a monitoring and flood warning system that saves Ontarians in excess of \$100 million annually, not to mention the loss of life and economic disruption that is avoided.

More than forty years ago, the government of Ontario, under Premier Leslie Frost, responded to the Hurricane Hazel disaster by enacting regulations to prevent development in environmentally hazardous areas to complement the already significant investment in structures such as dams and dykes. More recently, the regulation was strengthened to protect other areas in the watershed such as wetlands that are critical to maintain healthy stream flows (reducing floods and droughts) to complement the Provincial Policy Statement. These regulations form an important part of a mature and effective disaster management system in Ontario that is the envy of the world.

Governed by local municipal representatives and by provincial policy, Conservation Authorities make every effort to be responsive and fair to landowner interests while administering regulations designed to protect the public. Conservation Authorities are committed to client service that eliminates unnecessary delay or duplication. Close to 90% of all applications for development are approved, most within 30 days of initial application, ensuring a timely process *and* careful management of hazardous and environmentally significant areas.

Conservation Authorities regularly participate in forums and task forces with stakeholders including the building and land development industry and organizations like the Ontario Federation of Agriculture, to improve processes and accountability. Balancing the public good with individual rights and freedoms is what Conservation Authorities have done for more than six decades. It is also important to put the regulations into context; they are one tool in a toolbox that focuses primarily on services to assist landowners and others to achieve their economic and environmental priorities. That is why Conservation Authorities plant nearly three million trees annually on privately owned land; and provide grants and technical expertise to landowners to protect water quality, soil, and important habitats on their lands.

Conservation Authorities have been addressing important environmental issues in their local watersheds for more than sixty years and have provided the citizens of Ontario with an invaluable legacy of nearly 150,000 hectares of forests, floodplains and wetlands, most of it accessible to the public. Many of these lands have been developed to provide valuable, near urban recreation areas providing outdoor experiences to nearly six million visitors annually, in picnic areas, campgrounds, trails and on water bodies. Nearly 500,000 elementary school children experience firsthand environmental education programs, learning about important habitats and ecology as well as other environmental issues. These programs and services complement the core business of Conservation Authorities and leverage the public investment several times over.

We would be happy to discuss our work directly with you at your convenience. Please contact me at 905-895-0716 ext. 231 or by email at dpearson@conservationontario.ca. I look forward to a mutually beneficial dialogue.

Yours truly



Don Pearson
General Manager
Conservation Ontario