

Report To: Board of Directors

Subject: Proposed Amendments to the *Conservation Authorities Act* to establish the Ontario Provincial Conservation Agency, and Proposed Boundaries for the Regional Consolidation of Ontario's Conservation Authorities

Report No: FA-56-25

Date: November 21, 2025

Recommendation:

THAT Report No. FA-56-25 RE: Proposed Amendments to the *Conservation Authorities Act* to establish the Ontario Provincial Conservation Agency, and Proposed Boundaries for the Regional Consolidation of Ontario's Conservation Authorities **BE RECEIVED**;

AND THAT a Special Board of Directors Meeting be scheduled at the call of the Chair, no later than December 10, 2025;

AND FURTHER THAT staff **BRING FORWARD COMMENTS** on the policy proposal within ERO posting #025-1257 **FOR APPROVAL** at the Special Board of Directors Meeting.

Purpose:

The purpose of this report is to inform the Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority (NPCA) Board of Directors of the proposed amendments to the *Conservation Authorities Act* to establish the Ontario Provincial Conservation Agency (OPA), and the proposed boundaries for the regional consolidation of Ontario's Conservation Authorities as described in Environmental Registry of Ontario (ERO) posting #025-1257.

Further, staff are seeking input and direction from the NPCA Board of Directors regarding comments related to [ERO #025-1257](#). Confidential Appendix 1 includes key areas of potential implications for the NPCA in relation to the provincial proposals to be discussed during a closed session of the Board of Directors Meeting. The deadline for submitting comments on the ERO posting is December 22, 2025.

Background:

On October 31, 2025, the Ontario provincial government announced a proposal for a provincial agency to lead the implementation of a new conservation authorities framework. The Ministry of Environment, Conservation and Parks (MECP) [news release](#) states that the proposed legislation to create the OPCA aims to improve the province's conservation authority system to help get shovels in the ground faster on homes and other local infrastructure projects, while strengthening the vital role Conservation Authorities (CAs) play in managing watersheds and protecting communities from floods and natural hazards. This action intends to help the province deliver on its plan to protect Ontario by cutting red tape and building an economy that is more competitive, resilient and self-reliant, to help keep workers on the job in the face of tariffs and economic uncertainty.

On November 6, 2025, [Bill 68](#), *Plan to Protect Ontario Act (Budget Measures), 2025 (No.2)* was introduced in the Ontario Legislature, which under Schedule 3 includes proposed amendments to the *Conservation Authorities Act* to establish the Ontario Provincial Conservation Agency (OPCA). Bill 68 will proceed through the legislative process, and if passed, the provisions establishing the agency would come into affect upon Royal Assent. The proposed OPCA aims to provide centralized leadership, efficient governance, strategic direction and oversight of Ontario's CAs. The OPCA is intended to:

- Streamline and standardize service delivery by setting clear, province-wide performance standards;
- Support the consistent application of provincial standards for assessing, managing and mitigating flood risks across Ontario, including managing centralized data, updated floodplain mapping and overseeing improved maintenance of CA-managed infrastructure like dams, to manage flood and other natural hazards;
- Develop a single, digital permitting platform to provide a faster, more predictable approvals process and improved customer service, while maintaining high environmental standards;
- Develop clear performance goals of CAs to report on annually to support continuous improvements; and
- Oversee the implementation of a regional watershed-based consolidation of CAs, following consultation with the public, municipalities, and other partners including Indigenous communities.

Further, on November 7, 2025, the Province posted a policy proposal to consolidate Ontario's 36 CAs into seven Regional Conservation Authorities (RCAs) on the ERO and is seeking feedback on proposed boundaries and the criteria applied to inform the proposed boundaries. The seven proposed RCAs are Lake Erie RCA, Huron-Superior RCA, Western Lake Ontario RCA, Central Lake Ontario RCA, Eastern Lake Ontario RCA, St. Lawrence RCA, and Northeastern Ontario RCA. Appendix 2 illustrates the proposed RCA boundaries, which can also be viewed on the provincial [interactive map](#).

Under this proposal, NPCA would fall under the Western Lake Ontario RCA, along with Hamilton Conservation Authority (HCA), Conservation Halton (CH) and Credit Valley Conservation (CVC). The boundaries of the Western Lake Ontario RCA extend along the western Lake Ontario shoreline from Niagara through Halton and Peel, encompassing urban and rural watersheds that support the Greater Toronto-Hamilton corridor. The RCA is primarily based on the western portion of the Northern Lake Ontario and Niagara River Secondary Watershed. Appendix 3 shows the boundaries of the proposed Western Lake Ontario RCA.

According to the [ERO #025-1257 supplemental document](#), no changes are proposed to the overall extent of CA jurisdiction within the province, and under consolidation the new RCAs would remain independent organizations operating with municipal governance and oversight, in accordance with requirements under the *Conservation Authorities Act*, as administered by MECP.

In addition, the important work that conservation authorities do to protect people and property from the risks of flooding and other natural hazards will not change. The RCAs would continue to fulfill provincially mandated programs such as drinking water source protection under the *Clean Water Act*, managing development and other activities in areas at risk of natural hazards like flooding and erosion (e.g., floodplains, shorelines, watercourse and wetlands), flood forecasting and warning, and managing their lands and recreational trails so that Ontarians have access to local natural areas and outdoor activities. RCAs would continue to provide additional municipal and other watershed programs and services set out under the *Conservation Authorities Act*.

RCAs would also continue to provide municipal and other watershed programs and services set out under the *Conservation Authorities Act*, such as tree planting, data collection, restoration and other integrated watershed management activities that enhance the resilience of local watersheds and educate and engage local communities.

Discussion:

Bill 68 – Establishing the Ontario Provincial Conservation Agency (OPCA)

Under Bill 68, the *Conservation Authorities Act* would be amended to include “Part VIII.1 – The Agency” that establishes the OPCA, including:

- Establishing the objects of the agency
- Setting out the governance of the proposed agency
- Establishing tools for agency oversight of conservation authorities
- Establishing provincial oversight of the agency
- Setting out sources of agency funding

Appendix 4 summarizes the proposed amendments for establishing the OPA.

It is the understanding of NPCA staff that the proposed OPCA would aim to help free-up resources for front-line conservation work and better align the work of CAs with provincial priorities of housing, the economy, infrastructure, and climate resilience. The agency would also support consistent application of provincial standards for assessing, managing and mitigating flood risks across Ontario.

NPCA is committed to working with other levels of government and partners to modernize and streamline services. Over the past several years, NPCA has been focused on continuous improvements through updating planning and permitting policies, updating corporate policies, developing new guiding strategies, enhancing procedures, and modernization initiatives, including investments in software and data management. We remain committed to improving the delivery of our programs and services for the health and well-being of our local watersheds and communities.

ERO #025-1257 – Proposed Boundaries for the Regional Consolidation of Ontario’s CAs

The provincial government is seeking feedback on the proposed boundaries of the RCAs and the criteria applied to inform the proposed boundaries. This feedback will help inform the development of further proposed changes to the *Conservation Authorities Act* that may be introduced at a later date.

Under the current system, more than half of all municipalities in areas served by CAs fall within the jurisdiction of two or more CAs, which according to the province, results in unnecessary duplication that diverts resources from front-line conservation work and service delivery. If the proposed regional consolidation is implemented, this would be reduced by 63%. MECP also notes that individual CAs have significant disparities in size and resources, with some lacking access to the latest tools and technology that support flood risk management and evidence-based decision making. Consolidation intends to enable more consistent service delivery and more efficient resource and information sharing, making conservation authorities more responsive to the needs of the communities they serve.

The criteria the province applied for determining the proposed boundaries for regional conservation authorities are:

1. **Maintaining watershed-based jurisdictions** – aligning with natural hydrological boundaries to support effective flood and water management, consistent with drinking water Source Protection Areas and Regions
2. **Relationships between conservation authorities and municipalities** – reducing administrative duplication and overlap for municipalities and conservation authorities to simplify accountability and strengthen local partnerships

3. **Balancing expertise and capacity across conservation authorities** – enhancing technical skills and resources across conservation authorities to improve service and program delivery
4. **Service continuity** – ensuring uninterrupted delivery of local conservation authority programs – including flood forecasting and warning, permitting, and source water protection – through and after consolidation

As noted, under the proposal the NPCA would form part of the Western Lake Ontario RCA, along with HCA, CH and CVC. The proposed Western Lake Ontario RCA would also include the Niagara Peninsula Source Protection Area, Halton-Hamilton Source Protection Region and Credit Valley Source Protection Area.

Through ERO #025-1257, the province is seeking feedback on the following discussion questions to inform the planning for the future state of CAs:

1. What do you see as key factors to support a successful transition and outcome of regional conservation authority consolidation?
2. What opportunities or benefits may come from a regional conservation authority framework?
3. Do you have suggestions for how governance could be structured at the regional conservation authority level, including suggestions around board size, make-up and the municipal representative appointment process?
4. Do you have suggestions on how to maintain a transparent and consultative budgeting process across member municipalities within a regional conservation authority?
5. How can regional conservation authorities maintain and strengthen relationships with local communities and stakeholders?

The implementation of the regional consolidation of CAs would be overseen by the OPCA. This oversight role would include coordinating the transition process with involvement from CAs, municipalities, Indigenous communities, and interested parties to ensure minimal disruptions. The Ministry will provide further details on timelines, engagement opportunities, and transition supports at a future date. It is anticipated that the current CA Boards will complete their current terms at the end of 2026 and the transition process with the new RCA Boards would begin late 2026 to early 2027.

NPCA staff are seeking input from the Board of Directors on the above discussion questions to inform the ERO submission. A survey has been conducted among NPCA staff to elicit their input as well. Staff are reaching out to Indigenous partners offering to discuss the provincial proposal and how we will continue to work together during any transition process. Further, staff are reaching out to watershed municipalities to discuss the proposal and offer delegations to Councils or appropriate Committees.

The CAO's and General Managers of all 36 CAs continue to meet through Conservation Ontario's coordinated efforts. Further, the CAO's for NPCA, HCA, CH and CVC will also continue to meet during the consultation process.

It is recommended that NPCA staff present the draft comment submission at a Special Board of Directors Meeting scheduled in early December and the final comments be circulated to partner municipalities, Indigenous partners, HCA, CH, CVC, and other interested parties to help inform their comments by the deadline of December 22, 2025.

Financial Implications:

While there are no financial implications with providing comments on the ERO posting, any consolidation of the NPCA with other CAs would require closer examination to determine financial implications with respect to items such as operating and capital budgets, asset management, salaries and benefits, changes to fee schedules, and cost apportionment to the OPCA.

Although not mentioned as part of the proposed regional consolidation of CAs, many CAs, including the NPCA, have a Foundation. Any consolidation of NPCA with other CAs will need to examine financial and governance implications for the Niagara Peninsula Conservation Foundation.

Links to Policy/Strategic Plan:

Goal 4.1 Strengthen government relations toward collective outcomes and impact

Related Reports and Appendices:

- Appendix 1: Confidential - Potential Implications for Consideration Pertaining to ERO #025-1257
- Appendix 2: Proposed 7 Regional Conservation Authorities (RCAs)
- Appendix 3: Proposed Western Lake Ontario RCA
- Appendix 4: Summary of Bill 68 Proposed Amendments to the *Conservation Authorities Act* to Establish the OPCA

Authored by:

Original Signed by:

Leilani Lee-Yates, BES, MSPL.RPD, MCIP, RPP
Chief Administrative Officer/Secretary-Treasurer

Reviewed by:

Original Signed by:

Melanie Davis, MA
Manager, Office of the CAO & Board

Submitted by:

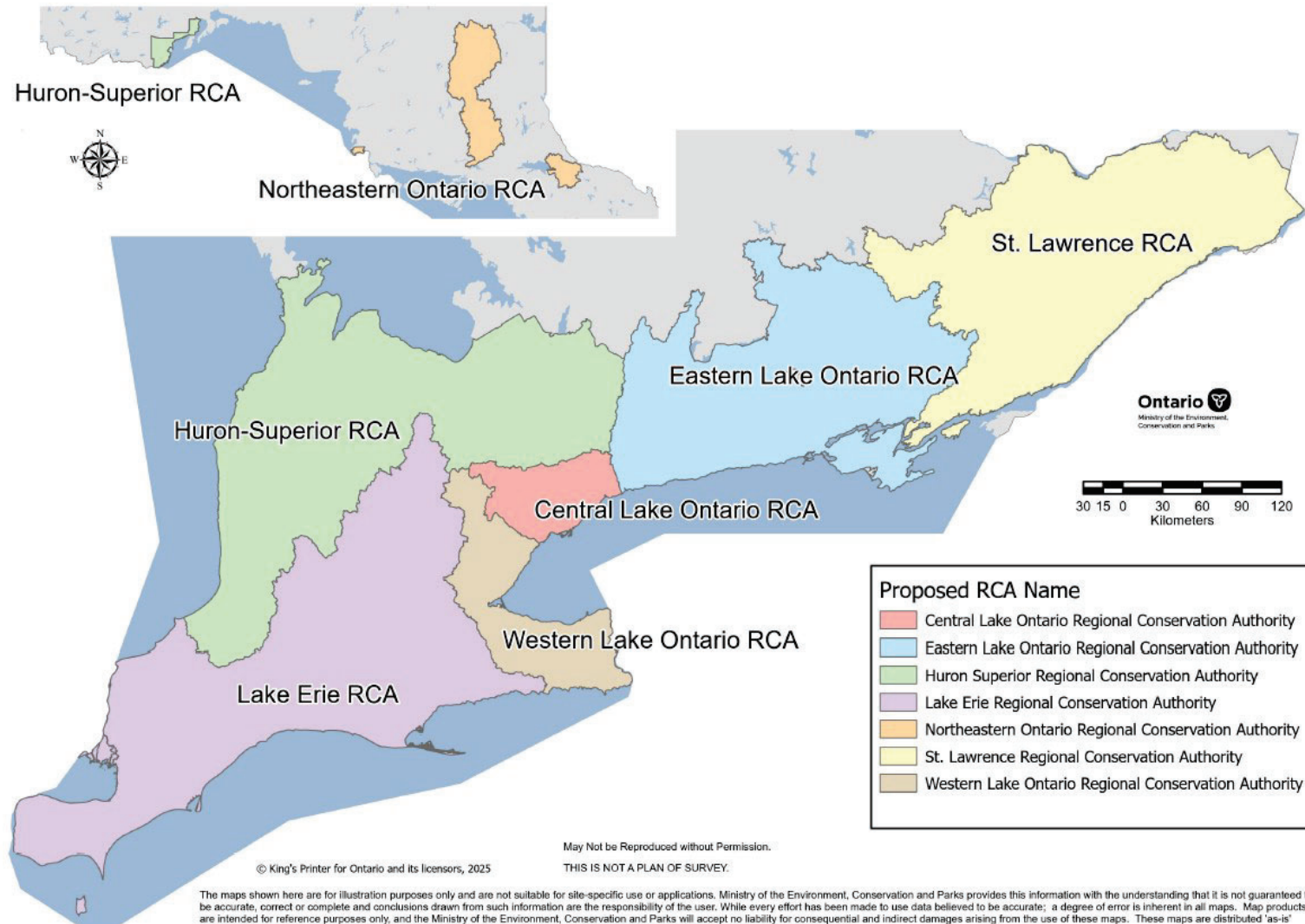
Original Signed by:

Leilani Lee-Yates, BES, MSPL.RPD, MCIP, RPP
Chief Administrative Officer/Secretary-Treasurer

Maps

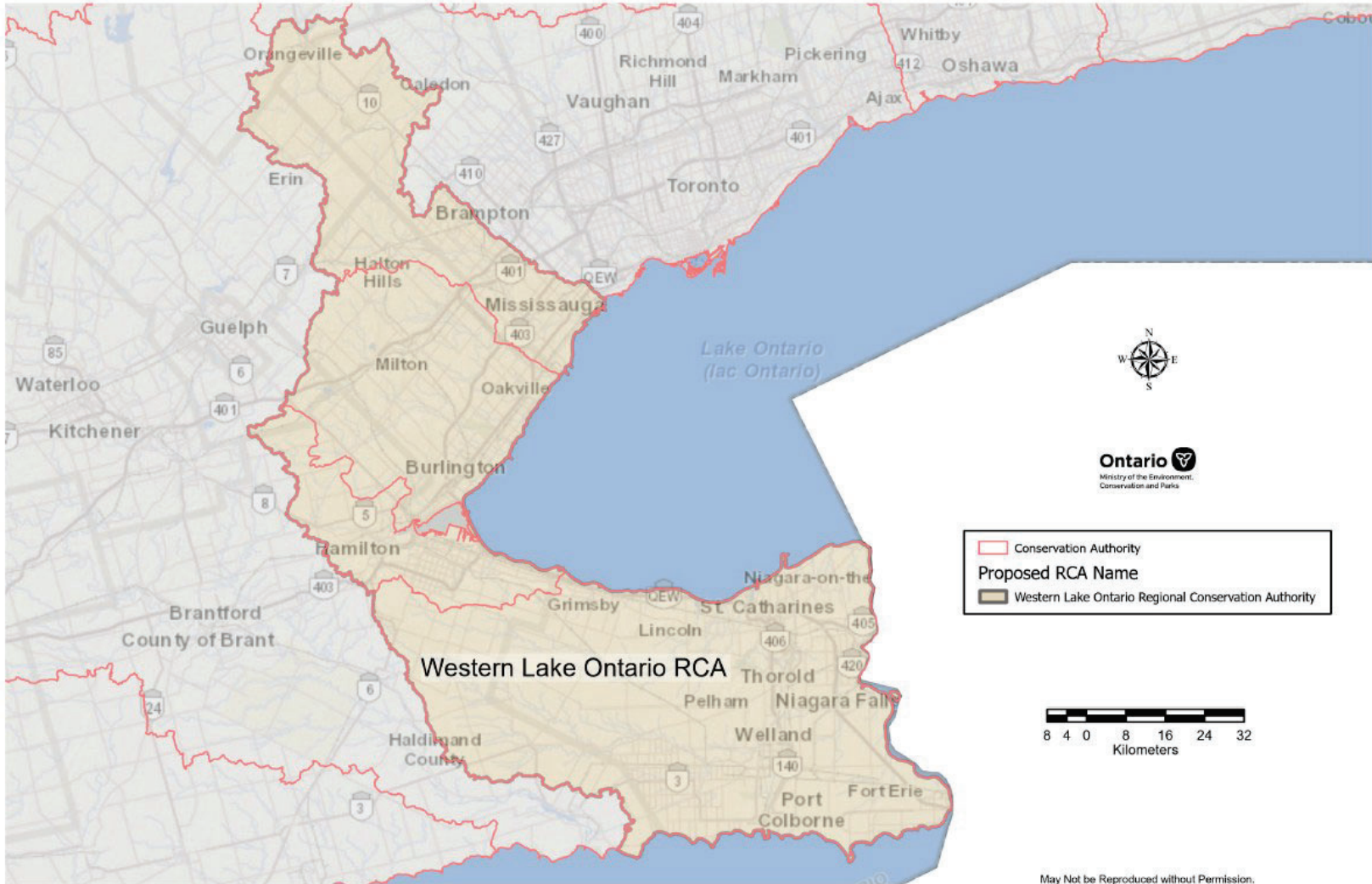
Map of Proposed Regional Conservation Authorities

PROPOSED 7 REGIONAL CONSERVATION AUTHORITIES (RCA)



Map of Proposed Western Lake Ontario Regional Conservation Authority

WESTERN LAKE ONTARIO REGIONAL CONSERVATION AUTHORITY



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The maps shown here are for illustration purposes only and are not suitable for site-specific use or applications. Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks provides this information with the understanding that it is not guaranteed to be accurate, correct or complete and conclusions drawn from such information are the responsibility of the user. While every effort has been made to use data believed to be accurate, a degree of error is inherent in all maps. Map products are intended for reference purposes only, and the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks will accept no liability for consequential and indirect damages arising from the use of these maps. These maps are distributed 'as-is' without warranties of any kind, either expressed or implied, including but not limited to warranties of suitability to a particular purpose or use.

Appendix 4 – Summary of Bill 68 Proposed Amendments to the *Conservation Authorities Act* to Establish the OPCA

OPCA Components	Summary of Proposed Amendments
Objects of the Agency	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Oversee the governance of CAs and other aspects of CAs such as their operations, including the programs and services they provide, to further the purposes of the <i>Conservation Authorities Act</i>. 2. Oversee the transition to a regional watershed-based framework for CAs in Ontario. 3. Promote consistent policies, standards and fees for programs and services provided by CAs. 4. Assess and report on the effectiveness of CAs in furthering the conservation, restoration, development and management of natural resources in watersheds in Ontario, including outcomes related to the implementation of their programs and services. 5. Oversee and evaluate the financial performance of CAs to ensure their long-term operational and capital financial sustainability, including the financial sustainability of their programs and services required under section 21.1. 6. Guide and evaluate the strategic planning by CAs to ensure it aligns with provincial objectives. 7. Support the development and implementation of a standardized and centralized system for processing applications for permits issued by CAs. 8. Lead the development and implementation of digital strategies and shared services to support the operations of CAs, including their programs and services. 9. Support strategic investment in programs and services provided by CAs, including leveraging funding available to Ontario and CAs. 10. Advise the Government of Ontario in respect of the programs and services CAs provide under the <i>Act</i> and any matters related to the objects of the Agency. 11. Any other objects prescribed by regulation. The Lieutenant Governor in Council (LGIC) can prescribe objects of the Agency. <p>The Agency may, for the purposes of achieving its objects, require that a CA provide information to the Agency including information relating to its operations, employees, assets, liabilities, rights and obligations, which may include plans, reports and financial statements, including audited financial statements, and may include personal information.</p>

OPCA Components	Summary of Proposed Amendments
General Powers	Agency has the capacity, rights and powers of a natural person for carrying out its objects. The LGIC can prescribe limits on the Agency's capacities, rights and powers.
Governance	<p>The proposed OPCA would be governed by a Board of Directors of five to 12 members appointed by the LGIC. Members cannot be a member of Parliament. The LGIC shall, in appointing a person as a member of the Board of Directors, take into consideration:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) the person's knowledge and experience in public administration, corporate governance and finance; b) the person's knowledge of programs and services provided by CAs; and c) such other matters as may be prescribed by regulation. <p>Members will serve a term of up to three years, and may serve for nine years total. Board of Directors will have by-laws. The LGIC will designate a Chair and up to two Vice-Chairs. Members of the Board of Directors shall be paid such remuneration and expenses as may be determined by the LGIC.</p>
Staff	A Chief Executive Officer (CEO) will be appointed by the Secretary of Cabinet to be employed by the Agency. The CEO can appoint employees, arrange for facilities and equipment and obtain expert or technical services.
Agency Directions	<p>The Agency may issue directions to CAs governing their operations, including programs and services. A direction may address:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Key performance indicators, key results or service delivery targets 2. Service standards 3. Information technology 4. Procurement 5. Training of members and employees 6. Budgeting 7. Asset management plans 8. Strategic plans <p>The Agency cannot issue a direction to a CA until the Minister is notified of the direction. All Agency directions would be published on a website. The Agency must establish a notice period of 45-days prior to commencement of a direction. The notice period is initiated by providing the Minister with a copy of the direction.</p>

OPCA Components	Summary of Proposed Amendments
	<p>To support implementation of such directions, the Agency may issue guidelines to the CAs.</p>
<p>Accountability and Transparency</p>	<p>The Minister may issue directions to the Agency. The Agency shall comply with every direction of the Minister.</p> <p>The Minister may require the Agency to provide information relating to its operations, employees, assets, liabilities, rights and obligations.</p> <p>The Minister may require policy, regulatory or legislative reviews related to the powers or duties of the Agency, and/or require reviews of the Agency (performance, governance, accountability, etc.)</p> <p>The Minister and the Agency will enter into Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that sets out requirements and expectations for the Agency, accountability relationships, and requirements for the Agency for carrying out its objects.</p> <p>The Agency will be required to report on its activities and effectiveness on March 31, 2029, and every subsequent three years.</p> <p>Items specified that will be published to a website:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Minister's directions to the Agency 2. Agency directions to CAs 3. Agency guidelines for CAs related to directions 4. Notices for all fees to be paid to or refunded by the Agency or other person
<p>Agency Termination</p>	<p>The Minister may wind up and appropriately dissolve the Agency, including dealing with assets and liabilities of the Agency.</p>
<p>Funding</p>	<p>The Minister may fund the Agency on the terms and conditions that the Minister considers appropriate.</p> <p>The Agency may establish and require payment of fees related to its performance of duties. The LGIC may prescribe circumstances in which the Agency may require the payment of fees to another person.</p>

OPCA Components	Summary of Proposed Amendments
	<p>The Agency may recover costs and expenses the Agency incurs, in accordance with any regulations, by determining the amounts of the costs and expenses that the CAs collectively owe to the Agency, and apportioning those amounts to the CAs. Upon receipt of notice from the Agency, the CAs will pay the amount owing.</p> <p>The LGIC may make regulations governing the recovery of costs and expenses of the Agency including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) the types of costs and expenses that may be recovered by the Agency, b) the method of determining the amounts of costs and expenses that the CAs collectively owe to the Agency, c) the method of apportioning amounts, and d) requirements respecting notices, including the contents of the notice and the process of issuing them.
Liability	<p>There is no personal liability of the Crown, Agency or CA specified persons.</p> <p>Includes CA members, staff and volunteers for any act done in good faith further to their powers, duties, or functions under the <i>Conservation Authorities Act</i>.</p> <p>No proceedings can be commenced against the Crown, Agency, or CA staff or member.</p>
Transition	<p>The LGIC may make regulations governing transitional matters that may arise due to the enactment of Schedule 3 to the <i>Plan to Protect Ontario Act (Budget Measures), 2025 (No.2)</i>.</p>