



December 6, 2022

Public Input Coordinator
Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry
PD – Resources Planning and Development Policy Branch
300 Water Street, 6th Floor, South tower
Peterborough, ON K9J 8M5
Via email: mnrwaterpolicy@ontario.ca

To whom it may concern,

Re: ERO 019-6141: Legislative and regulatory proposals affecting conservation authorities to support the Housing Supply Action Plan 3.0

Beef Farmers of Ontario (BFO) appreciates the opportunity to comment on *ERO 019-6141: Legislative and regulatory proposals affecting conservation authorities to support the Housing Supply Action Plan 3.0*. BFO represents 19,000 beef farmers in Ontario by advocating in the areas of sustainability, animal health and care, environment, food safety, and domestic and export market development.

The provincial government's plan to address Ontario's housing crisis and prepare for the province's expected population growth over the next ten years by building approximately 1.5 million homes is ambitious and necessary, but advancing housing development throughout Ontario cannot be done at the expense of our province's finite agricultural lands.

We know that farmland in Ontario continues to be lost to urbanization or non-agriculture uses at an alarming rate. The most recent Agriculture Census data for 2016 to 2021 shows Ontario lost 582,392 acres of farmland. This adds up to over 1.5 million acres of farmland lost to development or non-agriculture uses between 2006 to 2021. Further, between 2016-2021, over 290,000 acres of tame and native grasslands were removed from the Ontario landscape. Agriculture lands, especially agricultural grasslands, not only provide a means to produce food and support our rural communities economically, but they provide a number of invaluable ecological services such as habitat for wildlife and pollinators, carbon sequestration and oxygen production, and water and nutrient cycling.

We recognize that aspects of the changes to the *Conservation Authorities Act* may have direct or indirect impacts on the agricultural sector. Please find our comments below on various aspects of the consultation as they relate to the agricultural sector:

Identifying conservation authority lands suitable for housing and streamlining conservation authority severance and disposition processes that facilitate faster development

The consultation outlines that conservation authorities are required by regulation to complete a conservation area strategy and land inventory of all lands they own or control by December 31, 2024, and the Ministry's changes to amend the regulation to require the land inventory requirements also include identifying conservation authority owned or controlled land that could support housing development.

Many conservation authorities in Ontario own or control lands suitable for agriculture, which they currently lease to farmers for agricultural production. We are concerned the approximately 3000 acres of land being leased to farmers by conservation authorities may be deemed by the province as excess land suitable for housing. We recommend land owned by conservation authorities that is being used to support food production in Ontario should not be considered “excess land” and should not be considered as land suitable for housing development.

Proposed updates to the regulation of development for protection of people and property from natural hazards in Ontario (legislative changes)

BFO is concerned with the changes to provide an exemption for development authorized under the *Planning Act* from requiring a permit under the Conservation Authorities Act in municipalities set out in the regulation. This includes exempting development from requiring a permit for activities related to “straighten, change, divert or interfere in any way with the existing channel of a river, creek, stream or watercourse or to change or interfere in any way with a wetland.” We believe this change and lack of oversight will have negative impacts on not just adjacent properties to development, but nearby properties as well. The lack of oversight from conservation authorities and the potential risk associated with changes to waterways and to water quality or quantity is concerning for the agriculture sector. By removing measures to prevent potential issues from making changes to waterways and wetlands, we believe this will lead to an increase in property owners being responsible for addressing problems that may arise after the fact, as a result of adjacent or nearby development near agricultural lands.

Conservation authority appeals under the *Planning Act*

The changes to limit conservation authority appeals, except when acting as an applicant, of land use planning decisions under the Planning Act to matters related to natural hazards is also concerning. Considering the change of conservation authorities mandate to focus on the risk of natural hazards, such as flooding, unstable soils and bedrock, erosion and dynamic beaches, we believe limiting the ability for conservation authorities to appeal planning decisions is contrary to this mandate. We recommend conservation authorities ability to appeal planning decisions be maintained.

It is evident the preservation and protection of the existing agricultural land base is critical for the future sustainability of Ontario’s food systems, the provincial economy and in the fight against climate change. Land use policy has a significant influence on competing interests for Ontario’s farmland, which is one of Ontario’s most valuable and at-risk resources. The current unsustainable loss of agricultural lands needs to be seriously addressed. Long-term actions to protect agricultural lands that do not pit areas of the province against one another need to be examined. The province must find a way to balance the need for increasing our housing supply with the need to better protect our farmland.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on the legislative and regulatory changes affecting conservation authorities, and we encourage to the provincial government to view increasing Ontario’s housing supply and the protection of Ontario’s agricultural lands as interconnected issues.

Sincerely,



Jack Chaffe
President