

Item for the Action of the Regional Watershed Alliance

TO: Chair and Members of the Regional Watershed Alliance
Wednesday, May 22, 2024 Meeting

FROM: Sameer Dhalla, Director, Development and Engineering Services

RE: **CONSERVATION AUTHORITIES ACT STRATEGIES – PRELIMINARY INPUT AND REVIEW**

KEY ISSUE

Input on required Conservation Authorities Act Strategies, including the Watershed-based Resource Management Strategy and the Conservation Area Strategy.

RECOMMENDATION:

IT IS RECOMMENDED THAT the Regional Watershed Alliance (RWA) receive this report on the Watershed-based Resource Management Strategy and the Conservation Area Strategy and provide review and input as part of the stakeholder consultation process;

AND THAT staff report back to the RWA after finalizing these documents.

BACKGROUND

Ontario Regulation 686/21: Mandatory Programs and Services Regulation requires all conservation authorities to have complete by December 31, 2024:

- Flood and Erosion Infrastructure Operational Plan
- Flood and Erosion Infrastructure Asset Management Plan
- Ice Management Plan
- Land Inventory
- Conservation Area Strategy
- Watershed-Based Resource Management Strategy

Stakeholder and public consultation are only required during the development of the latter two strategies, the Conservation Area Strategy and the Watershed-based Resource Management Strategy. This report is part of the engagement plan that was outlined per the following:

At Board of Directors Meeting #7/23, held on September 22, 2023, Resolution #152/23 was approved as follows:

IT IS RECOMMENDED THAT the report, TRCA Strategies and Plans Required by the Mandatory Programs and Services Regulation under the Conservation Authorities Act, and any input on the proposed All Strategy Engagement Plan approach be received;

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AND FURTHER THAT staff report back to the Board on the progress and completion of the Strategies and Plans as described in this report.

TRCA staff also previously informed the RWA that these Strategies and Plans were underway during the meeting held on November 15, 2023. Resolution #R 25/23 was approved as follows:

IT IS RECOMMENDED THAT the TRCA Strategies and Plans required by the Mandatory Programs and Services Regulation under the Conservation Authorities Act report and any input on the proposed All Strategy Engagement Plan approach be received, for information.

RATIONALE

TRCA staff have drafted a Watershed-based Resource Management Strategy and a Conservation Area Strategy and have initiated engagement with the public, rights-holders and stakeholders, including First Nations and Indigenous Communities, partner municipalities, the TRCA BILD Industry Working Group, and the RWA. Individual stakeholder meetings will be held as needed.

TRCA is leveraging its website to provide online, interactive tools to seek input into the two Strategies. An overview of the Conservation Authorities Act and the Mandatory Programs and Services Regulation, and an overview of drafts of the required strategies, plans and inventory can be found on <https://trca.ca/about/conservation-authorities-act-strategies/>. This page also houses feedback forms to receive input on the strategies that require consultation.

Watershed-based Resource Management Strategy

The regulation states that the Watershed-based Resource Management Strategy (Watershed Strategy) must include the following generalized components:

- Guiding principles and objectives that inform the design and delivery of the programs and services that the authority is required to provide under section 21.1 of the Act.
- A summary of existing technical studies, monitoring programs and other information on the natural resources the authority relies on within its area of jurisdiction or in specific watersheds that directly informs and supports the delivery of programs and services under section 21.1 of the Act.
- A review of the authority's programs and services provided under section 21.1 of the Act for the purposes of,
 - Determining if the programs and services comply with the regulations made under clause 40 (1) (b) of the Act;
 - Identifying and analyzing issues and risks that limit the effectiveness of the delivery of these programs and services; and
 - Identifying actions to address the issues and mitigate the risks identified by the review and providing a cost estimate for the implementation of those actions.

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The regulation also requires periodic review and updating of the Watershed Strategy by the authority that includes procedures to ensure stakeholders and the public are consulted during the review and update process. The authority must also ensure stakeholders and the public are consulted during the preparation of the strategy and that the strategy be made publicly available.

The draft document that TRCA has prepared to comply with the regulation proposes the following concepts and components on which we seek RWA input:

- Recognition of the importance of Integrated Watershed Planning (IWM) and the need to consider all natural components of a watershed, mandatory and supporting, together with social and economic factors, for watersheds to be healthy and resilient.
- Watershed plans will continue to be one of the primary means by which detailed recommendations will be made for management actions to comprehensively address watershed issues within TRCA's jurisdiction, which are then implemented through various programs and services.
- The Watershed Strategy provides an overarching framework to guide the development and update of watershed plans, including guiding principles and objectives.
- TRCA has many studies and monitoring programs upon which it relies to guide decision-making.
- TRCA has a robust process in place to identify gaps in programs and services that considers mandatory programs and services compliance.
- Taking a risk-based approach, TRCA has developed a schedule to advance the next generation of our watershed plans to ensure that they are both up to date with respect to science and policy and that they address the geographical areas where updated knowledge is needed most.

Please note that this draft does not include comprehensive stakeholder input at this stage.

Conservation Area Strategy

The regulation states that the Conservation Area Strategy must contain the following:

- Objectives established by the authority that will inform the authority's decision making related to the lands it owns and controls, including decisions related to policies governing the acquisition and disposition of such lands.
- Identification of the mandatory and non-mandatory programs and services that are provided on land owned and controlled by the authority, including the sources of financing for these programs and services.
- Where the authority considers it advisable to achieve the objectives, an assessment of how the lands owned and controlled by the authority may,
 - Augment any natural heritage located within the authority's area of jurisdiction; and
 - Integrate with other provincially or municipally owned lands or other publicly accessible lands and trails within the authority's area of

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jurisdiction.

- The establishment of land use categories for the purpose of classifying lands in the TRCA's land inventory based on the types of activities on each parcel of land or other matters of significance related to the parcel.
- A process for the periodic review and updating of the Conservation Area Strategy by the authority, including procedures to ensure stakeholders and the public are consulted during the review and update process.

TRCA is focusing consultation for the Conservation Area Strategy on the objectives that will inform decision-making related to the lands it owns and controls, including decisions related to policies governing the acquisition, disposition, and long-term management of such lands. These objectives are based on and consistent with TRCA's mandate under the Act and applicable provincial policy, the requests of our municipal partners, and consistent with the strategic directions in TRCA's Strategic Plan 2023-2034. Further directions that support the objectives presented in this strategy can be developed in new or updates to existing land management plans, policies, and procedures.

Please note that this draft does not include comprehensive stakeholder input at this stage.

Input from RWA

We welcome RWA members' comments on the draft Strategies requiring consultation as outlined above by June 30, 2024. Copies of the draft Strategies are available upon request. Please note that the drafts do not include comprehensive stakeholder input at this stage.

In addition, public input on the draft Strategies is directed to <https://trca.ca/about/conservation-authorities-act-strategies/>, where a feedback form is found. Members of the public can use this form to provide their input on the draft guiding principles and objectives by June 30, 2024.

Finalizing the Strategies

Staff will engage with partner municipalities, First Nations and Indigenous Communities and stakeholders on their comments prior to finalizing the Strategies. During summer 2024, TRCA will prepare the final draft of the Strategies to reflect the input received during the consultation period. Endorsement of the TRCA Board of Directors will be sought in November 2024. The final Strategies and Plans will be posted on the TRCA website by December 31, 2024, and distributed to municipal partners and the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry.

Relationship to TRCA's 2023-2034 Strategic Plan

This report supports the following Pillars and Outcomes set forth in TRCA's 2023-2034 Strategic Plan:

Pillar 1 Environmental Protection and Hazard Management:

- 1.1 Deliver provincially mandated services pertaining to flood and erosion

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hazards

Pillar 1 Environmental Protection and Hazard Management:

1.2 Leadership in greenspace conservation

Pillar 3 Community Prosperity:

3.1 Connect communities to nature and greenspace

Pillar 4 Service Excellence:

4.4 Transparent decision making and accountable results

FINANCIAL DETAILS

The development of these Strategies is funded by the regular operating and capital budgets of TRCA divisions responsible for completing the work.

DETAILS OF WORK TO BE DONE

Staff will continue engaging with stakeholders according to the approved engagement plan and will report back to the RWA in 2025 after finalizing these Strategies.

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