Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks

Office of the Minister

777 Bay Street, 5th Floor
Toronto ON M7A 2J3
Tel.: 416-314-6790

Ministère de l'Environnement, de la Protection de la nature et des Parcs

Bureau du ministre

777, rue Bay, 5e étage
Toronto (Ontario) M7A 2J3
Tél. : 416.314.6790

Ontario

March 26, 2020

TO: Conservation Authorities as listed in the attached **Schedule** "**A**"

SUBJECT: Minister's Direction for Conservation Authorities during the COVID-19 Outbreak

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As the COVID-19 outbreak continues to evolve locally and globally, I am writing to provide direction on how conservation authorities can continue operations while maintaining a safe physical distance. To ensure conservation authorities can continue to conduct meetings and hearings as necessary, we are giving conservation authorities the ability to amend their administrative by-laws to allow for virtual meetings, including by teleconference.

As such, I am issuing this Minister's Direction ("**Direction**") pursuant to subsection 19.1 (7) of the *Conservation Authorities Act*. This Direction applies to all conservation authorities in Ontario, listed in **Schedule "A"** as attached. For greater certainty, this Direction also applies to conservation authorities when meeting as a source protection authority under the *Clean Water Act, 2006.*

The *Conservation Authorities Act* requires that, "[e]very meeting held by the authority shall be open to the public, subject to such exceptions as may be specified in the by-laws of the authority." Further, at any meeting that is held, "a quorum consists of one-half of the members appointed by the participating municipalities, except where there are fewer than six such members, in which case three such members constitute a quorum". It has been brought to my attention that the administrative by-laws that conservation authorities have adopted pursuant to subsection 19.1 (1) of the Act may create barriers in meeting these provisions of the Act during this time of emergency, where in-person attendance may not be feasible.

The primary purpose of this Direction is to enable conservation authorities to convene a meeting electronically in order to make the necessary amendments to their by-laws to deal with emergencies. This Direction identifies the minimum areas where the by-laws should be amended, in the manner deemed appropriate by the authority, to make provision for emergency situations. However, each conservation authority, depending on their individual by-laws, may identify the need to make other necessary amendments to respond to emergencies.

Accordingly, I am directing that the conservation authority review and amend their by-laws, as applicable, to ensure they comply with the following Direction and take the other necessary steps as set out in this Direction.

Electronic participation, emergencies

1. During any period where an emergency has been declared to exist, in all or part of an area over which a conservation authority has jurisdiction, under section 4 or 7.0.1 of the *Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act*, that may prevent members of the authority from meeting in person, the by-laws provide:

    a. That members of the authority be permitted to participate in meetings electronically, which shall include the ability of those members participating electronically to register votes.
    b. That any member of the authority who is participating electronically in a meeting may be counted in determining whether or not a quorum of members is present at any point in time during the meeting in accordance with the requirement in subsection 16 (2) of the *Conservation Authorities Act*.
    c. That any member of the authority can participate electronically in a meeting that is closed to the public.
    d. That any hearing or appeal that is dealt with in the by-laws can be conducted electronically with provisions for applicants and their agents to participate, if the conservation authority holds any such hearing or appeal during any period where an emergency has been declared to exist.

Meetings open to the public

2. Conservation authorities must continue to implement best practices to make board meetings open to the public in accordance with subsection 15 (3) of the *Conservation Authorities Act*. Where possible, conservation authorities must provide for alternative means to allow the public to participate in any meetings electronically.

General, emergency measures

3. If there is anything that is required to be done under the by-laws during the emergency, including the holding of an annual general meeting, that the by-laws permit postponement to a later date.

Publication of information

4. The conservation authorities listed in Schedule “A” shall make this Direction publicly available on a website or other electronic means.

5. In accordance with subsection 19.1 (4) of the *Conservation Authorities Act*, an authority shall make any by-laws that are amended in accordance with this Direction available to the public in the manner it considers appropriate.

Implementation procedure

6. A conservation authority may hold a special meeting to amend a by-law for the purposes of implementing this Direction.

7. Despite any provision in a by-law made under subsection 19.1 (1) of the *Conservation Authorities Act*, members of the authority can participate electronically in any special meeting that is required to implement this Direction.

8. A member of the authority that is participating electronically in such a special meeting may be counted in determining whether or not a quorum of members is present at any time during the meeting.

Effective date

9. This Direction is effective immediately. If it is in the public interest to do so, I will provide further direction or clarification, at a later date, related to the matters set out in this Direction.

If you have any questions related to this Direction, please contact:

Chloe Stuart
Assistant Deputy Minister, Land and Water Division, MECP
Robinson Pl South Tower, 6th Floor
300 Water Street
Peterborough ON K9J 3C7
(705) 755-5341
chloe.stuart@ontario.ca

To learn more about how the province continues to protect Ontarians from COVID-19, please visit www.ontario.ca/coronavirus.

Sincerely,

Jeff Yurek
Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks

c: The Honourable Steve Clark, Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing
The Honourable John Yakabuski, Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry
Ms. Kim Gavine, General Manager, Conservation Ontario

SCHEDULE "A" CONSERVATION AUTHORITIES

Ausable Bayfield CA
R.R. #3
71108 Morrison Line
Exeter ON N0M 1S5
Brian Horner
bhorner@abca.on.ca

Cataraqui Region CA
Box 160
1641 Perth Road
Glenburnie ON K0H 1S0
Katrina Furlanetto
kfurlanetto@crca.ca

Catfish Creek CA
R.R. #5
8079 Springwater Road
Aylmer ON N5H 2R4
Chris Wilkinson
generalmanager@catfishcreek.ca

Central Lake Ontario CA
100 Whiting Avenue
Oshawa ON L1H 3T3
Chris Darling
cdarling@cloca.com

Credit Valley CA
1255 Old Derry Rd
Mississauga ON L5N 6R4
Deborah Martin-Downs
deb.martindowns@cvc.ca

Crowe Valley CA
Box 416
70 Hughes Lane
Marmora ON K0K 2M0
Tim Pidduck
tim.pidduck@crowevalley.com

Essex Region CA
Suite 311
360 Fairview Ave West
Essex ON N8M 1Y6
Richard Wyma
rwyma@erca.org

Ganaraska Region CA
Box 328
2216 County Road 28
Port Hope ON L1A 3V8
Linda Laliberte
llaliberte@grca.on.ca

Grand River CA
Box 729
400 Clyde Road
Cambridge ON N1R 5W6
Samantha Lawson
slawson@grandriver.ca

Grey Sauble CA
R.R. #4
237897 Inglis Falls Road
Owen Sound ON N4K 5N6
Tim Lanthier
t.lanthier@greysauble.on.ca

Halton Region CA
2596 Britannia Road West
Burlington ON L7P 0G3
Hassaan Basit
hbasit@hrca.on.ca

Hamilton Region CA
P.O. Box 81067
838 Mineral Springs Road
Ancaster ON L9G 4X1
Lisa Burnside
lisa.burnside@conservationhamilton.ca

Kawartha Region CA
277 Kenrei (Park) Road
Lindsay ON K9V 4R1
Mark Majchrowski
mmajchrowski@kawarthaconservation.com

Kettle Creek CA
R.R. #8
44015 Ferguson Line
St. Thomas ON N5P 3T3
Elizabeth VanHooren
elizabeth@kettlecreekconservation.on.ca

Lake Simcoe Region CA
Box 282
120 Bayview Parkway
Newmarket ON L3Y 3W3
Mike Walters
m.walters@lsrca.on.ca

Lakehead Region CA
Box 10427
130 Conservation Road
Thunder Bay ON P7B 6T8
Tammy Cook
tammy@lakeheadca.com

Long Point Region CA
4 Elm Street
Tillsonburg ON N4G 0C4
Judy Maxwell
jmaxwell@lprca.on.ca

Lower Thames Valley CA
100 Thames Street
Chatham ON N7L 2Y8
Mark Peacock
mark.peacock@ltvca.ca

Lower Trent Region CA
R.R. #1
714 Murray Street
Trenton ON K8V 5P4
Rhonda Bateman
rhonda.bateman@ltc.on.ca

Maitland Valley CA
Box 127
1093 Marietta Street
Wroxeter ON N0G 2X0
Phil Beard
pbeard@mvca.on.ca

Mattagami Region CA
100 Lakeshore Road
Timmins ON P4N 8R5
David Vallier
david.vallier@timmins.ca

Mississippi Valley CA
10970 Highway 7
Carleton Place ON K7C 3P1
Sally McIntyre
smcintyre@mvc.on.ca

Niagara Peninsula CA
250 Thorold Road West, 3rd Floor
Welland ON L3C 3W2
Chandra Sharma
csharma@npca.ca

Nickel District CA
199 Larch St
Suite 401
Sudbury ON P3E 5P9
Carl Jorgensen
carl.jorgensen@conservationsudbury.ca

North Bay-Mattawa CA
15 Janey Avenue
North Bay ON P1C 1N1
Brian Tayler
brian.tayler@nbmca.ca

Nottawasaga Valley CA
8195 Line 8
Utopia ON L0M 1T0
Doug Hevenor
dhevenor@nvca.on.ca

Otonabee Region CA
250 Milroy Drive
Peterborough ON K9H 7M9
Dan Marinigh
dmarinigh@otonabeeconservation.com

Quinte CA
R.R. #2
2061 Old Highway #2
Belleville ON K8N 4Z2
Brad McNevin
bmcnevin@quinteconservation.ca

Raisin Region CA
PO Box 429
18045 County Road 2
Cornwall ON K6H 5T2
Richard Pilon
richard.pilon@rrca.on.ca

Rideau Valley CA
Box 599
3889 Rideau Valley Dr.
Manotick ON K4M 1A5
Sommer Casgrain-Robertson
sommer.casgrain-robertson@rvca.ca

Saugeen Valley CA
R.R. #1
1078 Bruce Road #12, Box #150
Formosa ON N0G 1W0
Dick Hibma
d.hibma@svca.on.ca

Sault Ste. Marie Region CA
1100 Fifth Line East
Sault Ste. Marie ON P6A 6J8
Corrina Barrett
cbarrett@ssmrca.ca

South Nation River CA
38 Victoria Street
P.O. Box 29
Finch ON K0C 1K0
Angela Coleman
acoleman@nation.on.ca

St. Clair Region CA
205 Mill Pond Crescent
Strathroy ON N7G 3P9
Brian McDougall
bmcdougall@scrca.on.ca

Toronto and Region CA
101 Exchange Avenue
Vaughan ON L4K 5R6
John MacKenzie
john.mackenzie@trca.ca

Upper Thames River CA
1424 Clarke Road
London ON N5V 5B9
Ian Wilcox
wilcoxi@thamesriver.on.ca