April 13, 2026

Hon. Todd J. McCarthy
Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks

Dear Minister McCarthy,

Upon review of the recent changes to Ontario Conservation Authorities and proposed further changes that could impact the Clean Water Act and its Regulations, our Source Protection Committee collaborated on the following response.

Over the last 25 years, protection of municipal drinking water sources in Ontario has improved dramatically. However, as the landscape and the climate changes, we must remain vigilant and continue with drinking water source protection measures to ensure that there continues to be safe water available for public consumption. Recently, the Province announced changes to boundaries for the regional consolidation of Ontario's conservation authorities. This reconfiguration must align with the fundamental basis of Justice O'Connor's Walkerton Inquiry report recommendation to maintain watershed-based drinking water source protection at the local level. As a Source Protection Committee, we strongly advocate that Justice O'Connor's recommendations are respected to ensure that source protection planning and implementation remain responsive to local issues and policy approaches.

The integrity of the drinking water source protection program is local, watershed-based committees that include members from the agriculture, business/commerce/industry, municipal, environment and health sectors. These members have a vested interest in the sources and drinking water systems that supply their families, neighbours and constituents with a safe supply of drinking water. Dilution of this oversight to the new regional conservation authority scale will not serve the recommendations made by Justice O'Connor following the tragedy that happened in Walkerton in our Source Protection Region. Our region and its residents are considerably more familiar and unwilling to waver on the core principles of the program.

Justice O'Connor's Walkerton Inquiry report recommended watershed-based drinking water source protection planning at the local level by those most directly affected. To ensure that source protection planning and implementation remain responsive to local issues and policy approaches, and to minimize the need for time consuming administrative changes and conformity exercises, the province should consider:

• Adopting the current scale of Source Protection Regions as the largest geographic extent for the proposed regional Conservation Authorities. A single regional Source Protection Authority spanning numerous municipalities risks weakening local accountability, distancing decision-making from watershed-specific realities, and diluting the local focus that is foundational to effective watershed management.

Tel 519-470-3000
mail@waterprotection.ca
Office: Grey Sauble Conservation Authority
RR4, 237897 Inglis Falls Road
Owen Sound, ON N4K 5N6

• Retaining the current geographic scale of Source Protection Areas. Ensuring that Assessment Reports (ARs) and Source Protection Plans (SPPs) would continue to be reflective of local drinking water threats, vulnerabilities, and policy approaches. While also helping ensure that conformity exercises and consequential amendments to ARs and SPPs would be minimized. Consolidation of ARs and SPPs to reflect changed Source Protection Area boundaries would be time consuming and contribute little to the outcomes of the source protection program.

• Maintaining local representation on Source Protection Committees (SPCs) to ensure that municipal, economic, public interest holders, and implementation bodies continue to have a voice in identifying needed amendments to plans and overseeing progress towards achieving the objectives of SPPs. Continued alignment of SPCs with Source Protection Region jurisdictions would help ensure local representation and accountability.

The Source Protection Committee has deep concerns about possible implications to the Clean Water Act as a result of the recent Conservation Authority Act changes. It is our intent to continue to work with the province, local municipalities and local Source Protection Authorities to protect our local sources of drinking water in the spirit of Justice O'Connor's recommendations.

Sincerely,

Dick Hibma
Acting Chair, Saugeen, Grey Sauble, Northern Bruce Peninsula
Source Protection Committee

Cc via email: Kirsten Service, MECP
Source Protection Authorities
Municipal Clerks