

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – December 19th, 2025

Saugeen Conservation Responds to Provincial ERO Proposal on Conservation Authority Consolidation

ALL SAUGEEN WATERSHED MUNICIPALITIES – Municipality of Arran-Elderslie, Municipality of Brockton, Township of Chatsworth, Municipality of Grey Highlands, Town of Hanover, Township of Howick, Municipality of Morris-Turnberry, Municipality of South Bruce, Township of Huron-Kinloss, Municipality of Kincardine, Town of Minto, Township of Wellington-North, Town of Saugeen Shores, Township of Southgate, Municipality of West Grey.

Saugeen Valley Conservation Authority (SVCA) has reviewed and submitted comments to the Province of Ontario’s Environmental Registry of Ontario proposal that would consolidate the province’s 36 conservation authorities into seven regional organizations, supported by a new provincial agency responsible for governance, standards, and central permitting.

Under the current proposal, Saugeen Conservation would be grouped into a potential “Huron–Superior Regional Conservation Authority,” encompassing approximately 80 municipalities, from the 15 currently within the watershed. This proposal represents the most significant change to Ontario’s environmental management system since the inception of Conservation Authorities.

SVCA does not support consolidation. While Saugeen Conservation supports the Province’s stated goals of improving consistency and modernizing digital permitting, those objectives can be achieved without removing local governance or amalgamating watershed-based agencies into large regional or provincial structures. In fact, SVCA is concerned that the top priority of the province to speeding housing approvals, and better front line services, will be negatively impacted by unnecessary amalgamation. The Authority’s formal submission to the Environmental Registry outlines how targeted investments, shared technical resources, and clear provincial standards could strengthen performance without undermining public safety, local accountability, or community trust.

Historically, the Province funded up to 50 percent of Conservation Authority operations. Today, provincial support has fallen to less than two percent (for SVCA), leaving municipalities to fund the vast majority of conservation services. SVCA is concerned that the proposed restructuring would shift governance away from the municipalities that created and continue to fund Conservation Authorities, resulting in a significant loss of local decision-making, community accountability, and rural representation.

Claims of systemic inefficiency are not supported by evidence. Saugeen Conservation issues more than 99 percent of permits within provincial timelines. One hundred percent of planning reviews and development-related screenings are completed within municipal timelines, with staff working directly with municipal planners, developers, and property owners to resolve issues early, reduce delays, and support local economic growth.

“At its core, conservation work is local. Flood forecasting, hazard management, and planning review depend on detailed watershed knowledge and strong relationships with municipalities and communities. Those strengths are not preserved by distance or scale. They are preserved by people on the ground who know the land and the risks.”

Erik Downing, General Manager and Secretary-Treasurer, SVCA

Saugeen Conservation is honoured to serve the communities of the Saugeen watershed and to work alongside its member municipalities to support safe, well-planned growth. That work is built on trust, local knowledge, and daily collaboration with the people who live and work here.

SVCA believes communities are best served when decisions affecting safety, land use, and natural systems are made close to home, by professionals who understand local conditions, rather than by a distant centralized office removed from the watershed it is meant to serve.

Saugeen Conservation will continue to communicate clearly and openly as this process unfolds, with a steady focus on public safety, local accountability, and the shared responsibility of caring for our watershed and communities.

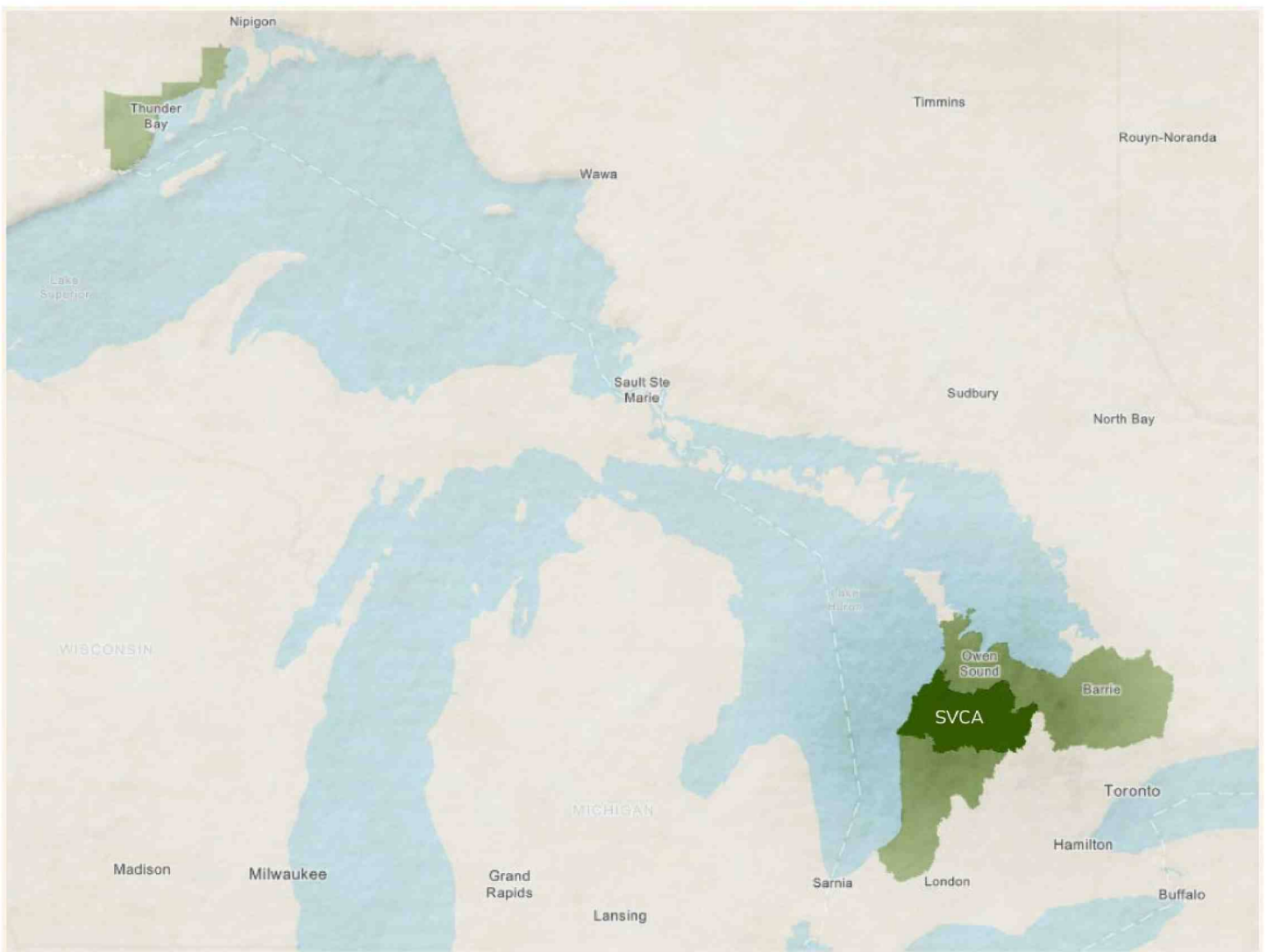
To submit comment to the ERO please visit: <https://ero.ontario.ca/notice/025-1257>

For more information, please contact:

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Proposed Conservation Authority Amalgamation

The proposed Huron-Superior Regional Conservation Authority

