

Given that Ontario's varied approaches to watershed management have become diluted, fragmented, and ineffective, we believe they should be replaced by an Outcomes-based Framework for Watershed Security, which we define as healthy and resilient watersheds that protect regional ecological integrity, social wellbeing, and economic vitality.

Not only would prescribed ecological outcomes safeguard our watersheds, biodiversity, public health, and economic vitality, a framework identifying a clear lead agency for the outcomes would deliver what the Ontario government has been talking about since 2018: stream-lined, more effective environmental management.

Key recommendations to restore the provincial vision to protect our watersheds are described below. Please note that these recommendations dovetail with two other sets of recommendations also being released at this time - recommendations Integrating Land Use and Watershed Planning Through a Municipal Charter for Watershed Security and those for a Revitalized and Expanded Role for Conservation Authorities.

Our top recommendations are that:

- Ontario should pursue an amendment to or new annex in the Canada-Ontario Agreement on Great Lakes Water Quality and Ecosystem Health on increased federal / provincial cooperation on watershed security, perhaps based on existing collaborative efforts to address nutrient flow to and algae in Lake Erie;
- Ontario should establish natural heritage targets, similar to those in the federal guideline "How Much Habitat is Enough", such as agreed percentages of a watercourse to be in natural heritage, wetlands, and streamside vegetation, with mechanisms to set restoration goals where a watershed is below target;
- Ontario's planning regime should articulate support for regional food security, sustainable agricultural practices, and farm succession;
- In the Provincial Planning Statement (PPS), Ontario should:
  - Reinforce the obligation that planning authorities shall "protect, improve or restore the quality and quantity of water by...using the watershed as the ecologically meaningful scale for integrated and long-term planning";
  - Reinstate climate change impacts as a key consideration in protecting water; and,
  - Move to create and implement the cumulative monitoring referred to in the Statement;
- Ontario should establish triggers, lead agencies, and a protocol for action when monitoring results indicate that a Provincial Water Quality Objective has been exceeded;
- The Province should restore the archived Wetland Policy and rescind recent amendments to the Ontario Wetland Evaluation System that limit the future identification of provincially significant wetlands;
- Ontario should revoke the blanket ability of aggregate extraction sites to operate below the water table and instead develop an appropriate protocol to protect and monitor groundwater on a site-by-site basis;
- Municipal Official Plans should require watershed studies, based on the ecosystem approach, prior to issuing development permits, and should include natural heritage system studies that include the identification of significant surface water contribution areas and plans to protect regional biodiversity;
- All municipalities in Ontario should be required to have a permitting system for site alteration, especially as such might impact water, with appropriate measures for inspection, halt-work orders, and adjudication;
- Minister's Zoning Orders should require a certificate on the non-impairment of watershed security from a designated agency, such as a conservation authority or the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation, and Parks; and,
- Concerns about the quality and quantity of water in, flowing through, or downstream from development being considered by a planning authority should be re-instated as eligible criteria for appeals to the Ontario Land Tribunal.