

PREMIER MCGUINITY:

Notwithstanding soothing rhetoric from the Ministry of Natural Resources and Conservation Ontario, the OPERA coalition is not persuaded recently elasticized interpretation of the Conservation Authorities Act reflects the high purpose and unselfish motives traditionally expected of good government.

Our recent "Memo to Municipalities" highlights circumstances and consequences of what is widely perceived as latter day manipulation of the Conservation Authorities Act without sufficient public consultation in advance. And certainly without revealing the quantum effect the resulting "adjustment" in land use planning will surely visit upon Ontario taxpayers. Your particular attention is directed, with respect, to sly blending of statutory definitions that expand Conservation Authority dominion combined with arbitrary tinkering with intent and language of a "generic" Regulation approved in 2004 but evidently now subject to modification at the whim or impulse of individual Conservation Authorities.

This example of bureaucratic smoke and mirrors is viewed by an increasingly skeptical electorate as nothing more than bureaucratic empire building. To alter that widespread perception there are, in our view, three basic questions on each of which the Ontario government should immediately circulate an equally succinct response. They are:

1. For what purpose and at whose direction are Conservation Authorities mandated to interpret and revise existing statutes and regulations by "peer group review"?
2. By combining "hazard lands" and "heritage lands" for regulatory enforcement do Conservation Authorities assume a larger role in land use planning across Ontario?
3. Should municipal governments publish total costs and resulting property tax levies of regional Conservation Authorities in local tax assessment notices?

We understand that some Conservation Authorities, as surrogates of the Ministry of Natural Resources, intend to present the Minister of that agency on or before June 1, 2006 a number of requested "adjustments" in generic Regulation 97/4 under Section 28 of the Conservation Authorities Act. We protest not only the thrust and direction of such recommendations but also the questionable process by which they have been induced and prepared.

By copy of this message with attachment to MNR Minister David Ramsay and other members of your Cabinet as well as their Opposition critics we respectfully ask that these ad hoc modifications to the Conservation Authorities Act are, on principle, unequivocally rejected by your government.