

Conservation Authorities Consolidation - UPDATE

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Chair, Upper Thames River Conservation Authority
Mayor, Town of Ingersoll

Provincial Announcement - March 10, 2026

Provincial Concerns

- Patchwork of standards and service delivery
- Outdated and fragmented data systems
- Administrative duplication
- Need for more accountability and transparency



Provincial Announcement - March 10, 2026

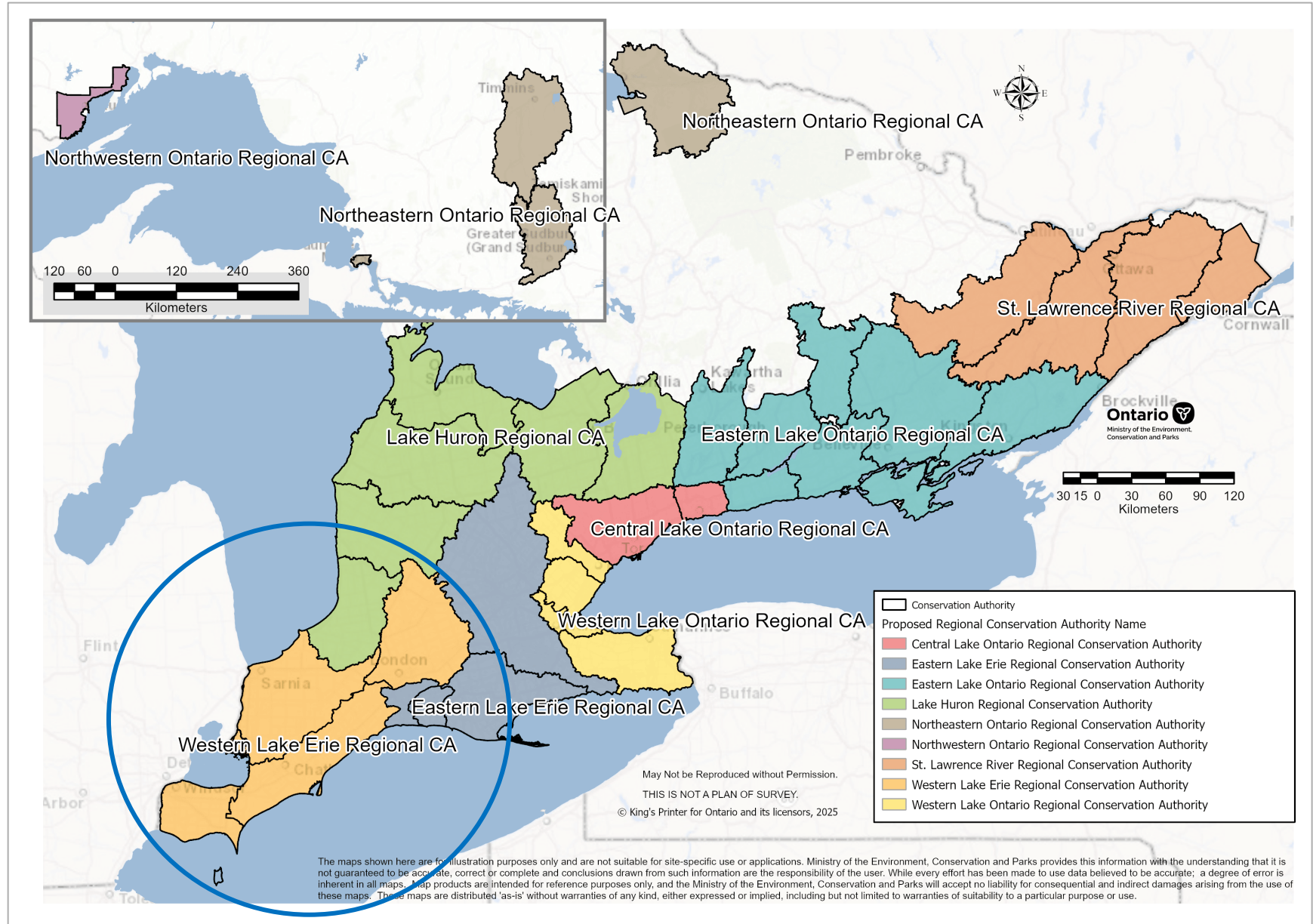
Provincial Guiding Principles

- Retain local influence
- Maintain CA watershed-based jurisdiction
- Reduce administrative overlap and duplication
- Strengthen CA capacity
- Continuity of services
- Improve customer service



9 Regional CAs

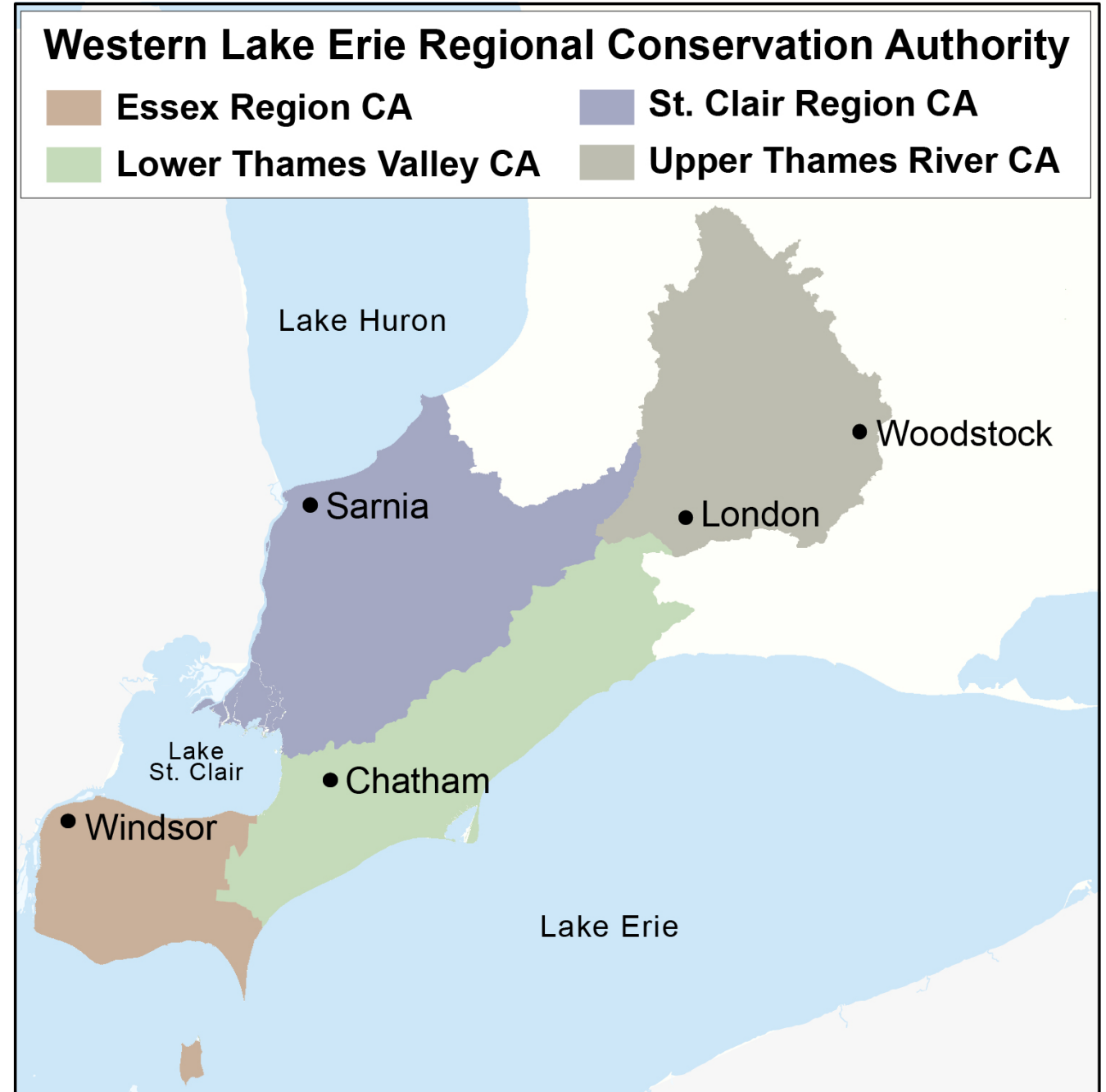
- Western Lake Erie Regional Conservation Authority
- Consolidation expected to take place by early 2027.





Western Lake Erie Regional Conservation Authority (WLERCA)

- Essex Region CA
- Lower Thames Valley CA
- St. Clair Region CA
- Upper Thames River CA





Regional CA Governance

- Municipally governed.
- Participating municipalities appoint Board members and pay CA levies.
- **Upper-tier and single-tier municipalities only.**
- Lower-tier municipalities within a county no longer participating.
- Timing: After October 2026 municipal elections, newly-elected upper-tier municipal councils will select first members.



Participating Municipalities in WLERCA

Upper Tier – 7 Counties*

- Essex (7 municipalities)
- Lambton (11 municipalities)
- Elgin (3 municipalities)
- **Huron (1 UTRCA municipality)**
- **Middlesex** (7 municipalities including **3 in UTRCA**)
- **Oxford (7 UTRCA municipalities)**
- **Perth (3 UTRCA municipalities)**

Single Tier – 6 Municipalities

- Chatham-Kent (Municipality)
- **London (City)**
- Pelee (Township)
- **Stratford (City)**
- **St. Marys (Town)**
- Windsor (City)

*represent 39 lower-tier municipalities

Regional CA Governance: Single Tier Municipalities

How this affects you:

- Representation on the Board continues.
- Continue to contribute Levy.
- **Influence will be largely diluted** amongst WLERCA:
 - 6 single tier municipalities
 - 7 upper tier counties

UTRCA reduced board size in mid 90s. Key concern was maintaining balance between rural and urban representation.



WLERCA Governance - Impact

- UTRCA created in 1947 as a partnership between member municipalities – use local knowledge and expertise to make decisions regarding management of the watershed's natural resources.
- Regional CA Board weakens local ties, community level representation, and meaningful **influence in decision-making**.
- Risk losing local voices, especially **balance between rural and urban representation**.
- Watershed Council(s) may be key route to hear those voices.

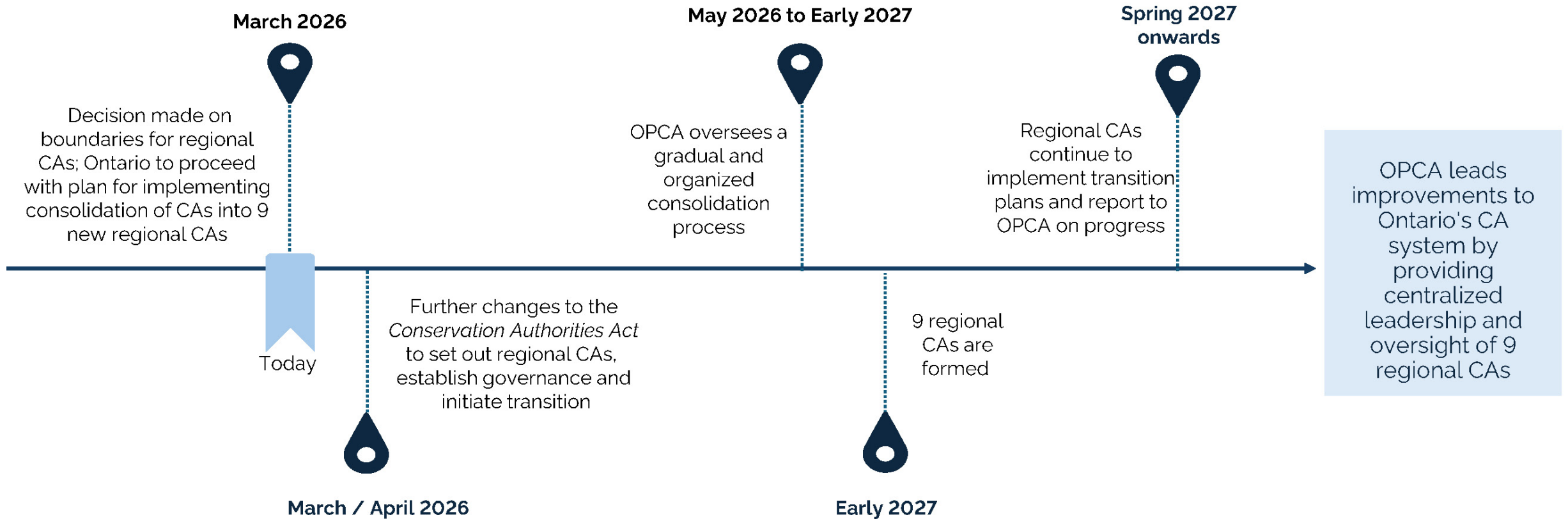


Regional CA Governance: Watershed Councils

- Each Regional CA to create at least one Watershed Council “to ensure watershed management continues to be informed by local knowledge and input.”
- Identify local priorities and interests to be considered by the Board.
- Membership requirements may be set out in regulation (similar to source water protection committees).

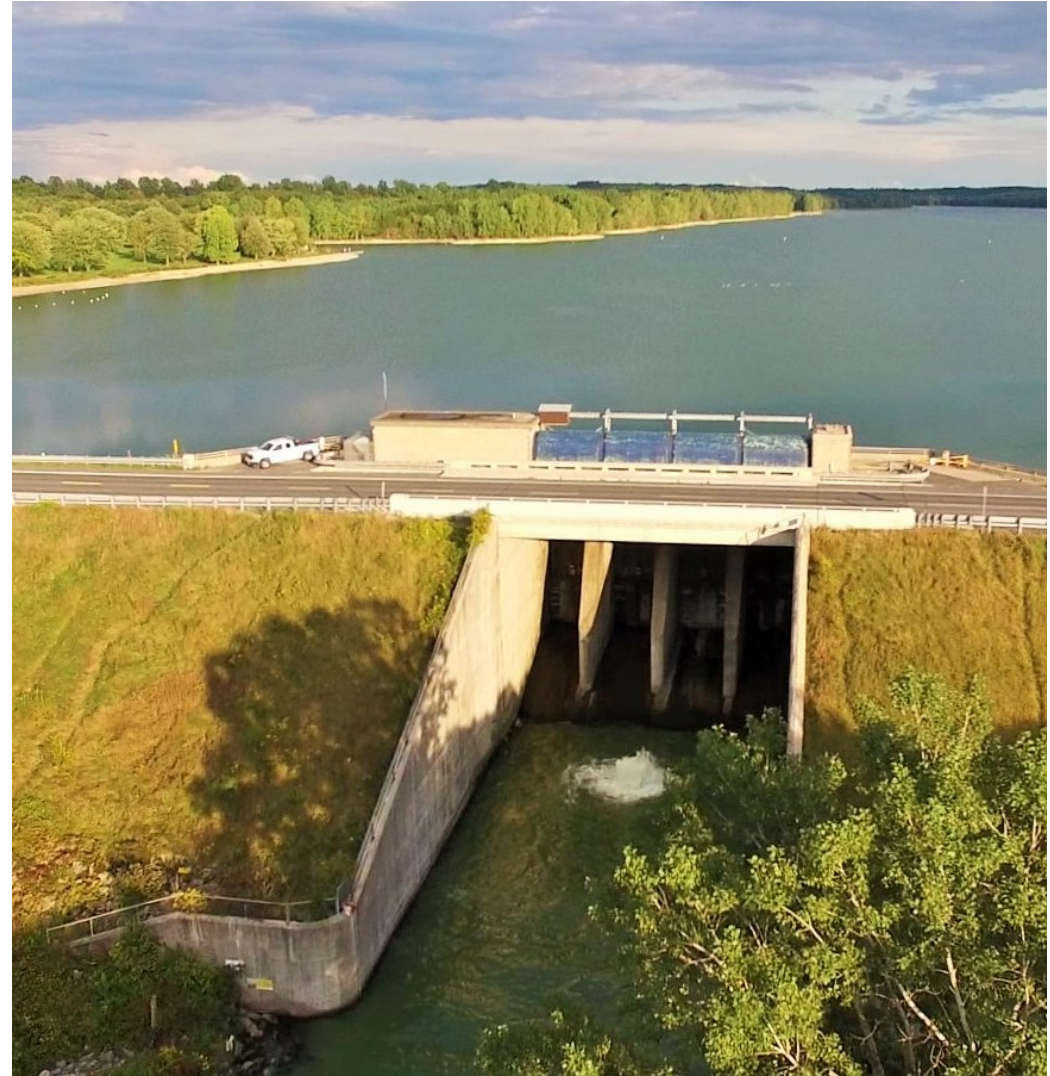
Watershed Councils will be an opportunity for input – not decision making.

Transition Process - Timeline



Transition Process - 2027 CA Budgets

- Minister able to issue directions to manage 2027 budget process for the 36 predecessor CAs.
- Provide clarity around timelines: Direct that CA budgeting be completed by December 31, 2026, and levies be issued to current participating municipalities.



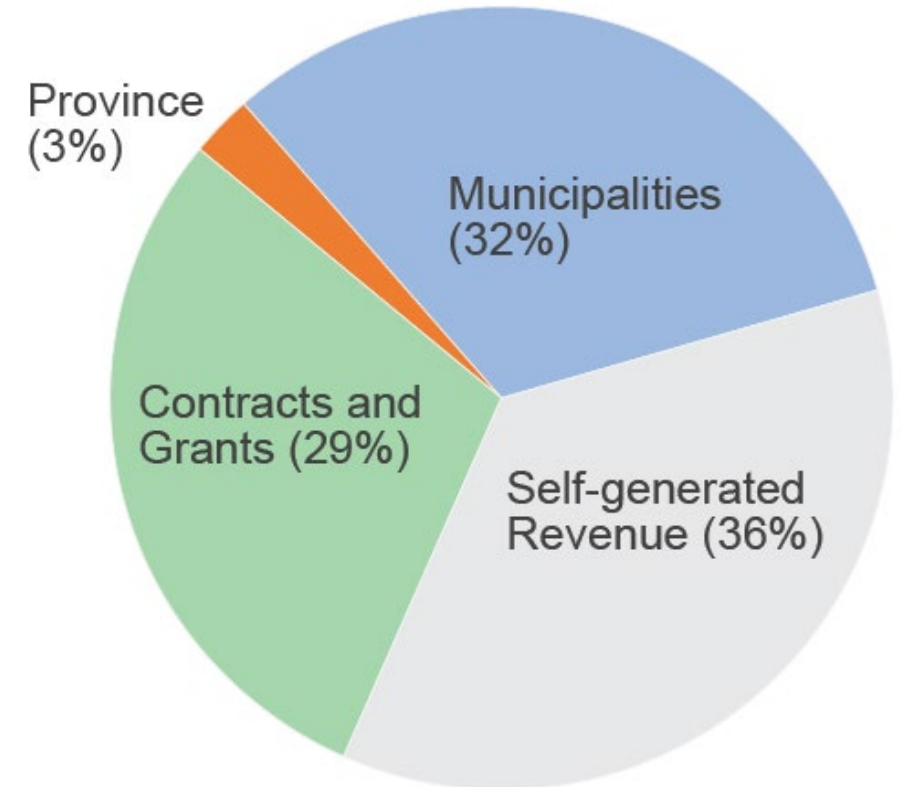


Transition Process - Funding

- Province spending \$20M to create Ontario Provincial Conservation Agency (OPCA).
- Province establishing new annual \$3M fund, administered by OPCA, to support CAs and coordinate transition over the next year with minimal disruptions to CAs' governance, programs, and services.

Economic Impacts / Concerns

- Province contributes 3% of UTRCA's 2026 operating budget. Additional provincial investment is required.
- UTRCA's member municipalities currently fund 32% of UTRCA overall programs and services.
- Regional cost-sharing model could unintentionally create inequalities between urban and rural municipality's ability to pay.
- No cost-benefit analysis – significant costs for transition (IT, branding), policy and staffing harmonization.
- Financial reserves and funds generated locally should be directed back to the community/property where they originated.





ERO Concerns

Despite some calls for provincial consistency, the overwhelming tone in Environmental Registry comments and reports from conservation authorities and other organizations indicate high opposition or trepidation, asking the government to pause or rethink the mergers.

- **Scale and Scope:** Proposed regional boundaries are considered too large to address specific local environmental, social, and economic needs, moving away from, or breaking, effective watershed management units.
- **Loss of Local Control:** Fear of losing local municipal representation, democratic accountability, and tailored environmental decision-making.
- **Transition Risks:** Significant concerns about service interruptions, staff turnover, and organizational instability during consolidation, particularly during high development pressure and climate risks.
- **Financial Doubts:** Lack of evidence that consolidation will bring promised cost savings; concern that large mergers may lead to higher administrative costs.
- **Efficiency vs. Effectiveness:** While the province argues for consistency and improved service times, critics feel the changes focus too much on shortening approvals for development, risking long-term watershed health.



Next Steps for the UTRCA

- No disruption in UTRCA's work to protect public safety and environmental health – We are committed to protecting the watershed at the local level.
- Will continue work collaboratively with our municipal partners through the transition period and beyond.
- Will review and communicate future changes from the Province.
- Business as usual for all UTRCA's watershed protection and environmental services, including conservation areas and trails, drinking water source protection, watershed monitoring, protection, and management, stewardship programs, agricultural extension services, education and partnership programs.



Questions