



Uncertain Future for MVCA Conservation Areas

May 26, 2021 - Proposed provincial regulations governing conservation authorities (CAs) will remove visitor amenities such as parking lots and trails from the core mandate of CAs. Doing this will remove their eligibility for funding under the municipal levy and create uncertainty at thousands of conservation areas across the province. Under the new regulation, these amenities must be funded through increased user fees, grants, and the generosity of local municipalities. Mississippi Valley Conservation Authority (MVCA) General Manager, Sally McIntyre, says all six of its conservation areas face an uncertain future. “For example, at the Mill of Kintail, we have an extensive trail network, washrooms, directional signage, a picnic shelter and the Gatehouse used by community groups. As with the museum, none of those amenities are to be eligible for the base municipal levy going forward.”

Conservation areas provide exercise opportunities, forest therapy and serve as rest stops across Ontario and are seen by many as a public asset. As the summer season begins and COVID-19 restrictions loosen, attendance at conservation areas are expected to see record attendance numbers again in 2021. “Last year we saw a 50% increase in attendance at the Mill of Kintail and Morris Island Conservation Areas,” says Shannon Gutoskie, MVCA’s Community Relations Coordinator. “The pandemic has shown everyone how important these facilities are to public health as well as conservation of the natural environment.”

If the regulation is approved as proposed, only activities that are directly tied to protecting nature heritage values will be eligible for the municipal levy.

The Province is hosting two webinars in the coming days to explain its proposals to the public: Thursday May 27 at 10:30 am and Tuesday June 1 at 2:00 pm. To register for the webinar, contact ca.office@ontario.ca.

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