



## Climate Change Actions and Ontario Land Trusts

### Background

Climate Change is a serious issue that impacts all Canadians. The longer we wait to address this issue, the more expensive it will become for all levels of government, taxpayers, businesses and the economy.

### Adverse impacts of climate change are already occurring:

- Loss of natural resources, food lands, wildlife habitat and genetic diversity as a result of rapid urban expansion and incompatible uses;
- Flood damage impacts on homes, roads, bridges and buildings;
- Business and social disruptions from power outages, heat waves, more flooding, low water conditions and impacts on water supply;
- Increased weather-related insurance claims for floods, forest fires and catastrophic events are severely affecting the insurance industry;
- Increased levels of government funding and liabilities in order to help people and businesses recover from flood and other events;
- Increased health care costs as a result of poorer air quality and hotter temperatures which create increased respiratory and other illnesses;
- Increased costs to natural resource-based industries e.g. forestry, fishing, hunting, commercial shipping, rural tourism and health-giving recreation opportunities as a result of decreased ice cover on lakes and rivers, loss of nature, less reliable snowfall, lower rainfalls and forest fires;
- Low flow and drought in streams and rivers affecting fish and wildlife habitat, farming economies and summer recreational activities.

### Seven Actions on Climate Change for Ontario

#### **#1 - Protection and stewardship of Ontario's land, forests, water resources, agricultural soils, rural landscapes, and the diversity of nature, will need to become key focus areas in a climate change plan**

Climate change is already affecting Ontario's lakes, rivers, streams and groundwater sources and the Province needs to assure Ontarians that it can continue to provide enough safe water for our needs, particularly for drinking water – today and into the future. As a result of a changing climate, stream flow is low or unpredictable, runoff is creating poor water quality in rivers and lakes, and many lake levels are either often too high or too low. A climate change plan needs to monitor and address critical water-related issues such as storm water management, drinking water protection, low water and flooding. Urban sprawl, and incompatible uses are grabbing or threatening lands, forest habitat and soils needed for food, diversity of



nature and the economic health of rural and urban environments. All are essential to Ontario in action on climate change.

**#2 – Funding through grants, program initiatives, taxation incentives and partnerships needs to be enhanced to support community conservation groups as active contributing players in strategic actions**

Ontario's land trusts, conservation authorities, land owners and environmental charities are already actively contributing to conservation of land, water, nature, food supply, wildlife diversity and the healthy environments of local communities across Ontario. Most, if not all, of these community actions involve the volunteer participation of landowners, donors, foundations and municipalities in the pursuit of shared goals in protection and stewardship. Good examples in recent years are found in their collective work to support and implement Provincial Plans for watershed management and designated greenbelt areas. Ontario can achieve more and better with high efficiency and cost effectiveness by supporting these community conservation groups in shared goals on climate change action rather than by trying to accomplish all with Ontario ministries only.

**#3 - More monitoring is needed to track climate change impacts and how to adapt to events impacting on land, nature, food and water**

Having water available for residents, businesses, agriculture and other needs is critical to a healthy population and thriving economy. Climate change impacts are affecting Ontario's water supplies and their quality. Simultaneously, these events, affect and threaten our food production, natural diversity, forest health and the economic and environmental health of Ontario communities.

**#4 - Storm water management must be included as an essential component in effective strategies for Ontario's climate change plan**

Increased runoff from frequent, heavy rainfall and snowmelt creates dangerous and more costly contamination for our essential water resources. Storm water management policy, guidance and actions are needed to prevent erosion, protect the water quality in streams, lakes and groundwater (drinking water sources) and prevent costly damages to roads, bridges, buildings and other infrastructure. The need to update flood plain mapping and address flood prevention infrastructure that is aging throughout all of Ontario is also very important. Extreme weather is impacting where flooding takes place and how it affects lands, roads, homes and businesses. Experiencing more frequent year-round and stronger flooding affects infrastructure, creates business disruptions and can abruptly change people and their lives when their homes are threatened or damaged.



### **#5 – Ontario’s drinking water source protection program needs to be a central piece for the Province’s climate change plan**

This program protects lakes, rivers, streams and groundwater sources, which we rely on for our drinking water. Clean and safe drinking water source quality and supply are threatened by warming temperatures, drought, storm water runoff, and more frequent flooding. Relying just on water treatment facilities to ensure safe drinking water could be a very costly choice. Protecting water sources and preventing overuse or contamination needs to be done as a first step and in partnership with better strategies for water treatment.

### **#6 - We must actively protect contributing landscapes, steward our wildlife habitats, manage our water resources and increase green spaces in both urban and rural areas as a holistic strategy**

Vegetation such as forests, shrubs, wetlands and grasses prevent flooding, help to absorb carbon, prevent runoff, cool air temperatures as well as provide recreational and quality of life benefits. Protecting land, soil and water for food production also ensures sustainability for future generations. Diversity of nature through protection of species at risk and their habitats helps us meet provincial, national and international goals for genetic diversity in environmental health and build stronger capacity for climate change actions.

### **#7 - We need to build on current efforts of municipalities, conservation authorities, land trusts and other agencies for a smart and cost effective approach to address climate change impacts**

Ontario land trusts, conservation authorities, municipalities and communities deliver a broad range of long-term programs for the protection and stewardship of diversity, land, nature and water - often sharing goals in partnership with all levels of government and many other agencies. This work helps us to adapt in climate change and build local resiliency. Building on this foundation and many other ongoing initiatives would be a good first step in planning and implementing the best actions in an effective climate change plan.



## **Recommendation**

The Government of Ontario is encouraged and requested to seriously consider and include the above seven actions in development and implementation of a diligent and timely Climate Change Action Plan for Ontario.

This will enable the Province to immediately address the emerging issues and changing conditions in a cost effective and efficient manner.

**Thank you for your consideration,**

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