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Ontario's Flooding Strategy Released

The Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry has released [Ontario's Flooding Strategy](#). There are five key areas for action:

- 1) Understanding Flood Risks,
- 2) Strengthening Governance of Flood Risks,
- 3) Enhanced Flood Preparedness,
- 4) Enhance flood response and recovery,
- 5) Invest in Flood Risk Reduction.

Municipal governments can welcome this commitment to enhance mapping and increase public awareness by creating a public education program. There is clear direction that all governments and conservation authorities need to work in greater collaboration. This will include clarifying responsibilities and working groups to tackle specific issues.

A strong investment in science based, defensible data is planned in an effort to improve flooding information. This is not only for mapping but also to improve forecasting and warning systems. The province will be reviewing a large number of regulations and technical guidelines to update them to better reflect recent flooding experiences and climate change projections. As well there is a commitment from the province to enhance flood forecasting in a number of ways including working with the Federal Government. This in turn will improve public warning information.

Of specific interest to municipal governments are the action items pertaining to land use planning decisions and infrastructure. Reliance on structures to mitigate flood hazards has not been as successful as originally intended. As a result, municipalities are called on to evaluate approaches and standards. This will include maintaining wetlands, increasing permeable surfaces, enhancing resiliency through building infrastructure in anticipation of extreme weather events, and stormwater / wastewater management and reporting.

Many of these actions will impact conservation authorities in terms of their role in mapping, the planning process, monitoring, forecasting and support of emergency management activities. Conservation Authorities could be called on to strengthen the use of hazard regulations under Section 28.

Agricultural and rural drainage may also see revisions to standards.

The strategy speaks to land owners' responsibilities and is supportive of the federal government developing a new low-cost national flood insurance program to protect homeowners at high risk of flooding and to develop a national action plan to assist homeowners with potential relocation for those at the highest risk of repeat flooding. There is a commitment to enhance emergency response by implementing Auditor General recommendations, and review the Disaster Recovery Assistance program. Specific actions are reviewing the build back better pilot, providing clarity on the eligibility of waste management costs, and reviewing program responsiveness.

Finally, there is discussion of better leveraging the existing Ontario Community Infrastructure Fund (OCIF) and Ontario's Asset Management Planning regulations to account for flooding and climate adaptation needs; funding for flooding infrastructure projects through the recent Green Infrastructure Stream intake; Conservation Authority Water Erosion Control Infrastructure (WECI) funds for dam investments; continued funding for core activities of Conservation Authorities; support from federal funding programs and encouraging the use of Local Improvement Charges for shoreline revetment.

Overall, this report will require municipal governments:

- to alter practices for where or under what circumstances development is allowed, including avoiding hazard lands and an emphasis on low impact development.
- to alter expectations of developers to better manage stormwater, maintain wetlands, increase permeable surfaces and require low impact development.
- to be more stringent with development. There will be some developments that may not be able to proceed which may result in some landowners being frustrated.
- to evaluate storm and wastewater management. There may be some costs (depending on how infrastructure funding is provided) to upgrading existing and up sizing future infrastructure designed to manage waste and storm water. Sewer overflow reporting will also require municipal attention.

With any change in approach or standards, there can be time lags which translate into costs. While the document points to municipal governments as the lynchpin in addressing flooding, it does not seem to require new unfunded mandates. The Strategy does however add pressure to an already challenging infrastructure funding environment where demand far outstrips available funds.

AMO continues to call for additional, dedicated federal and provincial funding for flooding infrastructure to help municipalities adapt to our changing climate. AMO staff will continue to monitor the ways in which this strategy is implemented.

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