

### Environmental protection at risk

This winter, the Ontario government passed two bills seriously threatening our environment.

The first, Bill 229, contains Schedule 6, a major assault on Ontario's highly respected system of 36 watershed-based Conservation Authorities. It risks watering down or losing the conservation authorities' science-based watershed approach currently protecting people and property from flooding and other natural hazards, as well as ensuring healthy natural resources. says Conservation Ontario [conservationontario.ca].

Bill 229 passed on December 8, 2020 in spite of an outcry. It allows Minister of Municipal Affairs Steve Clark to **over-ride the conservation authorities' power to protect important wetlands and forests**. He can issue a development permit without a hearing, and with no appeal. "The playing field isn't level. Developers have appeal rights that the conservation authorities do not.

The second, Bill 257, contains Schedule 3 which gives Minister Clark **nearly unchecked power to fast-track development on precious farmland and significant natural areas across the province**, as explained by Ontario Nature. "When an MZO [*Minister's Zoning Order - see below*] is used to permit development, it will no longer have to be consistent with Ontario's fundamental planning principles, as set out in the Provincial Policy Statement." Again, in spite of objections from many organizations, including TIARA, the Bill passed intact on April 12, 2021.

### The MZO

The Ontario government has discovered a powerful tool in its toolbox: the Minister's Zoning Order (MZO). Until recently, it was used very sparingly -- less than once a year on average between 2006 and 2018. But, according to the *Toronto Star*, **43 have been issued** since the Ford government came into power three years ago.

A Minister's Zoning Order allows Municipal Affairs and Housing Minister Steve Clark to make a ruling on how a piece of land is to be used in the province, with **no chance of appeal by municipalities, citizens or environmental groups**, explains *Environmental Defence*, a leading environmental advocacy organization. "While there are very rare emergencies that warrant speeding up the approval process, the government has changed the law to let the Minister issue MZOs that would otherwise be unlawful -- because they violate fundamental planning rules or even create floods and landslide risk." So far, no MZOs have been issued in the 1000 Islands, but the threat is there.

### Why worry about wetlands?

Caroline Schultz, *Ontario Nature's* Executive Director says: "Wetlands are delicate ecosystems that pay for themselves many times over both ecologically and economically. Their estimated economic value in southern Ontario alone is \$14 billion per year."

### TIARA's Annual Meeting: Saturday, August 14, 2020

Thinking hopefully but cautiously, we're tentatively planning a **real, live AGM this year**, but with your safety top of mind. We've booked **the pavilion at the Rockport Rec Hall for the morning of Saturday, August 14**. It has a roof but it's open-sided to the fresh air. We'll strictly follow all the prevailing regulations regarding masks, distance and numbers.

If it turns out nearer the time that these plans will not be permitted, we'll switch to a Zoom meeting on the same date and time. We'll keep you posted. When you renew your membership (a form is enclosed), please make sure to give us your email address. Up to date information will also be posted on our website (www.tiaraweb.org) and on Facebook (facebook.com/tiaracanada).

Our AGM will feature a speaker from **Watersheds Canada** who will tell us about their Living Edge program. Native trees, shrubs and wildflowers established along your waterfront can stabilize the soil and keep it in place naturally. During the high water of 2017 and 2019, we worried about flooding, but in times of climate change, this spring's low water has reminded us that drought is a possibility, too. Here's a link to a recent CBC report about Watersheds Canada: <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/ottawa/landowners-urged-to-protect-shorelines-1.6029697>

### Covid19: Border closing and marina restrictions

The start of this summer looks a lot like last year's. Currently, marinas can launch and watch over their clients' boats, but boat owners are not allowed to use marinas for "recreational boating". Boat owners can use their boats to access their island property.

As for the border between Canada and the USA, this can change over the summer. For up-to-date regulations, consult the Government of Canada's Travel and Tourism website, [travel.gc.ca](http://travel.gc.ca).

Cases continue to rise in many "hot spots" in Ontario. Kingston hospitals have been accepting Covid cases from other Ontario places to alleviate the pressure. The bright spot is that vaccines are being rolled out, but it will be a while until the effect is felt.

### Laura Bell (1930 - 2020)

With sadness, we announce the death of Laura Bell on November 20, 2020.

Laura had been a member of TIARA's board of directors for many years. She was a wise and sympathetic voice of reason, with a life-long love of the River and the environment.