



SOUTH NATION
CONSERVATION
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Annual Report on Conservation Authority Permit Review Timelines

December 2020



Acknowledgements

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Executive Summary

The annual report on timelines and service standards for Section 28 permits (under the Conservation Authorities Act) is provided to SNC's Board of Directors, posted on SNC's website, and submitted to Conservation Ontario.

Interim reports were prepared in May (January – March) and November (April – August) during 2020 to identify issues with reporting templates or internal processes.

This report has been prepared to support Conservation Ontario's Client Service and Streamlining Initiative.

1.0 Introduction

In April 2019, Conservation Ontario (CO) Council endorsed the CO Client Service and Streamlining Initiative. This initiative identifies actions to be taken by Conservation Authorities (CAs) to help the Province achieve its objective of increasing housing supply while protecting public health and safety, and the environment.

These actions include:

- a) Improve Client Service and Accountability;
- b) Increase Speed of Approvals; and
- c) Reduce Red Tape and Regulatory Burden.

In 2020 two interim reports for high growth CAs were provided to CO Council for information. Interim reports helped identify issues with the reporting template early in the process.

This 2020 Final Report provides an annual summary on review timelines and was provided to CO Council April 2021.

1.1 Organization Background

South Nation Conservation

South Nation Conservation (SNC) has a strong history in watershed management, natural hazard regulation, and sustainable development. As an agency established under the Conservation Authorities Act of Ontario in 1947, SNC has decades of practical experience in protecting our environment and engaging communities.

SNC employs more than 50 staff while leading hundreds of stewardship projects to success, throughout a 4,441 km² jurisdiction in Eastern Ontario.

Our Expertise

Conservation is our core competency. SNC offers natural resource management and planning expertise to help our partners contribute to a healthy region. These contributions include forest, wetland, wildlife, fisheries, urban trees, floodplain, natural hazards, and water management. Community education and engagement are also an important component of our efforts.

Working Together

As one of Ontario's 36 Conservation Authorities, SNC protects and restores regional ecosystems.

We do this in close partnership with 16 municipalities, comprising portions of: United Counties of Prescott and Russell; United Counties of Stormont, Dundas, and Glengarry; United Counties of Leeds and Grenville; and the City of Ottawa. The member municipalities appoint a 12-member, plus past chair, Board of Directors to govern SNC's work.

SNC's mandate to manage the natural resources includes the following primary roles:

Water Resources Management – SNC manages water resources using integrated, ecologically sound environmental practices to maintain secure supplies of clean water, to protect communities from flooding and ensure that environmental planning is an integral part of community development.

Forest Resources Management – SNC manages a large forest resource using sustainable forest management practices involving silviculture and wildlife habitat improvements which contribute to the health of the watershed's natural environment.

Land Use Planning and Environmental Policy – SNC works with a multi-stakeholder team to provide timely input and technical advice on development applications and policy documents.

SNC brings a holistic, watershed perspective to local municipal planning and supports provincial policy direction for natural heritage and hazards.

Permission Under the Conservation Authorities Act

The CA issues permissions (permits) under Section 28 of the Conservation Authorities Act. Section 28 allows the CA to regulate development and activities in or adjacent to river or stream valleys, shorelines of the St. Lawrence River system and inland lakes, watercourses, hazardous lands (e.g., unstable soil, bedrock, and slopes), wetlands and other areas around wetlands.

Development taking place on these lands may require permission from the CA to confirm that the control of flooding, erosion, pollution, or the conservation of land are not affected.

The CA also regulates the straightening, changing, diverting, or interfering in any way with the existing channel of a river, creek, stream, and watercourse or for changing or interfering in any way with a wetland.

2.0 Timeline Reporting

2.1 Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry (MNR) Service Standard

MNR Reporting Standards, Policies and Procedures for Conservation Authority Plan Review and Permitting Activities (2010) Service Standards are 30 (calendar) days for minor applications and 90 days for major applications from the date the application is deemed complete.

Major applications are defined as highly complex, requiring full technical review, and need to be supported by comprehensive analysis or those that do not conform to existing CA Board approved Section 28 policies.

Table 1. SNC Reported Permit Timelines in 2020, per MNR Review Standards [Policies and Procedures for Conservation Authority Plan Review and Permitting Activities (2010)].

Within MNR Timeline		Outside MNR Timeline	
Major	Minor	Major	Minor
6	119	0	53

2.2 Conservation Ontario (CO) Service Standard

The CO timelines are based on the new *Client Service Standards for Conservation Authority Plan and Permit Review Standard*.

CO service standards are 21 days for minor applications, 28 days for major applications, and 14 days for routine applications. Additional time is provided for resubmissions.

Table 2. SNC Reported Permit Timelines in 2020, per CO Review Standards [Client Service Standards for Conservation Authority Plan and Permit Review (2019)].

Within CO Timeline			Outside CO Timeline		
Major	Minor	Routine	Major	Minor	Routine
2	79	21	4	64	8

3.0 Discussion

SNC received an unusually high number of applications in 2020, partially due to a jurisdiction expansion along the Ottawa River. Processing time for applications was also impacted by adjustments related to the COVID-19 Pandemic (receiving applications, coordinating payments, completing site visits) and increased complaints and occurrences; however, staff quickly adjusted to online tools and managed to adapt well.

The 2020 report process also allowed staff to make improvements to our file tracking system. It is common for applicants to put files on hold due to missing information or because they need to update or resubmit their application (project scope changes). SNC made important changes to internal software to 'stop the clock' while waiting for information from applicants.

To reflect the client-related delays (which can be months in some cases), SNC included the following provisions:

- Ability to 'pause' timelines due to CA requests for additional information to address errors or gaps in technical information submitted for review.
- Added "Agreement to Defer" between the applicant and the CA (where applications can be put "on hold" at the applicant's request).
- Added additional time for re-submissions (as per CO Client Service Standards).

Staff made additional administrative improvements as part of our commitment to timely reviews and excellent customer service. Recent improvements include a specialized email inbox for Section 28 applications, select staff 'stewards' or concierges, online application forms, and online 'Report a Concern' forms.

4.0 Conclusion

Staff will continue to monitor and track timelines to support preparation of the annual report on timelines and service standards for Section 28 permits (under the Conservation Authorities Act).

The reports are provided to SNC's Board of Directors, posted on SNC's website, and submitted to Conservation Ontario in February of the following year.