

# Grand River Conservation Authority

**Report number:** GM-09-23-66

**Date:** September 22, 2023

**To:** Members of the Grand River Conservation Authority

**Subject:** Update on Regulatory Deliverables- Ontario Regulation 686/21

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## **Recommendation:**

THAT Report Number GM-09-23-66 – Update on Regulatory Deliverables – Ontario Regulation 686/21 be received as information.

## **Summary:**

Not applicable.

## **Report:**

Under *Ontario Regulation 686/21- Mandatory Programs and Services*, the Grand River Conservation Authority (GRCA) is required to complete six regulatory deliverables by December 31, 2024. These regulatory deliverables support the mandatory programs and services and include:

- development and implementation of an Ice Management Plan
- development and implementation of an Operational Plan(s) (Water and Erosion Control Infrastructure)
- development and implementation of an Asset Management Plan (Water and Erosion Control Infrastructure)
- Watershed-based Resource Management Strategy
- Conservation Area Strategy
- Land Inventory

## **Conservation Authority Plans Update**

### Ice Management Plan

Ice Management is a mandatory program and service the GRCA can provide within its jurisdiction if it is determined that ice management is required to reduce the risk associated with natural hazards. The Regulation stipulates that the program must include the development and implementation of an Ice Management Plan. This plan must include how ice within the Authority's jurisdiction may increase the risk of natural hazards and the steps that are necessary to mitigate these risks, including identifying equipment and resources needed to carry out these steps. This plan should be updated on a frequency as determined by the Authority.

This deliverable will provide GRCA with an opportunity to formalize current ice management practices within the watershed. Specifically, this Plan will identify the roles of the Authority in ice management activities, identify areas prone to ice jam flooding, how ice jams and other issues related to ice management can create increased risk to natural hazards if not managed properly and identify recommendations for structural and/or operational measures to mitigate the associated flood risks.

Progress to-date includes identification of the project team, background data collection, review of GRCA's ice management program and identification of key ice jam flood events to characterize ice jams within the Grand River watershed. Areas prone to ice jams within the GRCA watershed have also been documented.

A gap analysis will be completed, and the project team will review the need to characterize and analyze past ice jam flood events to benefit the GRCA ice management program.

During this process, staff will also consult with specific municipalities impacted by ice jams to determine any additional resources or monitoring equipment required for the program.

#### Operational Plan(s)

Operation, maintenance, repair and decommissioning of any water control infrastructure, where the purpose of this infrastructure is to mitigate risk to life and damage to property resulting from flooding or to assist in flow augmentation and erosions control infrastructure, is a mandatory program and service. The Regulation stipulates that an operation plan must be developed and implemented for water control/flow augmentation and erosion control infrastructure.

In 2004, the GRCA Board approved the Reservoir Operations Policy. Staff will review the policy and complete any additional analysis and/or updates on current/future climate changes.

Operations and Maintenance Manuals for the water control infrastructure have been developed and updated on an as-needed basis. The Operations, Maintenance and Surveillance (OMS) manuals for the seven multi-purpose dams will also be updated in 2023-2024.

#### Water and Erosion Control Infrastructure Plan

An asset management plan is also required to support the mandatory programs and services for flood control, low flow augmentation and erosion control infrastructure. This includes infrastructure the GRCA owns and/or operates through an agreement with a landowner.

The plan will include the identification, location and specifications of eight dams, six dike and floodwall systems, a condition assessment of the major components of the infrastructure, current maintenance practices/processes and systems and a review of the maintenance program to identify any modifications/updates that would be required to meet organizational goals. The plan will also document the GRCA's water control infrastructure asset management strategy and the associated funding needs, including major maintenance, large capital for individual dams and dikes, and outline recommended work.

Staff have completed a baseline inventory of dam components for the asset management plan. In order to complete the Plan within the required timelines and to utilize expertise outside of the GRCA related to life cycle analysis, cost-effective infrastructure management strategies, a Request for Proposals (RFP) for a consultant to complete the Water Control Structures Asset Management Plan has been issued and will be awarded at the September 22, 2023 Board meeting.

It is anticipated that the consultant will complete the Asset Management Plan by summer/fall 2024.

### **Conservation Authority Strategies Update**

#### Watershed-Based Resource Management Strategy

Ontario Regulation 686/21 sets out the Mandatory Programs and Services which must be delivered by all Conservation Authorities in Ontario. The regulation also requires Conservation Authorities to prepare a Watershed-based Resource Management Strategy (RMS) with a number of required components. This strategy will provide the watershed context and rationale for GRCA's programs and services (categories 1, 2 and 3) and identify priorities and future directions.

The Strategy may include both category 2 and category 3 programs and services provided by the CA, where the agreement which provides for the delivery of these programs or services permits the inclusion of these programs or services in the Strategy.

The GRCA's draft category 2 Memorandum Of Understanding (MOU) includes a clause permitting category 2 programs and services in the RMS and it is expected that the Strategy will

also capture key category 3 programs and services. This means that the guiding principles, objectives and description of GRCA's programs and summaries will be inclusive of all GRCA programs.

The RMS will assess Category 1 programs (only) for regulatory compliance and make recommendations and provide cost estimates to address any issues or mitigate risks that limit the effectiveness of the programs.

Currently, the guiding principles and objectives that inform the design and delivery of GRCA's programs and services have been drafted and are under review by staff. These were informed by GRCA's Strategic Plan and other resource management plans and strategies (e.g., water management plan). A review of GRCA's mandatory programs for regulatory compliance, issues and risks, and potential actions is underway, along with a summary of watershed issues. These programs include those related to natural hazards, land management, drinking water source protection, and delivery of provincial surface water and groundwater monitoring networks.

Public consultation is also a requirement for the development of the RMS. The GRCA considers senior municipal water management staff to be primary stakeholders for the RMS. First Nations may be key stakeholders if they identify an interest. The primary objective of stakeholder consultation is to provide information. A secondary objective is to collect feedback on potential issues, risks, gaps in programs to inform potential future directions or priorities (for consideration by the GRCA Board). The primary objective of public consultation will be to provide information. The main mechanisms for engaging the public will be 1) posting the draft RMS on GRCA's website, 2) one or more virtual webinars to present information on the RMS and answer questions about GRCA's programs and services. Public consultation for the RMS will not be delivered in conjunction with the Conservation Areas Strategy, as it's expected the scope/level of interest will differ substantively.

#### Conservation Area Strategy

Ontario Regulation 686/21 sets out the mandatory components of the Conservation and Management of Lands program and service. The regulation requires each conservation authority to prepare a Conservation Area Strategy. The objective of the Strategy is to ensure the GRCA has a documented and current set of objectives to inform decision-making related to the land they own or control. As part of the regulatory requirements, the Conservation Area Strategy will also inform the mandatory GRCA Land Inventory, through establishing land use categories for the lands it owns and/or controls.

The predominate focus to date has been on the development and finalization of the mandatory Land Inventory which summarizes details of all of GRCA's land holdings.

A staff working group has been established with individuals who have expertise in land management. Group meetings have been undertaken to gain input from staff across the Land Management Division to identify the objectives of the strategy, gaps in the current land management program and input on future measures.

Based on gained feedback, objectives statements have been drafted and short summaries are currently being developed to support the concepts of the objectives.

Public consultation is also a requirement for the development of this strategy. Staff are still working on determining the appropriate approach to engage key stakeholders and the public in this process.

#### **Land Inventory**

Ontario Regulation 686/21 requires that each conservation authority is required to prepare a land inventory, which outlines required information for every parcel of land owned or controlled by the Authority. The regulation sets out the minimum elements of the land inventory. The Land

Inventory is directly linked to the Mandatory Conservation Area Strategy, as land use categories established in the Strategy will be applied to each parcel of land in the Land Inventory.

Unlike the Conservation Area or Watershed-based Resource Management Strategy, the Land Inventory has no regulatory requirements to be posted publicly or shared with the province.

The GRCA is in the process of finalizing the Land Inventory. The inventory details information on the parcel acquisition, location, categorization, GRCA projects, etc. The GRCA owns 497 parcels throughout the watershed. This inventory will be a great addition to support the management of GRCA's land holdings and provides an easy-to-use reference document for all GRCA-owned and managed properties.

### **Financial Implications:**

To assist with the deliverables related to GRCA Lands, a temporary position was put in place to project manage the Conservation Area Strategy and Land Inventory. Additional temporary support has also been provided to the Water Infrastructure Department to increase capacity for technical assistance and management for the various Plans required.

Funding for consulting work, specifically for developing the Asset Management Plan for Natural Hazard Infrastructure, will be supported by the Lands Sale Reserve.

At this time, it is not anticipated that additional funding will be required for external studies. Should the need arise, the Transition Reserve and/or the Land Sale Reserve would provide the necessary funding.

### **Other Department Considerations:**

The Water Infrastructure, Water Resources, Conservation Lands and Corporate Services departments were consulted in preparation for this report.

### **Submitted by:**

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