



# A Canada Water Agency in Sault Ste. Marie: Our Vision for a water secure future

## Background

The Government of Canada is establishing a Canada Water Agency to improve freshwater management across the country. On June 28, 2021, Sault Ste. Marie City Council approved the formation of a Task Force to explore this potential opportunity. The Task Force is developing a pitch to bring the Canada Water Agency to our community, which will incorporate community feedback that will be published in a local [‘What We Heard’](#) report.

## Why Sault Ste. Marie?

Centrally located within the largest group of freshwater lakes in the world, the City of Sault Ste. Marie’s plentiful natural assets, cultural diversity, and local expertise that reaches beyond borders, make it an ideal location for such an Agency.

## Community discussions

The City of Sault Ste. Marie has partnered with the Lake Huron Collaborative’s Dr. Elaine Ho-Tassone to lead a series of community discussions. We have held five events – some in person and some virtual – with local organizations, Indigenous persons, and the general community. A final event will be organized for early November. All input will help guide the City of Sault Ste. Marie’s proposal to the Federal Government. Our website is at the bottom of this page, but you can also email us with questions or comments at [cwaproject@cityssm.on.ca](mailto:cwaproject@cityssm.on.ca).

## Youth involvement

This month (October), we are inviting youth voices to the table. We want to understand youths’ priorities and values for ensuring a water secure Algoma District for all. We will meet virtually for one (school groups) or two (everyone else) hours in mid- to late October. Youth aged 15-24 – regardless of their familiarity with freshwater science or management – are welcome to participate.

Teachers are asked to provide an overview of common water issues, the Canada Water Agency, and water management in Canada ahead of time (which we will provide to you) so that our limited time with the students can be used for student sharing. Those youth who do not meet with us through their school will receive the same overview at the start of our meeting.

**Please review the pre-meeting primer prior to attending our discussion.**



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## A PRE-MEETING PRIMER

***Educators:** please review the information in this document with your students prior to attending our meeting.*

### **Water management across Canada**

For most of Canada, freshwater waterways are managed by provinces and the Yukon; however, in Nunavut and the Northwest Territories, they are governed by Indigenous Services Canada (a Federal agency), usually in collaboration with local Indigenous communities. This is called co-management.

Areas that the Government of Canada has authority over include:

- Commercial fisheries (mostly in marine environments but also the Great Lakes)
- Navigation (e.g., transportation and shipping)
- Water on federal lands (e.g., Indian reserve lands and Federal protected areas)
- International relations (primarily the United States, regarding transboundary waters)
- Creation and maintenance of protected areas (via Environment and Climate Change Canada)

The provinces and the Yukon have decision-making authority (i.e., jurisdiction) over natural resources in general, including forestry, inland waters, fish and wildlife, and mining. Still, there is some overlap between both levels of government (e.g., certain areas of agriculture, human health, and pollution control).

### **Water management in Ontario**

Like in some other areas of Canada, operational responsibility over drinking water and wastewater are delegated from the provinces to municipalities (i.e., they shift their responsibility downwards). In addition, Conservation Authorities are completely unique to Ontario (in the world)! They are provincially legislated non-profit organizations formed where multiple municipalities fall within a watershed.

Their purpose is to manage the water on a watershed basis (i.e., collaboratively with all relevant municipalities), which is guided by a Board of Directors comprised of representatives from each member municipality. They are funded by diverse sources, including municipal levies, provincial and federal grants, and other sources. The provincial allocation has not increased since the 1990s and has generally decreased until today (Orr, 2019). Ontario has 36 conservation authorities, of which 31 are in southern Ontario.

Due to recent changes in legislation (some parts are still ongoing/not yet in full effect), conservation authorities have four required programs/services:

1. Risk of natural hazards (which includes permitting for development)
2. Lands titled to conservation authorities
3. Source water protection
4. Other endeavors per the regulations (still to be prescribed)

In addition, they may choose to pursue other programming with approval from the Board.

## **A Canada Water Agency**

After the 2019 election, Prime Minister Trudeau gave the Federal Minister of Environment and Climate Change the following mandates:

- "...to work together with the provinces, territories, Indigenous communities, local authorities, scientists and others to find the best ways to keep our water safe, clean and well-managed."
- "...to develop further protections and take active steps to clean up the Great Lakes, Lake Winnipeg, Lake Simcoe and other large lakes."

For years, water researchers and managers across Canada have been asking for more coordination and for a national vision for water management countrywide. So, when the Minister received the above two mandates, he determined the best way to achieve both of those mandates simultaneously was to create a formal Canada Water Agency.

This year, the Government of Canada led its own process to engage with members of the public (it is currently continuing its engagement of Indigenous persons) to find out what peoples' priorities are that the Agency should address. A Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development (Freshwater) is also wrapping up its study on gaps and overlaps in Canadian water policy.

Although we aren't sure yet exactly what the Agency will do or where it will be located, we are doing our best to convince the government it should be in Sault Ste, Marie. We know that it will do coordinating work of some kind and that it will focus on three themes: agriculture, climate change, and Indigenous reconciliation. We also know it will bring millions of dollars of investment and dozens of permanent, full-time jobs to its location.

## **Local and national water issues**

Canada is a large and diverse land mass with a LOT of water across it. The water issues we face are as diverse as our people, including:

- A lack of drinking water for First Nations peoples
- Aging drinking water and wastewater infrastructure across the country
- Drought in many areas of the country, while other areas have too much precipitation and flooding
- Climate change causing erratic and unreliable weather patterns, which also affects agriculture
- Groundwater depletion in both urban and rural communities; rural residents in the Algoma District frequently experience wells drying out (for some, every year)
- Privatization (e.g., water bottling for commercial companies)
- Dams blocking the flow of waters, organic material, and animals in those streams
- Increasing water quality problems – e.g., algae issues (caused by nutrients), plastic pollution, low oxygen (tied to warmer waters)
- Challenges with widespread collaboration

Are there any other issues your students can come up with? Why are these important to them? What can we do/how can we all get involved in addressing the youths' priorities?

Please encourage students to share their ideas with us during our meeting. For more information, visit our website: [www.cwassm.com](http://www.cwassm.com).