Province of Ontario
2026 Water Conservation and Efficiency Program Assessment

1. Lead agency and contact person:

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2. Status of goals and objectives

In 2012 Ontario adopted water conservation and efficiency goals and objectives that are consistent with the Basin-wide goals and objectives. The goals and objectives were developed based on stakeholder consultation, Indigenous engagement, and public comments received.

Ontario adopted the water conservation and efficiency goals as set out in the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River Basin Sustainable Water Resources Agreement (herein referred to as 'the Agreement'), and developed objectives consistent with the regional objectives adopted for the Basin that are tailored for Ontario to reflect the direction in the *Water Opportunities and Water Conservation Act*, 2010, and to address stakeholder and Indigenous community requests to emphasize the importance of taking ecological water needs into account in decision making, in keeping with the broader ecosystem protection and restoration goals of the Agreement.

Ontario's water conservation goals and objectives are available at:

Ontario's water conservation and efficiency goals, objectives and programs (in accordance with the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River Basin Sustainable Water Resources Agreement) | ontario.ca

3. Water conservation and efficiency program overview

Ontario's water conservation and efficiency program consists of a wide variety of statutes, programs and policies administered across several Ontario ministries, as well as local governments and other organizations.

The foundation of the program is the *Ontario Water Resources Act* (OWRA) and the Water Taking and Transfer Regulation (Ontario Regulation 387/04). The purpose of the OWRA is to provide for the conservation, protection and management of Ontario's waters and for their efficient and sustainable use, to promote Ontario's long-term environmental, social and economic well-being. Under the OWRA, a permit is required to withdraw more than 50,000 litres per day of ground or surface water, with a few exceptions.

Section 34.1 (9)(h) of the OWRA provides a permitting Director with authority to set terms and conditions on a permit governing the use and conservation of water taken under the permit, including requiring the holder to implement specified measures to promote the efficient use of the water or reduce the loss of water through consumptive use, conduct a water audit, and to prepare and implement a water conservation plan.

The *Water Taking and Transfer Regulation* outlines matters that the Director must consider when considering an application for a Permit to Take Water. Section 4(2).3.i. of the Regulation requires that the Director consider issues relating to the use of water, including whether water conservation measures are being implemented or are proposed to be implemented in the use of water, in accordance with best water management standards and practices for the relevant sector, if these are available.

Provincial land use planning statutes, such as the *Planning Act*, policies, such as those in the *Provincial Planning Statement,* 2024*,* and plans, such as the Greenbelt Plan*,* include some policy direction relating to water conservation in new developments. Section 3 of the *Planning Act* requires land use decisions to be consistent with the provincial policy statements and to conform to provincial plans. The *Clean Water Act,* 2006 requires that any significant threats to municipal drinking water sources, from a water quality and quantity perspective, be identified through the preparation of water budgets and addressed in local source protection plans, such as through policies on water conservation.

The *Water Opportunities and Water Conservation Act*, 2010 builds upon Ontario's expertise in clean water technology. Among other things, the Act sets the framework to encourage Ontarians to use water more efficiently by creating and implementing innovative approaches to protecting and conserving water resources for current and future generations.

4. Consistency with Regional Objectives

Ontario's program is consistent with the regional objectives in the promotion of environmentally sound and economically feasible water conservation measures. The programs (statues, programs and policies) below may link to more than one objective. See Table 1 and Appendix A.

Table 1. Regional Objectives and Ontario's Water Conservation and Efficiency Program

REGIONAL OBJECTIVE	LEGISLATIVE AND PROGRAM SUMMARIES
1) Guide programs toward long-term sustainable water use and management.	Ontario implements a range of adaptive programs and conservation and efficiency strategies that consider long-term sustainable water use while taking into account the importance of water to related ecosystems. Implementation occurs through the issuance of water taking permits under the *Ontario Water Resources Act* and the preparation of source protection plans under the *Clean Water Ac*t, 2006 to protect

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	existing and future drinking water sources, creating protection zones around municipal drinking water system intakes and wells, identifying risks and developing policies to direct municipalities, provincial ministries and landowners to take actions to address water quality and quantity risks, which include intakes extending into the Great Lakes. Under Ontario's *Conservation Authorities Act*, conservation authorities support and contribute to Ontario's water conservation and efficiency goals, including through programs and services related to natural hazard management, conservation and management of lands owned by conservation authorities, and playing a key role in the source protection program through their legislative responsibilities as 'source protection authorities' under the *Clean Water Act.*
2) Adopt and implement supply and demand management to promote efficient use and conservation of water resources.	Ontario has a range of programs that manage water supply and demand to achieve efficient use and conservation of water resources, such as establishing water efficiency standards in Ontario's Building Code (O. Reg. 163/24) and *Electricity Act*. Under the *Planning Act*, the Ontario Government issues policy statements that local planning authorities and other land use decision-makers must be consistent with as they make land use decisions. Ontario's *Provincial Planning Statement,* 2024 provides policy direction on matters relating to land use planning that are of provincial interest. It states that planning authorities shall protect, improve or restore the quality and quantity of water by, among other things, "planning for efficient and sustainable use of water resources, through practices for water conservation and sustaining water quality". Under the *Municipal Act,* 2001 and *City of Toronto Act,* 2006 and their regulations (Ontario Regulations 599/06 and 609/06 respectively) municipalities may establish municipal or city service corporations to deliver water and wastewater services, subject to certain limitations and requirements. It is up to municipal councils to decide whether or not a corporation would be appropriate as the most efficient means of delivering water and wastewater services. Municipal water and wastewater corporations currently cannot have private ownership. Legislative requirements for a municipality, in

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	terms of water delivery, generally apply to its municipally established water and wastewater corporation as well.
3) Improve monitoring and standardize data reporting among State and Provincial water conservation and efficiency programs.	Water takers who have a permit under the *Ontario Water Resources Act* are required to monitor their daily water takings and report their data annually to the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks. In addition, a range of Ontario programs and initiatives support improved monitoring and standardized data reporting related to water supply, water use and conservation/efficiency. This includes Ontario Surface Water Monitoring, Ontario's Hydrometric Network and Ontario Low Water Response, the Provincial Groundwater Monitoring Network, management of Ontario's foundation geospatial datasets and analysis to support decisions about water resources, and the Ontario Geological Survey's Groundwater Mapping Initiative. Ontario Regulation 506/18: Reporting of Energy Consumption and Water Use (EWRB), made under the *Electricity Act*, 1998, requires owners of prescribed properties that are 50,000 square feet or larger to report their buildings' annual energy and water use to the Ministry of Energy and Mines by July 1 of each year. In addition, the Ministry of Energy and Mines collects Greenhouse Gas emissions associated with these buildings, typically calculated based on the reported energy consumption using the ENERGY STAR Portfolio Manager tool. The EWRB initiative helps large building owners and managers better understand and manage energy and water use within their facilities and supports informed engagement in energy efficiency programming and other energy efficiency actions. Under this Regulation, exemptions to reporting are established for eligible reporters who meet specific exemption criteria. Exemptions are available for a single calendar year, or ongoing year-over-year. Portions of the data are publicly disclosed on the Ontario Data Catalogue. Making the information publicly available can help building owners better manage energy and water use and costs.

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	https://www.ontario.ca/laws/regulation/180506 https://www.ontario.ca/page/report-energy-water-use-large-buildings
4) Develop science, technology and research.	Ontario has a number of agencies, organizations, programs and strategies that promote and cultivate science, technology and research to implement the best in water, wastewater and stormwater technology, and support innovation and adoption of water conservation approaches. These include the Ontario Clean Water Agency, the Investment Accelerator Fund and the Ontario Agri-Food Innovation Alliance.
5) Develop education programs and information sharing for all water users.	Ontario is implementing a range of education initiatives and programs that raise awareness of the importance of water conservation, efficiency and cost-saving approaches to promote the sharing of information on best management practices. These initiatives and programs include: the Walkerton Clean Water Centre's curriculum and resources, which fosters leading-edge drinking water technologies and delivers education, information and advice to drinking water operators across Ontario on issues including water conservation; water efficiency labelling through partnership with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Water Sense Program; and support for environmental planning programs for water conservation and efficiency in the agricultural sector.
Other programs:	In accordance with Ontario's water conservation and efficiency goals and objectives, the province's water conservation and efficiency program includes a range of environmental and resource management legislation, strategies and programs that align with the objectives by integrating water conservation and efficient water use with other environmental management practices and considerations, such as energy use, climate change, and the protection and restoration of hydrological and ecological integrity. This includes the *Great Lakes Protection Act,* 2015, Ontario's Great Lakes Strategy, Ontario Parks Water Conservation Initiatives, the Canada-Ontario Agreement on Great Lakes Water Quality and Ecosystem Health (COA), the Great Lakes Basin Initiative (includes the Great Lakes Local

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	Action Fund and the Great Lakes Program), as well as various fisheries, biodiversity, habitat, nutrients and wetlands related initiatives. **Canada-Ontario Agreement on Great Lakes Water Quality and Ecosystem Health** COA is the principal mechanism through which Ontario and Canada coordinate work to address their respective and shared commitments to restore, protect and conserve the Great Lakes. The ninth COA took effect on June 1, 2021, and expired on May 31, 2026. It marked 50 years of collaborative Great Lakes work between both governments since the first COA was signed in 1971. Ontario and Canada are negotiating a new agreement to build on this longstanding partnership and advance Great Lakes conservation, protection and restoration. Through an exchange of Ministers' letters, both governments confirmed their commitment to developing a new COA. Ontario remains committed to working with the federal government in the interim period while negotiation of a new, tenth COA is underway. Ongoing Great Lakes work continues through existing initiatives and funding, including Remedial Action Plans for Areas of Concern, the Canada-Ontario Lake Erie Action Plan, and lake specific initiatives such as the Healthy Lake Huron Initiative. The 2021 COA advanced new and ongoing actions to prevent toxic and nuisance algae, improve wastewater and stormwater management, reduce plastic pollution and excess road salt, restore native species and habitats, and increase resilience to climate change. The agreement also supported environmental clean-up actions in historically degraded Areas of Concern, including the delisting of the Nipigon Bay Area of Concern, conservation of key Great Lakes habitats, continued restoration of Lake Erie and protection of Lake Ontario. Other priorities included supporting nature-based recreation opportunities and strengthening First Nation and Métis engagement in COA implementation. Approximately 98% of commitments under the 2021 COA were fully met, reflecting substantial progress

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	through coordinated action by both governments and partners. The next COA will be informed by engagement with the public, First Nations, Métis and the broader Great Lakes community, building on progress achieved under the 2021 agreement. **Canada-Ontario Agreement on Great Lakes Water Quality and Ecosystem Health:** https://www.ontario.ca/document/canada-ontario-great-lakes-agreement **COA Summary:** https://www.ontario.ca/page/summary-canada-ontario-great-lakes-agreement **Launch of Negotiations for the Tenth COA:** https://www.canada.ca/en/canada-water-agency/freshwater-ecosystem-initiatives/great-lakes/great-lakes-protection/canada-ontario-agreement-water-quality-ecosystem/canada-ontario-launch-negotiations-agreement-great-lakes-water-quality-ecosystem-health.html **Ontario's Great Lakes Strategy** The *Great Lakes Protection Act*, 2015 (GLPA) strengthens the province's ability to restore and protect the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River, as well as the waterways that flow into them. Ontario's Great Lakes Strategy was first released in 2012. The GLPA requires Ontario to report on progress made under Ontario's Great Lakes Strategy every three years. The first progress report was released in 2016; in 2023 MECP released the second progress report. Ontario is also required to undertake a review of its Great Lakes Strategy every six years. The first review was completed in December 2024 and the findings posted to the Environmental Registry of Ontario. https://www.ontario.ca/page/protecting-great-lakes https://www.ontario.ca/page/ontarios-great-lakes-strategy

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	https://www.ontario.ca/page/ontarios-great-lakes-strategy-2016-progress-report https://www.ontario.ca/page/ontarios-great-lakes-strategy-second-progress-report https://www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/15g24 https://ero.ontario.ca/notice/019-9454 **Great Lakes Local Action Fund** In September 2026, Ontario launched Round 4 of the Great Lakes Local Action Fund, providing up to $1.8 million for community-based projects that protect or improve water quality, strengthen climate resilience, and support the protection and restoration of Great Lakes ecosystems. Since 2020, Ontario has committed approximately $5.5 million through the Great Lakes Local Action Fund, supporting 107 projects led by municipalities, Indigenous communities, conservation organizations, community groups, and other partners to help protect the Great Lakes for future generations.https://www.ontario.ca/page/great-lakes-local-action-fund

5. Ontario's water conservation and efficiency program implementation timeline and status

Ontario's water conservation and efficiency program is in place and being implemented.