

Appendix C:

Adaptation efforts in Ontario

The provincial government has taken a number of steps over the last decade to help Ontario adapt to climate change, including creating policies directed specifically at driving adaptation, as well as incorporating adaptation considerations into other initiatives.

Ontario Expert Panel on Climate Change Adaptation (2009)

In December 2007, the Minister of the Environment appointed the Ontario Expert Panel on Climate Change Adaptation, “to help the Ontario government, municipalities and Ontarians prepare and plan for the impact of climate change in areas such as public health, environment, infrastructure and economy.”

The Expert Panel’s November 2009 report, *Adapting to Climate Change in Ontario*, noted the “clear need” for a comprehensive strategy to reduce the present and future impacts of climate change. The panel made 57 recommendations, including calling for the launch of a province-wide climate change adaptation action plan.

The panel warned that “[p]iecemeal, uncoordinated actions will be insufficient and costly. A carefully considered, evidence-based strategy with goals, timelines and clear responsibilities is required.”

Climate Ready: Ontario’s Adaptation Strategy and Action Plan 2011-2014

The Ontario government released its first climate change adaptation plan in April 2011. *Climate Ready: Ontario’s Adaptation Strategy and Action Plan, 2011-2014* (“Climate Ready”) sets out 37 actions to help prepare Ontario for the impacts of a changing climate and take advantage of climate-related opportunities. In particular, the plan calls for the mainstreaming of

adaptation: requiring ministries across government to include adaptation as a key consideration when updating existing policies and programs or developing new ones.

The ECO was encouraged that Ontario had started to develop and implement a formal adaptation strategy. However, the government failed to develop a strategic plan to achieve priority adaptation objectives across the province, instead providing what amounted to an inventory of existing government actions and investments. The plan also lacked quantitative or qualitative targets, or specific timelines for delivery.

Climate Ready was to be fully implemented by 2014, but in 2016 the Auditor General of Ontario reported that only about 30% of the actions were fully completed, and 40% of actions had seen little or no progress. Since then, ministries have made some further progress, but as of spring 2018 many Climate Ready actions still remained incomplete.

Ontario’s Climate Change Strategy (2015) and Action Plan (2016-2020)

Ontario’s Climate Change Strategy and Climate Change Action Plan, released in 2015 and 2016 respectively, focused primarily on greenhouse gas reductions and transitioning Ontario to a low-carbon economy, but acknowledged the importance of adaptation. The strategy included a brief section devoted to adaptation, which envisioned a province that is “better prepared for the impacts of climate change” by 2030. In summer 2018, the new provincial government committed to developing a new plan to address climate change in fall 2018.

Legislation

Climate change adaptation has been referenced in a small number of provincial laws, including the: *Far North Act, 2010*; *Municipal Act, 2001*; *Planning Act*; *Lake Simcoe Protection Act, 2008*; and *Conservation Authorities Act*. The Infrastructure for Jobs and Prosperity Act, 2015 requires the government and every broader public sector entity to consider the principle that “infrastructure should be designed to be resilient to the effects of climate change.”

Ministry policies and programs

Several Ontario ministries have created their own adaptation plans, incorporated climate change adaptation considerations into more focused programs and initiatives, or have undertaken research or assessments of specific climate-related impacts and adaptation needs.

For example, in 2017, the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry (MNRF) released Naturally Resilient – MNRF’s Natural Resource Climate Adaptation Strategy (2017-2021), a strategic framework to help the ministry address key areas of climate change vulnerability and support climate change adaptation efforts. The same year, the Ministry of the Environment and Climate Change (now called the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks) released a climate change adaptation strategy specific to Lake Simcoe, and the Ministry of Energy released its 2017 Long-Term Energy Plan, which commits to better preparing Ontario’s energy systems for extreme weather events. The Ministry of Municipal Affairs’ Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe, 2017 requires municipalities to develop policies and identify actions in their official plans that will address adaptation goals, such as stormwater management and protecting natural heritage and water resources.

In spring 2018, the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs finalized its Agricultural Soil Health and Conservation Strategy, which identifies climate-related risks to agricultural soil health and aims to improve resiliency of farmlands.

In recent years, the Ministry of Transportation has, among other things, undertaken work to assess the resilience of Ontario’s highway system’s drainage infrastructure to climate change. The ministry has also developed a rainfall intensity forecasting tool to be used for updates to or planning of new highways and roads.

Work with the federal government, provinces and other partners

Ontario has collaborated with other provinces and the federal government to address climate change. In December 2016, Canada’s federal, provincial and territorial leaders adopted the Pan-Canadian Framework on Clean Growth and Climate Change. Although focused primarily on reducing greenhouse gas emissions, one of the four pillars of the Pan-Canadian Framework focuses on adaptation and climate resilience. The framework identifies actions to support adaptation across Canada.

The former Ministry of the Environment and Climate Change also participated, with other ministries, provinces and organizations, in Natural Resources Canada’s Adaptation Platform. The Adaptation Platform is a national forum that collaborates on climate change adaptation priorities and aims to equip decision makers with the information and tools needed to adapt.

Ontario has also worked with other partners to conduct regional and watershed-level climate change vulnerability assessments across the province. For example, the MNRF worked with local partners to complete a vulnerability assessment of the northeastern Ontario Clay Belt, with a special emphasis on forestry. Similarly, the ministry is working with the Mississippi River and Rideau Valley conservation authorities to undertake vulnerability assessments in those areas. The province also completed a climate vulnerability assessment for the Lake Simcoe watershed.