

The Conservation Branch of the Ontario Department of Commerce and Development—the chairman mentioned the name of the Department as it was up until Christmas last, but the present name of the department is now the Department of Commerce and Development of the province of Ontario—was established in 1944 and was charged with organizing conservation work in Southern Ontario on the basis of drainage basins, with all the municipalities contained therein as equal partners.

From the terms of the Act which established this department and the scope of work envisaged for the Conservation Branch, as embodied in The Conservation Authorities Act, it is evident that the field of conservation assigned to it is confined very definitely to working with the municipalities after they decide to carry out a conservation program within their watersheds. The Branch is therefore primarily a planning and co-ordinating arm of the Ontario Government. This must be made very clear, because there are four other departments of this government engaged in conservation activities which deal with specific phases of our natural resources.

The large forest empire in Northern Ontario, with its problems of timber management, fire protection, reforestation, forest research, fish and wildlife, recreation and allied problems, is administered by the Department of Lands and Forests. Matters dealing with soil management and drainage, farm planning, crop improvement and a multitude of other problems which are the concern of the farmers of this province are administered by the Department of Agriculture. The building of dams in the hinterland of the north—that is, northern Ontario—to maintain lake levels and regulate summer flow is the responsibility of the Department of Public Works. And the most recently established group, the Ontario Water Resources Commission of the Department of Municipal Affairs, has wide powers in the study and control of water problems and is concerned at the present time very actively with sewage disposal problems and municipal water supplies.

Considering the scope of conservation covered by these four departments—and some of them are quite large, Lands and Forests, for example, including permanent and seasonal help has a staff of 4,200—one may reasonably wonder why the Government of Ontario as recently as sixteen years ago in its wisdom decided to establish still another department to plan and co-ordinate conservation schemes. The answer is that this was an entirely new approach in conservation activities directed to assist the municipalities primarily in Southern Ontario.

THE CONSERVATION AUTHORITIES ACT

The Conservation Authorities Act was passed by the Legislature in the spring of 1946. It required that all municipalities in a watershed—cities, towns, villages and townships (not counties)—be included in the body corporate.

The first step in establishing a Conservation Authority is undertaken by all the municipalities wholly or partly within a watershed. Two such municipalities must first by resolution petition the Minister of Commerce and Development to call a meeting for the purpose of ascertaining whether or not it is desirable that an Authority should be established. Two-thirds of the number of representatives which the municipalities are entitled to appoint (on a population basis) must be present to make the meeting legal. If two-thirds of those present vote in favour, a resolution is forwarded to the Minister requesting that an Authority be established. The Authority is then made legal by an Order-in-Council and under the Act becomes a body corporate with representatives from all the municipalities in the watershed, including those, if any, which voted against its establishment.