

**The Honourable Laurel Broten
Minister of the Environment**

**6th Annual Grand River Watershed Forum
GRCA Administration Centre, Cambridge**

September 15, 2006 at 9 a.m.

(Check against delivery)

Thank you, Doug [*Craig, Mayor of Cambridge*] for that kind introduction. Good morning, everyone.

It's great to be back here again this year and be among so many people who are dedicated to protecting and improving our environment.

I want to begin by thanking Peter Krause and all of the member municipalities and partners that form the Grand River Conservation Authority.

You do great work — the result of your hard work is clear to see by the progress you're making on so many fronts to sustain and protect your valuable water resources in the Grand River watershed.

Last year, when I spoke at this forum, I was very pregnant. As a new minister, I was also about to introduce an important new piece of legislation.

It's been an amazing year.

Today, my twin boys are nearly one year old and the Clean Water Act is in third reading at Queen's Park.

If that bill passes — which, of course, I feel very strongly that it should and will — I'll be both pleased and proud of our collective accomplishments.

I want my sons, Ryan and Zachary, to grow up in a province that is clean and green. I want them to live in a healthy and sustainable world. And I want our drinking water in Ontario to be safe.

I believe that the Clean Water Act is essential to Ontario's environmental future.

I'm proud to be part of a government that is so strongly committed to ensuring Ontarians have safe and healthy drinking water.

It's key to our vision of a cleaner, greener Ontario — where my children — and yours — can live and play in strong and healthy communities; where we can all have total confidence that our water is clean and safe to drink.

C'est la raison pour laquelle je suis fière de faire partie d'un gouvernement qui est si résolu à protéger la qualité et la quantité de l'eau potable de toutes les collectivités de l'Ontario.

Il s'agit d'un élément essentiel de notre vision d'un Ontario plus propre et plus vert — où nos enfants, les miens comme les vôtres, peuvent grandir dans des collectivités fortes et en santé; où nous pouvons tous compter sur de l'eau potable propre et sûre.

I have no doubt that each of us, at this forum, share that vision of a clean, green and healthy Ontario.

We all want clean air, land and water.

Many of you were here at last year's Watershed Forum. If so, you may recall that I spoke to you about the fundamentals of how our government plans to protect drinking water sources, about the principles guiding our government's watershed-based approach — an approach that's founded on the concept of prevention.

Effectively, I gave you a preview of the legislation I announced a few months later.

Fast forward to today, and we have not only taken this bill line-by-line through committee hearings ... we've taken it on the road ... from a historic townhall in Walkerton to the chambers of Queen's Park ... from a church hall in the town of Bath to convention centres in Cornwall and Peterborough.

We've listened to people's comments and heard their concerns.

And we've worked to bring forward amendments that will make this very important piece of legislation even better.

The amendments are a direct reflection of the valuable feedback we received from people like you — experts, property owners, environmental groups, municipalities and interested citizens from across Ontario.

To my mind, this is truly an exercise in democracy.

The valuable advice we've received has been a key component in the development of this proposed legislation.

As many of you are aware, one of the chief concerns we heard after first introducing the Clean Water Act was from rural and agricultural stakeholders who felt the use of permits, and permit officials, seemed to be heavy-handed.

We've addressed that issue.

One of the key amendments we've made is to replace permits and permit officials. Instead we will apply a negotiated risk management approach.

A more negotiated risk management approach recognizes the good work that is already being done on a voluntary basis. And it is similar to the stewardship activities that are already common and widespread in the Grand River watershed.

We also heard requests that we recognize the importance of education and incentives as a key part of our approach.

We have added explicit reference to include incentives, education and outreach programs as a component of source protection plans.

And we are extending the period for property owners to appeal risk management plans from 15 to 60 days.

Some agricultural stakeholders also told us about the need for agricultural representation on local source protection committees, as well as providing biosecurity training and qualifications for risk management officials and inspectors.

In response, we've added to the amendments new requirements for officials to meet specified qualifications that could include training on biosecurity protocols before entering private property.

We've also removed the limit of 16 members on Source Protection Committees so that they can be more flexible and representative of the local watershed community.

For example, just looking around at who is here at today's forum — you are municipal planners, CA staff, environmentalists, members of agricultural groups, scientists and engineers. Any one of you may well be selected to sit on a Source Protection Committee. It's one of the things that makes this proposed legislation so unique.

The goal is to give local people in the community a stronger voice and greater authority to preserve and protect the water they depend on.

This underscores our belief that the people living in a community know best what protective measures are needed, how best to carry them out and who should lead the efforts.

Recently, I announced a proposal to create a drinking water stewardship program.

It's part of the amendments we have proposed to the Clean Water Act and would enshrine financial assistance in the legislation.

The financial assistance program would initially invest \$7 million dollars to support farmers and small rural businesses for activities that reduce threats to drinking water. Establishing a sustainability program is a significant milestone for the rural communities in Ontario, like those of the Grand River region.

Approximately \$5 million would be dedicated to supporting early action to protect land and water surrounding wells and municipal water intakes.

The remaining \$2 million would be used to support local education and outreach related to source protection planning.

As communities complete their source protection plans, we'll know better what the costs of implementation will be and how best to direct sustainable funding.

I would like mention another key amendment we've made to the proposed act that would help recognize First Nations communities and their need to have their water sources protected — an important consideration here in the Grand watershed given the location of the Six Nations community downstream.

Where First Nation communities wish to participate in the process, their drinking water systems can also be protected under Bill 43.

My staff is working hard to consult with First Nations on how we might protect their drinking water supplies under the proposed Clean Water Act and how First Nations can play an active part in developing the source protection plans for the water supplies across the watershed.

We will be working with the Conservation Authorities to do this because to be meaningful and effective, consultation must occur at the local and watershed level.

These are a few of the highlights of the government amendments that would make the Clean Water Act even better.

Over the past year, I've travelled around the province and I've spoken to farmers and property owners ... to conservation authorities, water experts and environmentalists ... to municipal leaders and citizens from Windsor to Walkerton ... from North Bay to Cornwall.

People everywhere recognize that protecting our drinking water is a shared responsibility.

I strongly agree.

Ontarians also recognize that we need a way to protect our drinking water sources that is both practical and workable — one that makes sense in all areas of the province, in both rural and urban communities.

It's why our government is committed to working with all those interested in water protection to ensure that we get this legislation right and that people in every community have drinking water that's protected and plentiful.

The GRCA — and other conservation authorities across the province — played a major role in the development of the Clean Water Act — and I want to thank the many people in this room today who offered valuable input and advice, in particular Peter Krause, Paul Emerson and Lorrie Minshall.

I am pleased to recognize that the GRCA has undertaken some of the most advanced source water protection work in Ontario and I'm encouraged to hear that Waterloo Region and Oxford Country are now implementing their source protection plans.

Other regions across the province are looking toward you to see how to go about developing their own plans — and the GRCA acts as an excellent example of all that can be accomplished through cooperation and collaboration.

Over the years, the GRCA has been working with farmers, as well as its partners at the three levels of government, to implement effective programs that help protect rural water quality.

I am convinced that the GRCA and other conservation authorities will build upon the Clean Water Act and the new resources contributed by my colleague Minister Ramsay, in a way that continues the successful work that's already been done.

In fact, there's a great example of an "on the ground" science-based approach to source protection planning happening right here.

The GRCA is undertaking a study to look at the effectiveness of protected buffer zones established over the past 15 years to protect streams along the Grand watershed.

It's important to know if these buffer zones are working well, or if any changes are needed to make sure these streams are being adequately protected from threats to the water quality from agricultural activities.

I want to recognize the efforts of Tracey Ryan, the GRCA's supervisor of conservation services, who is involved in this evaluation process.

She is also a member of the ministry's science-based standards committee and is helping us set the standards for environmental management practices across Ontario.

A science-based approach is a key focus of our government. We intend to give watershed plans across the province the strongest possible scientific foundations.

As I am sure you all know, we are investing \$120 million so that for the first time, communities and their partners across Ontario will be able to study and assess their watersheds, develop water budgets and get the science right.

Over the past two years, the GRCA has received more than \$1.2 million to support the work being done here.

Currently, my ministry staff is working with Lorrie Minshall to set up a data exchange and information pilot project — which will improve the sharing of information between the ministry and the GRCA and help to move plan development forward more rapidly.

This morning, I've been focusing on The Clean Water Act — which is one key component of our government's integrated and comprehensive Water Plan to protect and sustain Ontario's water resources.

The act's fundamental principles of precaution and prevention respond to the multi-barrier approach to water protection recommended by Justice O'Connor.

And we continue to work towards achieving each one of Justice O'Connor's recommendations.

We've hired more water inspectors. We've put in place new rules for training operators of municipal water systems.

We've established yearly inspections for municipal residential drinking water systems and twice-yearly inspections at the labs that test our drinking water.

In addition to our focus on municipal drinking water systems, we know that many Ontarians depend on private wells for their drinking water. This year we continued our investment to support Phase III of the Well Aware program which helps ensure well owners get the information they need to keep their drinking water clean and their families safe.

We're also simultaneously advancing the second part of our government's comprehensive Water Plan for Ontario, which focuses on preventing the depletion of water resources.

In December, Ontario joined Quebec and eight states in signing the Great Lakes Charter Annex Agreement. This will ensure that Great Lakes water will stay in its own basin and will promote conservation on both sides of the border.

It's a move that complements the work of The Right Honourable Herb Gray and the International Joint Commission, who I know you will be hearing from in a few minutes, as well as that of our other Canadian and American partners.

As we all know well, cooperation is key to preserving and improving the water resources we all share.

To that end, the GRCA and other Lake Erie Conservation Authorities will no doubt be interested in the provisions in the Clean Water Act designed to strengthen the protection of the Great Lakes for drinking water by recognizing the need to take action in each lake's watershed.

In addition to collaboration, research and innovation are key to meeting the challenge of any emerging issues.

Today, you will learn about some of the most recent innovations and technological advances for healthy waters.

The technologies, products and approaches being showcased here at the Forum illustrate the groundbreaking work that is being spearheaded by Ontario researchers and companies — work that not only protects our own environment, but provides environmental solutions for countries worldwide.

Our government is focused on making Ontario one of the most research intensive and innovative jurisdictions in the world. Knowledge is like any other resource — we profit most from its generation.

We support environmental research and the commercialization of new knowledge as a means of strengthening Ontario's environmental industry — and as a key contributor to our province's competitiveness and success on the global stage.

The Walkerton Clean Water Centre, which was set up last year as an agency of the government, is also making great strides in fostering next-generation solutions.

Earlier this summer, I was pleased to attend the official opening of the Centre's new Technology Demonstration Facility, which is one of Canada's only hands-on training centre for water operators. Since January, more than 1,000 operators have participated in the Centre's mandatory training programs.

At the same time, I announced the investment of \$100,000 to support research by the Centre and its partners into new membrane treatment technologies that can potentially remove pharmaceuticals, personal care products and endocrine-disrupting compounds from water.

This is leading-edge research with great potential for the future.

I was also proud to recognize the first recipients of the Centre's new scholarship program established to support research into drinking water protection.

These are all major steps forward. And we are on track for so much more.

My ministry keeps on top of the latest water protection developments in jurisdictions around the world — and actively considers how new leading-edge solutions can best be adapted in this province.

Ontarians deserve the best the world has to offer.

They deserve clean, healthy, abundant water and the certainty of knowing that it is safe for their children to drink.

I want a clean, healthy environment in which my children can grow and thrive. I believe we have a responsibility to the next generation to be good stewards of the environment we all share. And I am proud of my Premier and my government for its focus on ensuring clean water, air and land for all Ontarians.

The Grand River Conservation Authority — along with First Nations, municipalities, and other conservation authorities all across Ontario, businesses, farmers and property owners — are our valued partners.

By working together we can ensure Ontario has drinking water that's safe and clean, protected and plentiful ... and build the kind of future we all want for our children and our children's children.

Thank you.