



Conservation
ONTARIO
Natural Champions

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Fact Sheet

Ontario's Conservation Areas Not Just Pretty Places

Ontario's 36 Conservation Authorities collectively own and manage approximately 500 conservation areas in northern and southern Ontario covering a total area of almost 76,000 hectares. Conservation Authorities are the second largest landowners next to the Province of Ontario. More than 270 of these conservation areas are publicly accessible.

In addition to their beautiful landscapes and scenery, conservation areas play important *environmental*, *educational* and *recreational* roles and contribute to the physical and mental wellbeing of almost seven million people who visit them each year.

Environmental Role of Conservation Areas

Conservation areas protect important natural features and ecosystems which contribute to healthy watersheds, climate change adaptation and healthy Great Lakes. They do this through soil conservation, as well as floodplain, forest and wildlife management.

Conservation areas lands also include many water resources such as creeks, streams, rivers, wetlands, ponds and lakes as well as important recharge areas where surface and groundwater meet.

Educational Role of Conservation Areas

Conservation areas act as 'living classrooms' bringing people and nature together. They help teach the public about the importance of our environment and how it is impacted by our activities and lifestyles.

Conservation Authorities operate a total of 37 permanent Interpretive Centres, 16 Seasonal Centres, and include many interpretive trails and heritage features.

In 2015, over 3,000 schools and 421,000 students participated in environmental education programs run by Conservation Authorities, many taking place at local conservation areas. During this year, most Conservation Authorities either hosted or participated in local water festivals as part of their outdoor education programs.

Recreational Role of Conservation Areas

Ontario's conservation areas include more than 8,400 campsites and 2,600 km of trails. Just over 6 million people visit a conservation area annually.

Conservation Areas encourage people to get outdoors and be active, as well as enjoy and appreciate nature. They provide year round facilities and outdoor recreational opportunities for people of all ages and a range of abilities, including picnicking, boating, camping, swimming, hiking, fishing, cycling, snowshoeing, downhill skiing, cross-country skiing and even more extreme recreational opportunities such as snowboarding, rock climbing and ice climbing.

Although some Conservation Areas have limited access in order to protect sensitive lands and/or wildlife, many provide important public recreational opportunities at low or no cost.

Benefits of Nature

Healthy ecosystems such as forests, wetlands, lakes, rivers and green spaces provide safe water resources, healthy food, clean air, cooler environment, and opportunities for more physical activities in parks and conservation areas which contributes to both healthier bodies and minds.

What Kind of Ecosystems Provide Public Health Benefits



- Reduce smog and pollution by filtering out many airborne pollutants linked to heart disease, respiratory illnesses, diabetes, and cancer.
- Regulate heat
- Provide green spaces for outdoor activity which helps to improve both our minds and bodies.



- Filter sediment, nutrients, and pollution, helping to clean our drinking water sources.
- Recharge groundwater, which more than 20% of Ontarians rely on for their drinking water.
- Provide wetland trails



- Moderate the local climate by absorbing and releasing heat
- Provide us with sources of drinking water and food
- Support recreation activities such as swimming, fishing, and canoeing



- The lakes recycle and purify the water we drink, absorb the waste we produce, provide us with food, fuel and shelter, moderate our climate, nurture our bodies and feed our spirits with their natural beauty.
- Important drinking water source for 80% of Ontario residents

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