

2021



CONSERVATION ONTARIO ANNUAL REPORT
From Vision to Action

#ConservationMatters

CAO / CHAIR MESSAGE



KIM GAVINE,
General Manager



ANDY MITCHELL,
*Chair,
Board of Directors*

2021 marked the 75th anniversary of the *Conservation Authorities Act* (CAA) which was originally enacted in 1946. The reason for establishing conservation authorities (CAs) then remain as valid today – the need to protect people and property, preserve our environment and strike the appropriate balance between development and protecting our natural heritage.

The legacy of development in the first half of the 20th century saw many areas where deforestation created significant flooding and erosion problems which resulted in degraded water quality. In some cases, the clearing of the forests and other vegetation was so severe that it created deserts such as in the Ganaraska watershed. In order to turn things around, the province and municipalities started to establish conservation authorities who would manage and restore Ontario's water and land natural resources using a watershed-based approach.

Coincidentally, 2021 also marked a period of renewal as implementation began of significant changes made to the *Conservation Authorities Act* by the Province as a result of a review of the legislation which started in 2015 and ramped up in 2018 – 2020.

Conservation Ontario (CO) has worked hard to support conservation authorities as they work through these changes. Four CO staff joined the 14 CA staff and representatives from other agencies to support the Conservation Authorities Working Group which was struck by the Ministry of Environment, Conservation, and Parks to determine the best ways to approach implementation. The Chair of the Working Group is Hassaan Basit, President and Chief Executive Officer of Conservation Halton. Conservation Ontario also hosted a series of meetings with CAs and developed guidance material. More detail on this work is available in this annual report.

While our work on the CAA has been extensive, Conservation Ontario continued to support its members throughout 2021 in other program areas as well. In July we celebrated a successful new partnership with the Federal government. Conservation Ontario was approved to receive \$9 Million from 2021 to 2024 through the Nature Smart Climate Solutions Fund offered by Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC). Over 50 projects with 15 conservation authorities are currently being funded. In addition to this, Conservation Ontario was also approved to receive \$1.2 Million to secure and protect significant natural areas to help Ontario protect biodiversity and adapt to climate change impacts.

Our year ended with a call for help from British Columbia which was struggling to manage the impacts of severe flooding in late November and early December. Conservation Ontario and CAs met with Emergency Management Ontario and the Ontario Ministry of Northern Development, Mines and Natural Resources to see how CAs could help. A total of 53 staff from 18 conservation authorities quickly volunteered to travel to BC and help in any way they could. Fortunately, just prior to finalization of the agreement, conditions began to improve and CA staff were put on standby. It was very gratifying to see that the expertise of conservation authorities is known and valued by their peers in other parts of the country. And it was amazing to see how many CA staff were able to immediately jump up to the plate and offer to help.

Thank you to our staff, members and partners for a very busy 2021.

FROM VISION TO ACTION

CONSERVATION ONTARIO'S 2021-2025 STRATEGIC PLAN

Over the course of the 2021-2025 Strategic Plan, Conservation Ontario will be a leader, engaging conservation authorities in matters of common interest, and in helping to shape effective policy relating to healthy watersheds and people. Through this work and in collaboration with others, Conservation Ontario will promote and continually strengthen a watershed-based conservation coalition in Ontario.

OVER THE NEXT FIVE YEARS, CONSERVATION ONTARIO WILL:

- ✓ Track and influence policy and program development to advance integrated watershed management in Ontario
- ✓ Continue to develop information management, communication and technical tools for conservation authorities to support and promote their work
- ✓ Build strategic funding, program and policy partnerships that can leverage and broaden the reach of conservation authority programs important for watershed health and to address climate change impacts
- ✓ Support member conservation authorities to implement changes to the *Conservation Authorities Act*
- ✓ Promote the value and role of conservation authorities to key decision makers, partners and the general public
- ✓ Engage member conservation authorities meaningfully and keep them up to date on Conservation Ontario efforts on their behalf
- ✓ Take action towards Indigenous Reconciliation and ensure diversity, equity and inclusion within corporate Conservation Ontario and across all our program areas



SUPPORTING MEMBERS TO IMPLEMENT CHANGES TO THE CONSERVATION AUTHORITIES ACT

CONSERVATION AUTHORITIES WORKING GROUP

To help implement changes to the *Conservation Authorities Act*, the Province established a Conservation Authorities Working Group. The Group is comprised of representatives from Conservation Ontario, conservation authorities and municipalities as well as the development and agriculture sectors.

Four Conservation Ontario and 14 conservation authority staff participated in the Working Group throughout 2021. The Chair of the Working Group is Hassaan Basit, President and CEO of Conservation Halton.

The work of the group is divided up into two phases. Phase 1 regulations were released in early October 2021 and included regulations for Mandatory Programs and Services, Transition Plan and Agreements, and, Rules of Conduct in Conservation Areas (not yet in force).

The work on Phase 2 regulations continues into 2022.

SUPPORTING MEMBERS TO IMPLEMENT CAA CHANGES

In 2021, Conservation Ontario undertook significant effort to ensure members could implement the changes as required. A coordinated response to the Phase 1 consultation guide was prepared and key recommendations promoted by conservation authorities were accepted in the final regulations, including an extension of the timelines for completion of MOUs/agreements and the inclusion of passive recreation as a mandatory program and service. As well, regarding the release of the final Phase 1 regulations, Conservation Ontario delivered the following activities for CAs:

- Media release and Summary Bulletin with background on the Phase 1 regulations
- A General Managers' meeting and special Chairs' Listening Sessions to provide an overview of the regulations

- Conservation Ontario *Guidance on Implementation of Transition Plans and Agreements Regulation* was finalized and circulated to all CAOs/GMs. This document contains guidance and tools to support CAs throughout the transition period
- Three bi-weekly Conservation Authorities University GM sessions featuring GM Panel Discussions on preparation of Transition Plans and the Inventory of Programs and Services. These were attended by 34 CAs and more than 60 senior staff
- Ongoing updates to 'Members Only' Implementation Resources webpage containing resources on CO events/webinars, MECP Guidance, CO Guidelines, and CA Sample Resources, including draft transition plans, sample CA municipal agreements and program and services guides
- Co-hosted Conservation Ontario and Association of Municipalities of Ontario webinar: "Overview of the *Conservation Authorities Act* Phase 1 Regulations" (November 19). Total of 223 registrants from both CA and municipal staff and leadership. Welcoming comments were provided by Andy Mitchell (Chair, CO) and Lynn Dollin (Chair of the Conservation Authorities Task Force, AMO). Presentations by Bonnie Fox (CO) and Amber Crawford (AMO)

Conservation Ontario Governance Accountability and Transparency Initiative

Conservation Ontario and conservation authorities share the Provincial government's commitment to governance accountability and transparency. Amendments to the *Conservation Authorities Act* related to governance were proclaimed in December 2020 and February 2021. The Governance Accountability and Transparency Initiative was endorsed by Council at the April 12th, 2021 Annual General Meeting. It identified a number of required and BMP actions which help to demonstrate accountability and transparency to the Province through compliance with the legislation, and of course to municipalities and

the public in their implementation. By September 2021, all 36 conservation authorities passed resolutions of support for the Governance Accountability and Transparency Initiative. It includes: Updates to CA Administrative Bylaws, Proactive Reporting on Priorities as well as Promotion and Demonstration of Results. A key deliverable completed by all 36 CAs was to post governance material on each of their websites for easy public access.

SUPPORTING SUSTAINABLE GROWTH FOR ONTARIO

The implementation of the Conservation Ontario Client Services Streamlining Initiative has assisted conservation authorities to support the provincial housing strategy while ensuring new development is safe from natural hazards and doesn't create new hazards or deplete natural resources such as sources of drinking water. This work contributes to environmental sustainability.

This initiative was created to support actions outlined in the provincial Housing Supply Action Plan and identifies a number of actions to improve client service and accountability, increase speed of approvals and reduce red tape to help the province address the lack of housing supply, while at the same time not jeopardizing public health and safety or the environment in the process. Significant service improvements are being made through this initiative.

From January 1st – December 31st, 2021, the high-growth CAs issued a combined total of 7,533 permits (a 12% increase in volume from 2020). The CAs remain highly successful at issuing permits within the provincial and CO best practice timelines – issuing 91% of permits within the provincial timelines and 84% within the significantly reduced CO best practices timelines.

STRATEGIC FUNDING, PROGRAM AND POLICY PARTNERSHIPS

TACKLING CLIMATE CHANGE WITH NATURE

Nature Smart Climate Change Solutions Program

In 2021, Conservation Ontario was approved to receive \$9 Million from 2021 to 2024 through the Nature Smart Climate Solutions Fund under the Place-Based actions stream offered by Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC). Over 50 projects with 15 conservation authorities are currently being funded.

The objective of this program is to deliver on multiple nature-based solutions including protection and restoration of wetlands, grasslands, and riparian areas, as well as enhanced land management practices that will increase carbon sequestration. Projects will occur on Conservation Authority-owned/other conservation lands, or on private lands with long-term agreements, ensuring lasting benefits.

These projects will help to:

- store and capture carbon
- mitigate the impacts of climate change (flood risk reduction)
- build resilience and improve water quality, and
- provide critical habitat for Canada's wildlife

CANADA NATURE FUND

In response to Conservation Ontario's submission, *Conservation Authorities' Unique Contribution to Conserving Canada's Conservation Areas*, Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC) provided \$1.2M over two years through the Canada Nature Fund to secure land for biodiversity conservation and help the federal government meet the target of conserving 25% of Canada's natural lands by 2025 to help Ontario adapt to climate change impacts.

Conservation Authorities are partnering with municipalities, foundations and private donors to assemble almost \$4.53M in match funding and in-kind contributions to augment the resources provided by ECCC.





FLOODPLAIN MAPPING AND INTEGRATED WATERSHED MANAGEMENT

Conservation Ontario engaged with Cambium Indigenous Professional Services in a project with Lower Thames Valley Conservation Authority and Chippewas of the Thames First Nation to deliver *Floodplain Mapping and Integrated Watershed Management with First Nations in Ontario - A Partnership Approach*. This was funded by Crown Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs. Started in 2019, this project was undertaken to ensure the Indigenous perspectives are being meaningfully incorporated and that respectful relationships were being developed to inform local CA watershed management work, as well as complete floodplain mapping for the Lower Thames River watershed. It is anticipated this project could be used as a framework for other CAs to consider. The overall goal of this initiative is to ensure a holistic understanding of watershed health that will lead to better planning and allocation of resources and a healthier watershed for all.

In 2021, Phase 2 was led by the Chippewas of the Thames First Nation to complete floodplain / risk mapping within their territory along the banks of the Thames River, with technical support of Lower Thames Valley Conservation Authority. This phase included developing and sharing education materials to foster a broad understanding of the importance of the work.

WATER AND EROSION CONTROL INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENTS

The Water and Erosion Control Infrastructure (WECI) database was managed by Conservation Ontario for the 2021-2022 WECI funding application review process. The Committee hosted an Information Webinar in early February as an orientation for submitting applications; with 39 CA staff attending from 35 CAs. The Committee reviewed 85 funding applications from 25 CAs for 2021/22 with total project costs around \$15.3 million. The Province approved 61 infrastructure safety and repair projects and studies with a value of \$10 million for 22 conservation authorities.

Ontario Flooding Strategy – Flood Mapping Technical Team (FMTT)

- In 2021, Conservation Ontario, the conservation authorities and the Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO) worked with Ministry of Northern Development, Mines, Natural Resources and Forestry (NDMNRF) at the FMTT Table. Outcomes include the development of draft Data, Survey and Mapping technical guidance to support floodplain mapping efforts in Ontario.
- Multi-Year Approach task team also worked on a draft report entitled *Flood Hazard Mapping in Ontario: a Status Report*, which will be completed in 2022.

Technical bulletins on Hydrology and Hydraulics are also being developed. Recommendations from this work are being provided to the Minister of NDMNRF in support of Ontario's Flooding Strategy.



PROTECTING ONTARIO'S DRINKING WATER SOURCES

Drinking Water Road Sign Campaign (DWSP)

The co-created campaign included a new DWSP Information Story Map, plus an interactive map marking municipal & provincial DWSP road sign locations, with web links to the local Source Protection Authority or Region, a DWSP Quiz and daily social media posts.

Additionally, a Drinking Water Source Protection Zone song, ***Drinking Water Protection Zone, I Gotta Know*** and music video were produced. The campaign ran from October 7 to October 28 and wrapped up with a photo opportunity/media event with the Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks (MECP), Minister Piccini, at the Ganaraska Conservation Authority, in Port Hope.

This campaign was very effective and resulted in a large reach to social media audiences. The DWSP Story Map had just over 3100 visits, while the music video had just over 800 views.

New 2-year DWSP funding model for SPA/SPRs

Funding from MECP for DWSP has been expanded to a two year cycle instead of annually.

Director's Technical Rules under the Clean Water Act, 2006

The release of the amended Director's Technical Rules, CWA, 2006. These updates will continue to protect municipal surface and ground water sources now and into the future.

DWSP Social Media Campaigns

CO maintains an ongoing social media campaign on Facebook and Twitter to support the profiling of the DWSP program and the role of CAs. Social media posts are provided to CA staff, in advance, in order to support the campaign. There were 66 social media posts shared, in the various 2021 seasonal campaigns. The collaborative approach, with members of the DWSP Communications Working Group, using a co-production model has been a great contributing factor to this success.

CO Knowledge Building Series for Project Managers

Experts from various disciplines were invited to present on a DWSP related topic with a Q & A.

Topics included:

- Dense Non Aqueous Liquids (DNAPLS) as drinking water threats
- Road Salt Management Plans
- Non Agricultural Source Material as drinking water threats

Conservation Ontario's Climate Change Vulnerability Assessment Tool (CCVAT)

Two full day hands on training sessions were held by the CO CCVAT Working Group (CH, TRCA, NPCA and MECP). Just over 40 participants attended from a diversity of sectors including municipal, private consultants and conservation authorities).



TRACK AND INFLUENCE POLICY DEVELOPMENT

Conservation Ontario identifies and responds to government policy initiatives which impact conservation authority business and create opportunities to advance an integrated watershed management approach that can contribute to achieving outcomes that build social, economic and environmental resilience across Ontario's watersheds.

Working with conservation authorities, Conservation Ontario develops a variety of policy positions and statements, backgrounders, reports, whitepapers and submissions that respond to initiatives and issues.

In 2021, 16 Submissions to Provincial and Federal consultations were developed by Conservation Ontario with direct input from 34 of 36 CAs; *Conservation Authorities Act* submission on Phase 1 Regulations engaged 26 CAs.

Topics also included: Creation of Canada's Water Agency and a Federal Standing Committee's Fresh Water Study, Modernization of legislation/Provincial Plans (e.g. 2 Planning Act/+2 Minister's Zoning Orders related, Greenbelt Plan, Ontario Professional Foresters Act), Modernization of various Regulations under

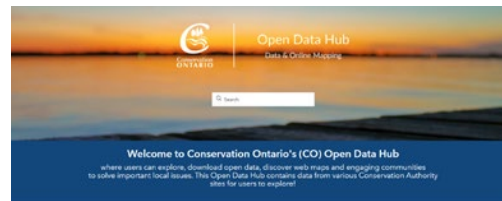
various Acts (e.g. Drainage Act, Public Lands Act/shore land erosion control structures, Water Resources Act, and Endangered Species Act), and, additional Strategic Reviews by the Advisory Panel on Climate Change, Great Lakes PFOS Risk Management, and Environmental Compliance Practices of the Ministry, Environment, Conservation and Parks (MECP).

Conservation Ontario Class EA

Conservation Ontario also submitted CO's Class EA Annual Review Report to the Ministry of Environment, Conservation and Parks on the use of the Class Environmental Assessment for Remedial Flood and Erosion Control Projects and continued to work with MECP on streamlining improvements to CO's Class EA.

AGGREGATING AND DISSEMINATING CA KNOWLEDGE

Over the past five years, Conservation Ontario (CO) has focused efforts on enabling conservation authorities to make data more discoverable, accessible and available through a series of targeted activities made possible through funding provided by the Great Lakes Observing System (GLOS) and by leveraging the collective knowledge and expertise of our colleagues in conservation authorities, federal and provincial government and other key partners with a passion for data sharing in the Great Lakes region.



Since 2016, 13 open data sites have been created and federated resulting in almost 300 datasets being shared with the public. An additional four CA open data sites are expected to launch in 2022 as a direct result of this initiative. In addition, 23 CAs collectively created or uploaded more than 160 metadata records, 87 of which are publicly queryable. An Application Programming Interface (API) is available to ensure other applications can query these and future records as they are created. A further 7 CAs currently share water quality data through Great Lakes DataStream, launched in late 2021. All of these data, including over 460,000 observational records across almost 1,000 sites, are now discoverable through [Conservation Ontario's Open Data Hub](#).



TRAINING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROVIDED TO CONSERVATION AUTHORITIES

Training

- **CO DWSP Road Salt Management Workshop** (Jan)
22 CA staff; 19 CAs
- **Level 1 Provincial Offences Officer Training** (Mar – Apr)
CA staff: 26; 16 CAs
- **Level 1 Provincial Offences Officer Training** (Sept – Oct)
CA staff: 33; 19 CAs
- **Pre-Latornell Section 28 Regulations Workshop 2 Days** (Nov)
CA staff: 110; 32 CAs
- **2021 MOU between CO and Hydro One** (Aug)
CA staff: 55; 24 CAs
- **Conservation Authorities Act S.28 Discussion and Training Session** (Mar)
CA staff: 112; 33 CAs
- **Conservation Authority University Executive Development Program**
19 virtual sessions in Jan-Feb and Oct 2021, 3 regional in-person 1 day workshops were held in the Fall of 2021 and a 2 day in person training was delivered in December 2021
39 Senior CA staff from 21 CAs registered

Webinars

- **Conservation Ontario / Association of Municipalities of Ontario: Overview of CAA Phase 1 Regulations** (Nov)
CA staff: 111; 30 CAs
- **Provincial Flood Forecast and Warning Webinar Series** (5 sessions, Sept – Nov)
CA staff: 81, 36 CAs
- **Conservation Areas Workshop Series**
(4 webinars June – Dec)
CA staff: 444; CAs: 36 CAs (CO Comms support)
- **Rekindle the Sparks Education Webinar Series**
(2 webinars Mar & Apr)
CA staff: 26; CAs: 9 CAs
- **Rekindle the Sparks Full Day Conference: Protecting Watersheds Through Education** (Nov)
CA staff: 68; 25 CAs (CO support)
- **Latornell 2020 Leadership Development Project**
(2 additional webinars Jan/Feb 2021)
CA staff: 285
- **Latornell 2021 Conservation Symposium**
(6 webinars Sept – Dec)
CA staff: 635
- **Mandatory Vaccination Policies: Your Questions Answered** (October)
CA staff: 33; 24 CAs
- **WECI Program - 2021-2022 Information Webinar**
CA staff: 39; 35 CAs
- **CA University: GM Sessions Implementation of CAA phase 1 Regulations**
3 virtual sessions Nov-Dec ranging from 40-60+ CA staff, 27-34 CAs at each session

HEALTHY HIKES

In the 2021 Healthy Hikes campaign, Conservation Ontario and the conservation authorities explored six distinct themes:



MAY – Mental Health & Nature
Protect Your [Mental] Health



JUNE – AccessAbility: Nature for All at Conservation Areas



JULY – For The Love of Parks



AUGUST – Going Camping?
#RecreateResponsibly



SEPTEMBER – Outdoor Education: Fall Learning Adventure for Kids, Parents and Teachers



OCTOBER – Fall Into Nature at Conservation Areas

GETTING SOCIAL

Other social media campaigns included climate change, 75th Anniversary of the *Conservation Authorities Act*, World Water Day, National Day for Truth and Reconciliation, World Wetlands Day, International Biodiversity Day and Emergency Preparedness Week.



11K

Ontario's Conservation Areas



4K

Conservation Ontario



31K



22K



LATORNELL
CONSERVATION SYMPOSIUM

LATORNELL 2021

The theme for the 2021 Latornell Conservation Symposium was **#ConservationMatters**. Six webinars were hosted focusing on innovations in conservation science and planning with topics such as watershed management, offsetting, ecological monitoring tools, natural asset management for climate change, conservation areas programming and Indigenous-led land conservation movements. The webinars featured speakers from conservation authorities, municipalities, ENGOS, consultants and many others. Just over 2,000 people participated in the webinars.

2021 Webinars:

- The Other Watershed Cycle: Monitoring, Planning and Restoration
- Reimagining Conservation Lands for the Future
- The Good, the Bad and the Unknown of Natural Heritage Compensation
- Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas: What Does That Mean and What Could That Look Like?
- Ecological Monitoring Tools
- Nature Based Solutions for a Changing Climate

Recordings of the Webinars can be found here: www.latornell.ca/webinars



Photo © Tim Lanthier

GREENSPACES PROVIDE HEALTH SAVINGS

2021 RESEARCH PUBLISHED BY ECOHEALTH ONTARIO

Quantifying the health savings accrued by greenspaces was the focus for a series of three business cases published in 2021 by the Greenbelt Foundation and EcoHealth Ontario. The research is the result of several years of work and is the first of its kind in Ontario to estimate the healthcare saving from urban green infrastructure.

The case studies included a project to plant additional trees in order to increase the tree canopy in a Brampton neighbourhood to help adapt to impacts from heat and air pollution; a parking lot transformation into an urban downtown park in Peterborough; and developing a survey and outdoor recreation program which can be used with seniors in Peel Region to improve their life satisfaction and general well-being. Credit Valley Conservation and the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority oversaw two of the case studies.

Conservation Ontario is a member of EcoHealth Ontario and oversees the EcoHealth newsletter and website.

FRIEND OF THE GREENBELT AWARD

In 2021, Conservation Authorities (CAs) were recognized with the prestigious Friend of the Greenbelt Award for their innovative solutions to COVID-19 response and recovery. Throughout pandemic conditions in that year, CAs ensured that conservation areas remained open and that visitors were safe.

Ontario's conservation areas fulfill an important role as local destinations for recreational and nature-based opportunities across the province.

Initially, approximately half of the conservation authorities had to close some or all their conservation areas in the early days of the pandemic. As well, conservation areas had to

grapple with unprecedented surges in visitors and many trails were overrun due to more people trying to get out in nature.

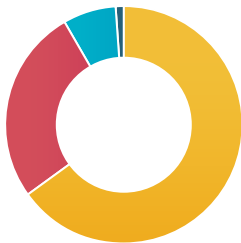
To accommodate these challenges, conservation authorities used innovative approaches such as new or updated reservation systems, developed pandemic protocols, and created innovative programming including: Forest Therapy programs, "Storybook Walk(s)" in partnership with a local library, and mobile apps to create a "Talking Forest", teaching visitors about biodiversity in the area.

The Award recognizes leaders from across the Greater Golden Horseshoe region who champion, innovate, and ensure the ongoing success of Ontario's Greenbelt. It was presented to Conservation Ontario on behalf of Ontario's conservation authorities.



2021 FINANCIALS

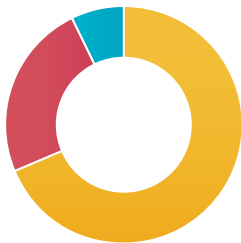
CONSERVATION ONTARIO



REVENUES

65%	Membership Fees	\$1,330,002
27%	Special Projects	\$548,704
7%	Source Water Protection	\$144,793
1%	Other	\$21,806

TOTAL **\$2,045,305**



EXPENDITURES

69%	Operations	\$1,388,087
24%	Special Projects	\$487,353
7%	Source Water Protection	\$144,793

TOTAL **\$2,020,233**



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