



# Protecting Our Future

Ontario Provincial Plans and Conservation Authorities



**March 2015**

# A Healthy & Strong Future For Ontarians



Green spaces, wetlands, forests, moraines, escarpment, and the Great Lakes improve water quality, provide drinking water, help to prevent flooding and erosion, contribute to our economy, and provide important habitat for wildlife and birds. They also help us to connect to Nature.

The Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan, Greenbelt Plan, Niagara Escarpment Plan, and the Growth Plan for the Greater Golden Horseshoe protect important natural resources and promote more sustainable growth patterns.

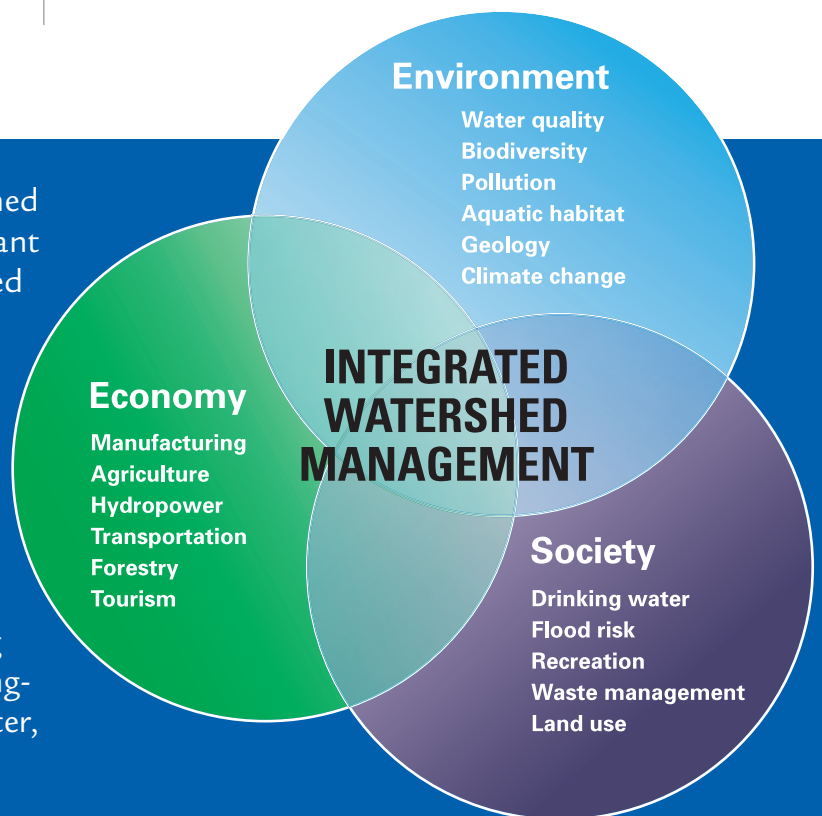
Through their watershed planning process, land management activities, regulatory programs, recreational opportunities and stewardship initiatives, Conservation Authorities help to meet the goals and objectives of the Provincial plans.

Conservation Authorities do this work in partnership with municipalities, the Provincial and Federal governments, landowners, other agencies and many community groups.

Eighteen of Ontario's 36 Conservation Authorities play a key role in helping to meet the goals and objectives of these plans.

Ontario's Conservation Authorities are watershed management agencies that protect important ecosystems using an integrated watershed management approach.

Integrated watershed management means managing upstream activities so that downstream resources are healthy and sustainable. This approach considers economic, social and ecological interests, together, with issues such as climate change impacts or intense urbanization. Balancing economic and social interests with the long-term health of the environment results in smarter, collaborative decisions.





## Activities That Protect Ecosystems

### Land Acquisition

Conservation Authorities purchase lands to protect ecosystems such as wetlands, floodplains, creek valleys, designated federal/provincial environmentally significant areas, groundwater recharge and discharge areas, significant Great Lakes properties and corridors connecting important conservation lands.

- Since 1960, the Hamilton Conservation Authority has been acquiring land for permanent protection. These lands include 14 significant Niagara Escarpment properties, seven major conservation areas, a 121-km trail network, 12 significant wetlands, a number of waterfalls, underground streams and caves. These lands protect important habitat for many diverse ecosystems as well as numerous provincially and federally recognized species at risk. **4**

### Adapting to Climate Change

Climate change affects all aspects of Ontario's resources and the complexity and scope of this issue requires a more 'integrated approach' taking into consideration ecological, economic and social interests and impacts.

Integrated watershed management enables us to use a wide variety of activities such as watershed stewardship, monitoring, planning, regulation, and flood management to address many issues, together.

Conservation Authorities bring together different stakeholders to assess issues, pool resources, and develop solutions based on local science developed through watershed management programs and activities.

Conservation Authority flood management programs significantly prevent or reduce damages caused by flooding from extreme weather events.

- Credit Valley Conservation's Climate Change Vulnerability Assessment Program protects important ecological features and functions on the Oak Ridges Moraine, Niagara Escarpment, Greenbelt and Greater Golden Horseshoe Growth Plan areas. This program helps to build resiliency and prevent or reduce flooding. **5**

# Enough Water Today and Tomorrow

## Watershed Planning

### Addresses Upstream Impacts for Downstream Benefits

As a result of Ontario's growing demand for water, watershed managers face increasing challenges in maintaining a balance between human, economic and environmental interests.

A key part of watershed management, Conservation Authority watershed plans identify issues and target solutions, managing the impacts of our activities on natural resources.

Watershed planning is a cyclical process that protects natural systems and is often triggered by issues such as climate change, flooding, low water or poor water quality. It requires the development of a plan to address the issues, implementation of the plan, and then monitoring, evaluating and updating of the plan based on changing conditions or new information. Developing and implementing watershed and subwatershed plans is a collaborative process.

- The Central Lake Ontario Conservation Authority has completed watershed plans for four creek systems within the headwaters of the Oak Ridges Moraine. These plans support the goals, objectives, and policies of Provincial plans. As part of the watershed management process, ongoing monitoring allows the Conservation Authority to track and analyze existing conditions, changes and trends to inform future watershed management actions. **1**

## Protecting Drinking Water Sources

Through Ontario's Drinking Water Source Protection Program, Conservation Authorities collect local watershed data which enables them to map natural features and functions, identify land uses that impact them, and protect municipal drinking water sources. This information is used in local source protection plans.

## Watershed Stewardship Protects Water and Land

Conservation Authorities offer technical expertise and tools, provide incentive grants, promote community involvement and build partnerships to leverage funds in order to deliver programs that protect water and land resources.

Tree planting, wetlands restoration, well decommissioning, erosion control and habitat rehabilitation engage landowners, communities, and businesses in activities that protect and improve water quality and supplies, keep soils healthy, and ensure clean air and clean drinking water.

- Lower Trent Conservation initiated the Healthy Shorelines - Clean Water Stewardship Program with funding from the RBC Blue Water Project to encourage property owners to plant native plants, shrubs and trees along shorelines in order to reduce sediment and contaminated runoff, and restore fish and wildlife habitat. **6**

Conservation Authorities develop water budgets with local municipalities and others in order to determine how much water is available in the watershed, how it is currently being used, and how much will be needed in the future.

Source protection plans protect important sources of drinking water throughout these Provincial Plan areas.

## Monitoring conditions in Ontario's Watersheds

Ontario's Conservation Authorities use a variety of means to monitor water and land conditions often working in partnership with all levels of government, other agencies, and landowners. Watershed monitoring programs provide the data required to assess the effectiveness of the solutions being used to address issues on the landscape. Many Conservation Authorities also produce watershed report cards.

- Nine Conservation Authorities that comprise the Conservation Authority Moraine Coalition (CAMC) specifically monitor and report on conditions for the Oak Ridges Moraine and have produced report cards for the general public, municipal partners and others. **2**

## Stormwater Management Protects Water Quality

Conservation Authorities reduce stormwater runoff through the development of stormwater management strategies, support for Low Impact Development (LID), and implementation of local and broader-based green infrastructure initiatives. All of these activities help protect the natural water balance, improve water quality and reduce or prevent flooding.

- The Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority's RainScaping Program reduces stormwater runoff, which is a major source of phosphorous pollution. RainScaping encourages water control to mimic the natural water cycle and supports the goals, objectives, and stormwater management policies of the Provincial Plans. **3**

- The Grey Sauble Conservation Authority's forestry program plants trees on the Niagara Escarpment improving air quality, water quality and soils; providing important wildlife and bird habitat, windbreaks and shade; as well as providing sources of materials for building and manufacturing. **7**

- The Nottawasaga Valley Conservation Watershed Improvement Program, coordinated by the Nottawasaga Valley Conservation Authority brings together community groups, businesses and municipalities to improve the health of the Nottawasaga River and Georgian Bay. By undertaking stream bank stabilization, tree planting and other projects on local tributary streams, volunteers have helped to further the environmental goals of the four Provincial Plans. **8**

# Enjoying and Learning About Nature

## Conservation Areas Connect People and Nature

Conservation Authorities manage conservation lands that contribute to attractive, liveable communities. Conservation areas protect critical ecosystems and also offer year round outdoor and education activities to the general public. Many conservation areas are located near where people live and often act as living classrooms, bringing people and nature together.

Some Conservation areas offer significant cultural sites such as First Nations or pioneer villages.

- The Ball's Falls Centre for Conservation at Ball's Falls Conservation Area, features interactive exhibits and learning centres that showcase the natural and cultural history of the Niagara Escarpment. Environmental exhibits highlight the human impact on nature, as well as watershed management and conservation programs of the Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority.

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- As one of Canada's largest providers of outdoor and experiential education, the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority reaches 180,000 learners of all ages. TRCA operates the Kortright Centre, an environmental exploration centre in a natural setting. The Centre offers a wide variety of activities such as alternative energy demonstrations, and other special education programs.

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- The Ganaraska Region Conservation Authority operates and owns the Ganaraska Forest Centre which has hundreds of kilometers of hiking, mountain biking, cross-country skiing, snowshoeing and even horseback riding trails on the Oak Ridges Moraine. Since 1978, the Centre has been offering outdoor education programs to schools and youth groups. All of the programs align with the Ministry of Education curriculum, and include activities such as orienteering, outdoor survival skills and pond study programs.

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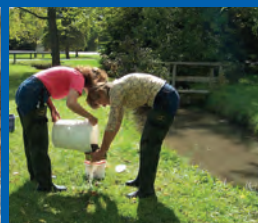
# Planning For Growth

## Technical Support for Land Use Planning

Conservation Authorities provide a wide variety of technical support and plan review expertise to municipalities. Activities include assessing environmental impacts associated with activities near sensitive natural features, as well as hydrogeology and stormwater studies. They conduct technical studies, provide input to municipal strategies and Official Plans, as well as conduct reviews of Environmental Assessment reports. Conservation Authorities often provide expertise around source protection, watershed planning, stormwater management, GIS, species at risk and many other program areas.

- The Region of Halton recently entered into a three-year agreement with Conservation Halton to fund a Conservation Halton staff team to review regional Environmental Assessments for new infrastructure projects.

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# Balancing Development

## Watershed Planning and Policies for Planning and Development

In order to assess development based on the capacity of the watershed, Conservation Authorities rely on subwatershed plans to establish resource-based targets that protect farmland, ecosystems and greenspaces, promote climate change adaptation, and improve water quality. More intensified growth ensures efficient use of land, water and energy resources, as well as existing infrastructure.

Conservation Authorities use watershed plans to inform the development of their own policies to promote balanced growth.

- The Toronto and Region Conservation Authority's Living City Policies for Planning & Development support growth and protect the environment. This approach ensures that the city can continue to grow on the foundation of healthy rivers, shorelines, greenspaces and biodiversity. **13**

## Regulating Development to Protect People and the Environment

Conservation Authorities regulate development activities in or adjacent to sensitive environmental areas such as wetlands, watercourses, and the shorelines of the Great Lakes, to protect people and property from natural hazards such as flooding and erosion, as well as to build resilient natural systems.

Additionally, Conservation Authorities regulate the straightening, changing, diverting or interfering with watercourses and wetlands. Land features such as vegetated shorelines and stream valleys; wetlands; and wooded areas protect water, prevent erosion and flooding, and contribute to climate change adaptation.

- The Kawartha Conservation's Rural and Agricultural Guide to Permits was developed in consultation with the local farm and rural community. It clarifies the permit process and helps to minimize potential impacts to rivers, lakes, and wetlands. **14**



# Supporting Farming Viability

Conservation Authorities collaborate with local municipalities and other agencies across the province to implement rural and clean water programs. They offer cost-sharing grants for beneficial management practices such as manure management, erosion control, fragile land retirement, conservation cropping practices, naturalization or planting to increase streamside habitat, fertilizer management, and septic and well improvements. These activities protect water quality and quantity and promote healthy soils.

- The Grand River Conservation Authority helps farmers achieve some of their environmental goals through the Rural Water Quality Program, which is a collaboration among municipal, provincial and federal governments. The program was developed with the advice and assistance of farm organizations and offers advice and grants to local farmers. **15**



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Let's Chat!

