

Essex Region
Conservation Authority
sustaining the place for life

Conservation Area Strategy

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Definitions.....	4
1.0 Purpose and Regulatory Framework.....	5
1.1 Ontario Regulation 686/21: Mandatory Programs and Services.....	5
1.2 Land Acknowledgement	6
1.3 Origins of the Essex Region Conservation Authority.....	6
1.3 Strategic Direction.....	8
1.4 Conservation Areas Objectives per Legislative Requirements.....	8
2.0 Primary Objectives for Conservation Authority Lands (O.Reg. 686/21, 10.(1)1).....	9
2.1 Protect and Conserve.....	9
2.2 Connect	10
3.0 Land Acquisition & Disposition (O. Reg 686/21,10.(1)1).....	10
4.0 Programs & Services, Sources of Financing (O. Reg 686/21,10.(1)2).....	14
4.1 Mandatory Programs and Services.....	14
4.1.1 Conservation Land Management Plans.....	15
4.1.2 Implementation of Conservation Lands Management.....	18
4.1.3 Conservation Lands Restoration Activities	21
4.1.4 Conservation Lands Infrastructure Maintenance	24
4.2 Non-Mandatory Programs and Services.....	24
4.2.1 Land Securement and Acquisition.....	25
4.2.2 Regional Biological Services.....	25
4.2.3 Holiday Beach Operations and Activities.....	25
4.2.4 John R. Park Homestead.....	26
5.0 Augmentation and Integration of Natural Heritage (O. Reg 686/21,10.(1)3).....	26
5.1 Augmentation of Natural Heritage.....	26
5.2 Integration with other Publicly Accessible Lands	29
5.2.1 County Wide Active Transportation System.....	29
5.2.2 Stone Road Alvar Conservation Area	29
5.2.3. Point Pelee Peninsula	29
6.0 Land Use Categories (O. Reg 686/21,10.(1)4).....	30
6.1 Classifying Conservation Areas.....	30

6.1.1 Management Areas 32

6.1.2 Conservation Areas – Passive Recreation 32

6.1.3 Conservation Areas – Active Recreation..... 32

6.2 Site-Specific Zoning..... 33

6.2.1 Ecological Protection Zone..... 33

6.2.2 Natural Heritage Zone 33

6.2.3 Access Zone 34

6.2.4 Development Zone..... 34

6.2.5 Cultural Heritage Zone..... 34

7.0 Review Process (O. Reg 686/21,10.(1) 5)..... 34

7.1 Public Consultation 34

7.2 Periodic Review 35

References..... 35

Definitions

In this strategy,

"Direct support or supervision" means, a situation in which a staff person employed by ERCA, or by another person or body, is present on site at all times, overseeing activities as they occur and providing direction, feedback and/or assistance. In some instances direct support or supervision is required for health and safety reasons.

"Habitat" means, any area on which any species of animal, plant or other organism depends, directly or indirectly, to carry on its life processes, including life processes such as reproduction, rearing, hibernation, migration or feeding, and includes places that are used by members of the species as dens, nests, hibernacula or other residences.

"Natural heritage" means, features and areas, including wetlands, forests, valleylands, wildlife habitat and other natural features and ecological functions in an area, as well as all the different plants and animals that use those areas. Natural heritage features provide many benefits, including habitat for plants and animals, erosion control, flood control, clean air, and clean water, and are important for their environmental and social values as a legacy of the natural landscapes of an area.

"Natural heritage system" means, a connected system made up of natural heritage features and areas which are linked by natural corridors and which are necessary to maintain biological and geological diversity, natural functions, viable populations of indigenous species, and ecosystems. These systems can include natural heritage features and areas, lands that have been restored or have the potential to be restored to a natural state, areas that support hydrologic functions, and working landscapes that enable ecological functions to continue.

Conservation Area Strategy (2024-2029)

1.0 Purpose and Regulatory Framework

The Conservation Area Strategy identifies broad objectives for the Essex Region Conservation Authority's (ERCA) Conservation Areas and related programs and services. The strategy was undertaken by the ERCA to meet requirements as outlined in the [Conservation Authorities Act, R. S. O. 1990, c. C.27](#) (CA Act) and [O. Reg. 686/21: Mandatory Programs and Services](#) (Regulation) and is intended to provide guidance for the management and operation of the ERCA's conservation areas.

Section 21.1 of the CA Act sets out Mandatory Programs and Services that all conservation authorities must deliver within their watershed. Section 21.1.1 of the CA Act details Municipal Programs and Services that conservation authorities are permitted to provide under agreement to their municipal partners while Section 21.1.2 provides direction related to Other Programs and Services conservation authorities may deliver. O.Reg. 686/21, specifically, subsection 9(1), paragraph 1 outlines that all conservation authorities must complete a Conservation Area Strategy. The main requirements of a Conservation Area Strategy per Section 10 of the Regulation are outlined below.

1.1 Ontario Regulation 686/21: Mandatory Programs and Services

As outlined in the regulation, the objectives for the Conservation Area Strategy are outlined in Section 10. (1) of the Regulation as follows:

10. (1) A Conservation Area strategy referred to in paragraph 1 of subsection 9 (1) shall include the following components:

- 1. Objectives established by the authority that will inform the authority's decision-making related to the lands it owns and controls, including decisions related to policies governing the acquisition and disposition of such lands.*
- 2. Identification of the mandatory and non-mandatory programs and services that are provided on land owned and controlled by the authority, including the sources of financing for these programs and services.*
- 3. Where the authority considers it advisable to achieve the objectives referred to in paragraph 1, an assessment of how the lands owned and controlled by the authority may,
 - i. augment any natural heritage located within the authority's area of jurisdiction, and*
 - ii. integrate with other provincially or municipally owned lands or other publicly accessible lands and trails within the authority's area of jurisdiction.**
- 4. The establishment of land use categories for the purpose of classifying lands in the land inventory described in section 11 based on the types of activities that are engaged in on each parcel of land or other matters of significance related to the parcel.*

5. *A process for the periodic review and updating of the conservation area strategy by the authority, including procedures to ensure stakeholders and the public are consulted during the review and update process.*

1.2 Land Acknowledgement

The Essex Region Conservation Authority acknowledges that the conservation lands it owns and manages are the traditional territory of the Three Fires Confederacy, comprised of the Ojibwe, the Odawa and the Potawatomi Peoples.

We value the significant historical and contemporary contributions of local and regional first Nations, and all of the Original People of Turtle Island who have been living on and stewarding the land since time immemorial. These conservation areas are covered by Treaty 2 and Treaty 35.

1.3 Origins of the Essex Region Conservation Authority

On July 18th, 1973, the Essex Region Conservation Authority (ERCA) was founded as the 36th Conservation Authority in Ontario. Jurisdiction ranges from where the west boundary of the Thames River watershed meets the shores of Lake St. Clair to the east boundary of the Muddy Creek watershed where it meets the shore of Lake Erie and with all coastal floodplains on Lake St. Clair, the Detroit River and Lake Erie included, and all islands within the participating municipalities. The extent of jurisdiction extends into Lake St. Clair and Lake Erie for 5 kilometers, and with respect to the Detroit River, with similar extents up to the International Boundary between Canada and the United States.

Over the past five decades, significant strides have been made in improving the sustainability of the Windsor-Essex-Pelee Island region. Over 7 million trees have been planted and thousands of acres of natural habitat have been restored, increasing regional natural coverage from 3% to over 8.5%. ERCA established 18 publicly accessible Conservation Areas and developed more than 80 kilometres of Greenway Trail system with an additional 17 km of trail systems within various conservation areas, and 47 km of rail corridor yet to be developed for public use. ERCA led the regional charge to protect drinking water at its source, and to have the Detroit River designated as a Canadian Heritage River; the only river in North America with both Canadian and American Heritage River designations.

1.3 Strategic Direction

ERCA's [Strategic Plan "Sustaining the Place for Life" \(2016-2025\)](#) outlines the vision, mission commitment and corporate values as well as the strategic priorities. In light of legislative changes, this plan will be undergoing review and updates to ensure that ERCA is in compliance with legislative requirements.

ERCA's Vision: The Essex Region is a sustainable, resilient and vibrant place with healthy and thriving watersheds, Great Lakes and a green culture.

ERCA's Mission: Improving our environment to enrich our lives.

ERCA's current Strategic Plan provides for 4 main strategic directions:

- **Connect** - Connect people to our landscapes, natural areas, trails, waterfronts and our Great Lakes. Connect and expand natural areas through acquisition, management, land use planning and habitat restoration.
- **Engage** - Engage our community to increase awareness about the critical importance of a healthy and sustainable community through outreach and education.
- **Collaborate** - To work collaboratively to strengthen and facilitate partnerships with all levels of government, our municipal partners, stakeholders and the public to create a future of sustainability through innovative land use planning and watershed management services.
- **Discover** - To develop greater scientific knowledge to proactively address and respond to environmental challenges such as climate change, water quality and other threats to our sustainability.

The Strategic Plan outlines 5 key statements that provide the basis for decision making and priority setting for the Authority. They are as follows:

- 1) The climate will continue to change.
- 2) The Great Lakes are our most significant natural resource.
- 3) Our landscapes and habitats are among the most significant in Canada.
- 4) Our urban areas will continue to grow and expand.
- 5) ERCA is a sustainable, resilient and valued agency.

1.4 Conservation Areas Objectives per Legislative Requirements.

Section 10(1) of Ontario Regulation 686/21 notes that a Conservation Area Strategy shall include "Objectives established by the authority that will inform the authority's decision making related to the lands it owns and controls, including decisions related to policies governing the acquisition and disposition of such lands". For reference, Section 21.1 of the CA Act states the following:

An authority shall provide the following programs or services within its area of jurisdiction:

1. *Programs or services that meet any of the following descriptions and that have been prescribed by the regulations:*
 - i. *Programs and services related to the risk of natural hazards.*
 - ii. *Programs and services related to the conservation and management of lands owned or controlled by the authority, including any interests in land registered on title.*
 - iii. *Programs and services related to the authority's duties, functions and responsibilities as a source protection authority under the Clean Water Act, 2006.*
 - iv. *Programs and services related to the authority's duties, functions and responsibilities under an Act prescribed by the regulations.*

2.0 Primary Objectives for Conservation Authority Lands (O.Reg. 686/21, 10.(1)1)

The following section describes the objectives that inform ERCA's decision-making related to the lands it owns and controls, including decisions related to policies governing the acquisition and disposition of such lands, in order to meet the needs of section 10.(1)1. of the Conservation Authorities Act.

2.1 Protect and Conserve

Goal 1: Protect and Conserve - Protect and enhance the natural areas in the Essex region.

Objective 1: Maintain and improve hydrological functions (e.g. water retention and erosion control) within Conservation Areas to assist in protecting people and properties from flooding.

Objective 2: Protect and enhance the biodiversity and ecosystem resilience of the Essex Region.

Objective 3: Ensure conservation lands contribute to the optimization of watershed ecosystem services.

Objective 4: Undertake research, monitoring, and evaluation of the natural heritage system, and organize current information to identify information gaps and strengthen knowledge of ERCA's watershed natural heritage system.

Objective 5: Maintain, enhance, and build new partnerships to enhance connectivity of natural heritage lands and trail networks where possible.

To achieve the 'Protect and Conserve' goal and objectives, ERCA aims to increase the acquisition of wetlands and flood-prone areas and seek opportunities to improve and restore hydrological functions, such as water retention, within conservation areas. Land Management plans will continue to be developed and implemented in each conservation area and will be updated every 5-10 years for high-use and low-use areas, respectively. These Management Plans include site-specific practices to maintain habitat quality, increase biodiversity, and improve habitats for species at risk including invasive species management, wetland management, and ecosystem management. Increasing land acquisition and protecting, enhancing, and/or restoring lands will help with the large-scale goal of improving habitat connectivity and mitigating the impacts of habitat fragmentation across the Essex region.

2.2 Connect

Goal 2: Connect - Connect people to the natural environment through conservation areas and trails.

Objective 1: Safely maintain Conservation Areas and trails for public access.

Objective 2: Ensure that, wherever possible, Conservation Areas are accessible and inclusive to all members of the community.

Objective 3: Ensure that the public has access to quality and sustainable outdoor recreation and education programming in nature.

Objective 4: Determine the current public uses occurring on conservation lands, identify user groups and principal uses, and identify actions to meet future needs for these lands.

To achieve the 'Connect' goal and objectives, ERCA will continue to evaluate opportunities to develop and encourage the opportunity for public access to natural areas, where appropriate, and implement conservation education programs and community engagement initiatives with a commitment to ensuring that all programs, facilities, and Conservation Areas comply with accessibility standards, such as those set out by the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA). This includes installation, as-needed upgrades, and regular maintenance of facilities, parking lots, benches, trails, and restrooms to meet or exceed AODA standards. Additionally, ERCA will continue to pursue opportunities with Indigenous communities pursuant to all things related to cultural heritage.

3.0 Land Acquisition & Disposition (O. Reg 686/21,10.(1)1)

Governments at various levels have recognized the importance of protecting natural heritage systems and the vital role they play within sustainable ecosystems and for the quality of life of ratepayers within the ERCA watershed. Many of these senior provincial and federal agencies have adopted policies that identify and protect the watershed's natural heritage/open space system; however, planning policy is an insufficient long-term conservation tool in that policies are constantly subject to amendments and appeals. The most risk-adverse way to protect important natural areas is through land securement.

To address one of ERCA's key Strategic Plan priorities, ERCA has been actively acquiring properties since its formation in 1973 on a property-by-property basis, including several acquisitions through the Clean Water~Green Spaces program (established in 2003).

2011 Land Securement Strategy

In 2011, ERCA retained the services of Orland Conservation to produce a Land Securement Strategy (LSS). The LSS is a land acquisition guidance document with a purpose to provide a strategic foundation for ERCA's land securement efforts and guide the permanent protection of the region's most biologically significant natural heritage features. The LSS provides objective justification and prioritization of land securement opportunities to ERCA's Board of Directors and staff. Lands identified for securement within the LSS may already have existing natural

heritage features and/or strategic restoration opportunities as identified by ERCA through the Essex Region Natural Heritage System Strategy (ERNHSS).

The land securement program outlined in the LSS, 2011 has been designed specifically for the ERCA watersheds, and includes:

- Criteria for selecting and prioritizing Land Securement Priority Areas (LSPA);
- A landowner contact program to engage landowners in a securement discussion;
- Securement options and tools available for landowners; and
- Recommendations on working with individual landowners who are interested in pursuing a land securement project.

This document is not available to the public. The 2011 Land Securement Strategy requires further review and update in response to planning changes and development trends.

Current Land Securement & Disposition Strategy

Each year ERCA works towards the strategic acquisition of lands that have the most significant impact on improving the sustainability of the region and the overall health of the watershed. Specifics of new land acquisitions are managed in a confidential/closed meeting of the Committee of the Whole and once acquired, restoration and management of these lands would be considered as a mandatory program.

The goal of the Land Securement Strategy is to focus on natural areas, linkages, infilling and creating larger core area conservation areas, as natural heritage features have the ability to mitigate the potential impacts of hazards on the watershed.

It is inconceivable that all properties holding impactful features could be secured by public agencies or land trusts. With existing funding levels and the ability to locate willing parties, ERCA will approach land acquisition based on a willing buyer-willing seller philosophy. Acquisition will be completed based on available opportunities to acquire targeted properties and will be considered on a case-by-case basis and subject to funding.

Land disposition is not envisioned by ERCA. In the unlikely event that a property does not have existing or potential ecological significance, does not meet the noted securement criteria as detailed in the LSS, and has no pre-existing agreement to honour regarding disposal, the parcel may be considered for disposition from which proceeds would be directed towards the ERCA's land acquisition account to be used to secure additional lands.

In addition to the above, periodically ERCA receives donations of land for which charitable receipts are issued. Dependant on conditions of sale, as well as location and natural heritage significance, these properties are either retained as part of ERCA's land holdings, and/or sold with the proceeds added to a land acquisition reserve fund for future purchase of properties aligning with overall conservation goals of the Authority

A Timeline of Growth

ERCA Lands Acquisition

Over the past 50 years of managing our region's watersheds, countless actions have been taken to protect and restore the local environment. Significant environmental areas have been acquired to ensure their protection in perpetuity and create a sustainable, resilient and vibrant place that aligns with our mission and vision for the Windsor-Essex-Peel Island community.

All elements of a place are interconnected - our community, its environmental health, healthy lifestyles for our citizens and our economy. These natural spaces, which have been protected over the past five decades, improve habitat and water quality, provide for flood attenuation, mitigate the impacts of climate change, and support physical and mental health.

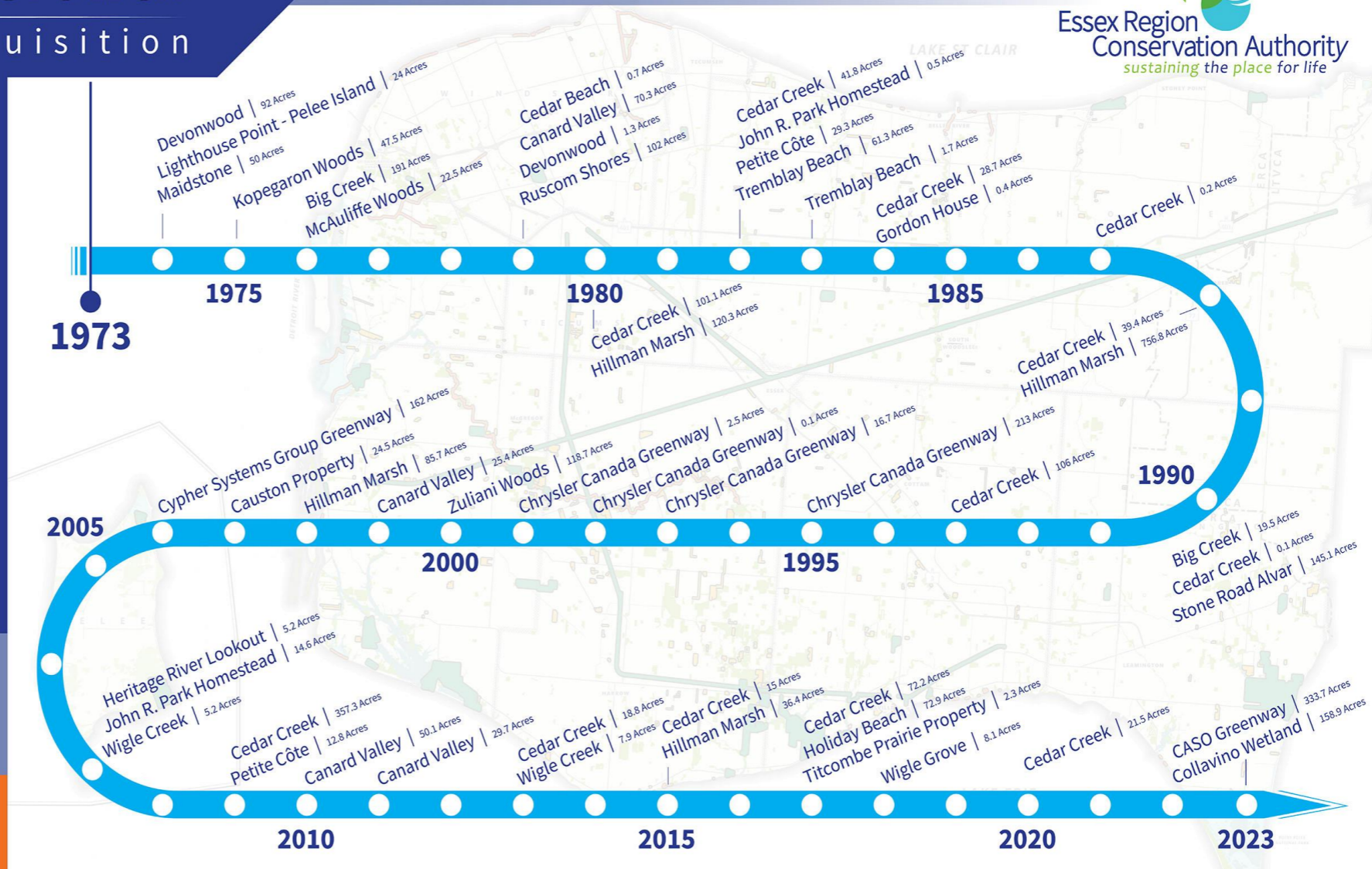
We embrace this place, and make it our home, for life.

Our Mission

The Essex Region is a sustainable, resilient and vibrant place with healthy and thriving watersheds, Great Lakes and a green culture.

Our Vision

Improving our environment to enrich our lives.



4.0 Programs & Services, Sources of Financing (O. Reg 686/21,10.(1)2)

The following section identifies and describes the mandatory and non-mandatory programs and services that are provided on land owned and managed by ERCA, including the sources of financing for these programs, in order to meet the needs of 10.(1) 2 of the regulation.

4.1 Mandatory Programs and Services

Mandatory programs and services (Table 1) include management, operation, and maintenance of ERCA owned/managed lands, including ecological monitoring and stewardship, land management planning, habitat and restoration activities, hazard tree abatement, and invasive species management. This also includes general operations and asset maintenance/management of any facilities, trails, and other amenities that support public access and passive recreational activities within specific Conservation Areas.

Currently, ERCA owns 16 publicly accessible Conservation Areas and 3 trail systems and, in total manages more than 1,800 hectares (~4,448 acres) of conservation lands. These properties provide habitat for over 150 provincially rare species, of which 50 are listed as species at risk (25 endangered, 15 threatened, and 10 species of special concern), and includes over 75 km of Greenways with 12 Community Greenway Entrances. All ERCA Greenways (including the newly acquired CASO property) make up 303.0 hectares (~749 acres) of naturalized habitat.

The Conservation Services department actively implements habitat protection and management programs within Conservation Areas to prevent anthropogenic (human caused) disturbance and unauthorized use. This includes forest inventories, invasive species management, wetland protection, and the restoration of ERCA owned properties. This also ensures that optimal biodiversity and ecological function of the natural heritage features within ERCA properties are maintained, enhanced, or restored.

Table 1: ERCA's Mandatory Programs and Services along with source of funding.

Mandatory Program/Service	Source of Funding
<p>Management, operation and maintenance of ERCA owned lands.</p> <p>Includes: restoration activities, management plans, hazard tree and invasive species management and ecological monitoring.</p> <p>Programs and services to maintain any facilities, trails or other amenities that support public access and passive recreational activities in conservation areas</p>	<p>Mandatory Category 1 Municipal Cost Apportionment and Self-Generated</p>
<p>Conservation Land Management Plans</p>	<p>Mandatory Category 1 Municipal Cost Apportionment</p>

Section 29 Minister’s regulation Rules for Conduct in Conservation Areas (O. Reg. 688/21)	Mandatory Category 1 Municipal Cost Apportionment and Self-Generated
---	--

4.1.1 Conservation Land Management Plans

Management plans are created by ERCA staff to provide details on appropriate land use(s), and assure that development or use of a site, and its required infrastructure, occur in a manner that is sustainable and compatible with the long-term watershed needs (hazard and heritage considerations). These plans prescribe specific habitat management programs and techniques to maintain habitat quality, including invasive species management, forest management, wetland management through water level manipulations (e.g., flooding and drawdowns), and ecosystem management through prescribed burns for tallgrass prairie/alvar.

The process of preparing a management plan involves analysis of the overall goals and objectives for the site, the site’s features and landscapes, threats and possible conflicts between uses, and solutions that can be implemented over time. The development of a plan becomes increasingly complex with the number of issues, stakeholders, and considerations. The following proposed 8-Step process is typically utilized for creating Conservation Area Management Plans for each site (see Figure. 4).

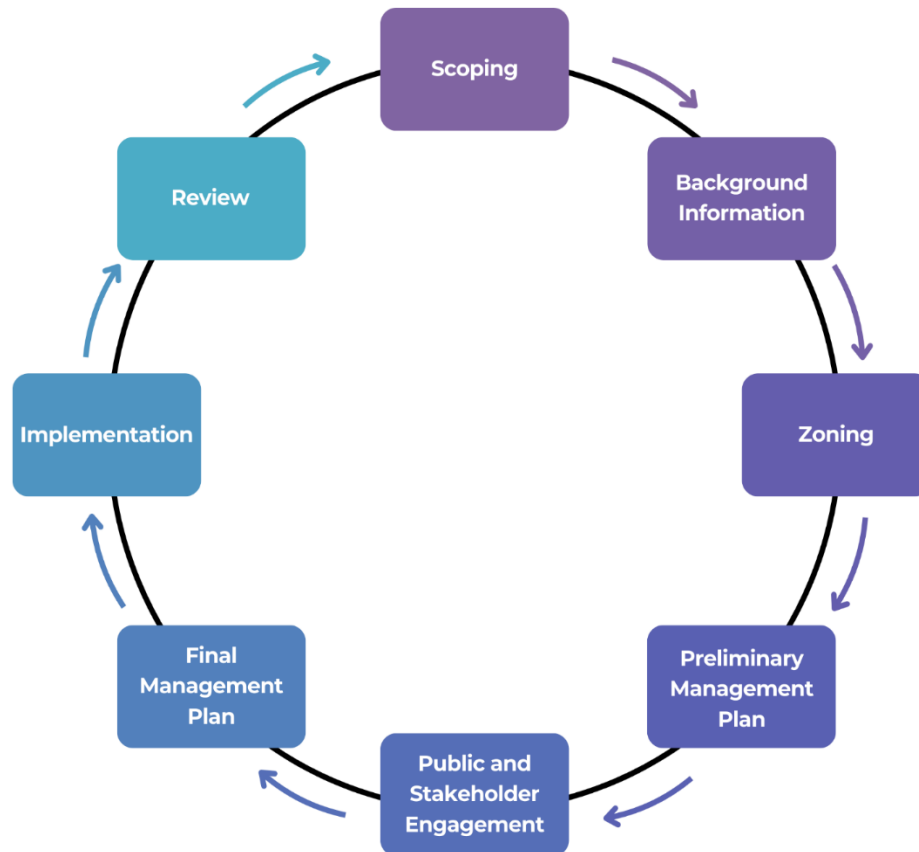


Figure 4: 8-step process for the development of a Conservation Area Management Plan.

Scoping

The first step in management planning is understanding a scope of the initiative, which involves assigning a project manager and identifying a team, securing a budget, assigning responsibilities, developing a high-level workplan with milestones and timelines, defining the scope of the plan (goals, objectives, deliverables, etc.), and confirming the level of public engagement.

Background Information

Once the scope of the project is known, the project team will initiate a background information and literature review to establish a baseline understanding and identify any data gaps.

Background information includes:

- Site history (previous land uses, land ownership, and environmental changes and challenges);
- Natural heritage features and processes (Ecological Land Classification and biological surveys that identify sensitive habitats and species at risk);
- Review of previous management plans (identifying successes and lessons learned);
- Social, cultural, indigenous and economic significance, concerns, and/or threats;
- Environmental/ecological significance, concerns, and/or threats;
- Recreation and/or potential land uses; and
- Current management programs.

Zoning

There are three defined classifications that are assigned to Conservation Areas, based on their primary purposes, overall character, and extent of visitor use and development. These include:

- Management Areas (public accessibility varies);
- Conservation Areas - Passive Recreation (accessible to the public); and
- Conservation Areas - Active Recreation (accessible to the public).

Most Conservation Areas include a variety of natural and cultural features; site-specific zoning defines these different areas. There are five classified zones that can be applied further within a site, including:

- Ecological Protection Zone;
- Natural Heritage Zone;
- Access Zone;
- Development Zone; and
- Cultural Heritage Zone.

These classes and zones are described further in Section 5.0.

The Ecological Land Classification System (ELC) is a provincially recognized and accepted method of typifying, characterizing, and describing vegetation communities within a property. It helps to determine the character and relative biological importance of an area and assists in determining what is required to maintain or improve the site's natural heritage features and functions. Additional biological surveys and documenting the flora and fauna will assist in prescribing management actions designed to benefit specific populations, such as Species at Risk. These assessments will also provide the baseline biological information required to assess the relative sensitivity of particular habitats and areas within a Conservation Area and therefore inform the decision-making process with respect to appropriate public uses.

Preliminary Management Plan

A preliminary plan provides the background information needed to make science-based management recommendations and to provide the public with enough detail to understand the preferred management direction. The general outline of a preliminary management plan is as follows:

- Introduction: including information on the Conservation Area's regional context, property history, classification, plan purpose, and goals and objectives;
- State of the Conservation Area: including information on abiotic conditions (climate, geology, soils, topography, hydrology), biophysical resources (flora and fauna), and cultural resources;
- Existing Uses: including public use, market analysis, and ERCA use;
- Zoning: based on identified zones as described above;
- Recommendations: identification of operational, natural heritage, cultural heritage, and development recommendations;
- Implementation: description of priorities and phasing; and
- Consultations: summary of public consultations.

In some instances, a management plan could have a greater emphasis on economic factors, development, and revenue. Modifications could be made to include more detailed business planning topics, such as a review of major tourism/economic development influences, trends and opportunities, customer surveys and analysis, operational analysis (based on infrastructure and capital plan reports), financial/investment opportunities and risks, and community benefits.

Public and Stakeholder Involvement

Public consultation allows for a better understanding and appreciation of the dynamic social needs of the local community. Management plans require periodic modifications or updates to ensure that watershed health and input from ratepayers are properly considered.

When a management plan does not provide for public facilities but instead is focused on natural heritage features, the extent of public consultation is limited to stakeholders and neighbouring

landowners. However, if the plan will serve the needs of the watershed, then greater effort is required to communicate the preliminary management direction and provide opportunities for feedback. During the initial scoping of the plan, the level of public engagement will be determined as it has impacts on staff allocations and budgets.

Forms of public and/or stakeholder engagement may include:

- Visitor surveys;
- Mailed surveys;
- Public meetings;
- Providing copies of the preliminary management plan to stakeholders and inviting comments; and
- Feedback and comment forms, both written and online.

Final Management Plan

When public and stakeholder comments have been received and evaluated, consideration of changes to the plan will be made. Once the draft final management plan has been approved by the Director of Conservation Services and the Chief Administrative Officer/Secretary-Treasurer, it is reviewed by the Conservation Services Advisory Board with a recommendation to ERCA's Board of Directors for approval.

Implementation and Review

Once approved, ERCA Administration is responsible for the implementation of the management plan and will assign tasks and keep track of budgeting. Budgetary constraints, changing priorities, and our dynamic ecosystem may lead to changes to the original management objectives or recommendations. In these instances, an adaptive management methodology will be applied, which involves continuous monitoring of both the plan and the outcome of activities. The review of existing management plans and the timing associated with this review will be assessed and detailed within the site-specific management plans.

It is important to note that these management plans are dynamic and deal with life science issues that evolve and change therefore requiring these documents to be referenced as living documents.

4.1.2 Implementation of Conservation Lands Management

This section outlines some of the activities that ERCA would undertake to actively manage conservation lands. This list is not exhaustive but only intended to illustrate some of the more complex undertakings of conservation lands management.

Low Complexity Prescribed Burns

Low Complexity Prescribed Burns (LCPB) are limited intensity, low risk burns that are intentionally set to achieve specific land management objectives (Fig. 3). LCPBs can help achieve a range of objectives including:

- Restoring and maintaining the health, integrity, and sustainability of ecosystems (e.g. releasing and recycling nutrients into the soil by turning woody debris and organic matter into mineral-rich ash, opening a tree canopy and allowing for sunlight to reach the forest floor);
- Controlling outbreaks of insects and disease (e.g. invasive species management);
- Reducing wildfire hazards;
- Silviculture site preparation and technique testing; and Research (MNR, 2017).

The main objective of prescribed burns in ERCA's Conservation Areas is to improve ecosystem health and promote the growth of tall grass prairie species, reduce the extent of woody succession by young Dogwood shrub species, and manage the spread of invasive species.



Figure 5: A Low Complexity Prescribed Burn (LCPB) at Hillman Marsh Conservation Area on March 21, 2023.

Forest Management

Forest management efforts prevent the forests of the Essex Region from following a trajectory that leads to decline, a lack of regeneration, and vulnerability to disease and pests. Forest cover in the Essex region is low, and typically disparate. The goal of ERCA's Forestry Program is to plant site-appropriate native tree species and in the most ecological and environmentally practical locations, taking the greatest care to ensure survival by preparing the planting site and monitoring growth until the trees reach a sustainable maturity.

Forest management efforts involve gathering background information, developing management objectives (managing for health, wildlife, and diversity), conducting a forest inventory (species present, stocking levels, ELC plots), developing and evaluating management options, and

developing and implementing a management plan. ERCA's vision for forest management includes:

- Managing biodiversity (variety and variability among living organisms and the ecological complexes in which they occur);
- Health and sustainability (diversity of age classes, removing dead/diseased trees);
- Protection of Species at Risk (species like Butternut and Kentucky Coffeetree are intolerant to shade; opening the canopy will help them thrive);
- Environmental benefits (carbon sequestration, pollutant sinks);
- Recreation (walking trails);
- Participation in the Managed Forest Tax Incentive Program (MNRF program where managed forest area is taxed at 25% of the municipal); and
- Mitigating climate change (increased carbon storage; ERCA, 2009).
- Hazard Tree management as a risk management activity for public safety.

Invasive Species Management

Invasive species are non-native species that cause harm to the environment, economy, or human health. Invasive species have higher tolerance to external factors such as temperature, humidity, and soil moisture, making them more successful in crowding out and killing native species. These species outcompete native species for resources, alter habitat structure and function, disrupt ecological processes, and lead to the decline or extinction of native species. Their spread can cause damage to industries that rely on those environments, create increased management and control costs, and have negative impacts on tourism.

It is crucial to prevent the spread of invasive species through early detection and rapid response, but once established, there are five principal control methods (Manning and Miller, 2011; CWS, 1995):

- Biological control (introducing living organisms into populations of an invasive species to reduce the reproductivity capacity and density);
- Chemical control (the use of herbicides and pesticides);
- Cultural control (preventative methods; planting pest-resistant crops, soil solarization);
- Mechanical control (using machines to remove invasive species; mowing, tilling, constructing barriers); and
- Physical control (physical removal of invasive species; hand-pulling plants, trapping animals, flooding/drawdowns);

Common invasive species that are actively controlled in ERCA's Conservation Areas include Common Reed (*Phragmites australis* ssp. *Australis*; Fig. 4), Flowering Rush (*Butomus umbellatus*; prominent at Hillman Marsh Conservation Area), and Glossy Buckthorn (*Frangula alnus*). Autumn

Olive (*Elaeagnus umbellata*) is often controlled by ERCA via a 5-year partnership with the City of Windsor at the Spring Garden Natural Area. This fast-spreading species not only spreads above-ground by seed but also below-ground by root, making it difficult to control and easily preventing native species from thriving.



Figure 6: Invasive Phragmites at the Hillman Marsh Conservation Area during a pilot project to test methods of control (2016).

4.1.3 Conservation Lands Restoration Activities

When opportunities exist, the Conservation Authority will undertake appropriate restoration of lands. Typically, this includes restoration of natural heritage features and ecological functions on disturbed or marginal agricultural lands. This restoration may include afforestation (i.e., tree planting in order to create a woodland/forest), wetland creation, or the planting of tallgrass prairie grasslands/meadows. Restoration plans are created taking into consideration the landscape context of the property being restored, as well as the local site conditions such as soil texture, moisture, and slope.

Due to the low percentage of natural cover within the Essex region, it is essential that ERCA implement habitat restoration wherever possible to work towards completing the regional natural heritage system, in accordance with the Essex Region Natural Heritage System Strategy (ERNHSS).

The following are recent examples of some of the restoration activities ERCA has undertaken.

Collavino Conservation Area

In October 2022, 60.7 hectares of ecologically sensitive wetland habitat was donated for protection to ERCA. The property is a mix of wetland and floodplain near the mouth of the Canard River in Amherstburg. A restoration plan has been successfully implemented by ERCA to

restore the health and function of this wetland. This plan included dyke repairs, constructing infrastructure to manage water levels, and a multi-year *Phragmites* management strategy.



Figure 7: Biological control to tackle invasive phragmites, stems have been injected with the larvae of two moth species.

Hillman Marsh Restoration Plan

The Hillman Marsh Conservation Area, located in Leamington, Ontario, is a barrier-protected coastal wetland and is classified as an Environmentally Significant Area, Provincially Significant Wetland, and an Area of Natural and Scientific Interest. As a part of Carolinian Canada, Hillman Marsh helps to preserve hundreds of rare and endangered species that are seldom seen in Ontario. In 2019, as a result of high-water levels, low ice cover, and limited sediment supply, the barrier beach breached (Fig. 6), and the open marsh is no longer protected from Lake Erie, resulting in impaired water quality, and a loss of most submerged aquatic vegetation, tree cover, and woody vegetation.

In 2022, the Hillman Marsh Restoration Plan was initiated to restore the barrier beach and wetland plant community. Restoration work is currently underway to update the headland at the end of East Beach Road and construct a pilot section of an artificial barrier beach. Future construction efforts will include the full artificial barrier beach comprising of a rock core topped with sand and vegetation, equipped to withstand climate change extremes, protect the wetland ecosystem, and safeguard homes and businesses. Following the construction of the barrier beach, extensive revegetation efforts will take place to enhance wetland structure, function, diversity, and resilience to climate change impacts.



Figure 8: Breached barrier beach at Hillman Marsh Conservation Area (June, 2023; photo courtesy of Wayne King).

Cedar Creek Conservation Area

Cedar Creek Conservation Area contains one of the few remaining riverine wetlands in Essex County, representing a total of 153 hectares (~378 acres) of Provincially Significant Wetland, and 1% of all remaining wetlands in the Essex Region. ERCA recently acquired the Armstrong Property, comprised of 14.8 hectares (~37 acres) of the Cedar Creek Wetland and 128.6 (~318 acres) hectares of surrounding upland (Fig. 7). ERCA has begun to implement plans to undertake forest stewardship practices, including reforestation on the higher elevations of the property to augment the Carolinian forest component of the property, and create forest linkage between the Armstrong Property and previously owned Cugat Property.

The proposed restoration project is ongoing and aims to:

- Restore a diverse, native, Carolinian habitat mosaic (including swamp forest, wetland, riparian and upland meadow habitats);
- Connect and expand upon existing habitat areas in the Cedar Creek watershed, while promoting the recovery of local species at risk; and
- Restore the natural drainage to the existing agricultural fields, while isolating the upstream drainage pattern from lake water.



Figure 9: Aerial imagery of the newly acquired Armstrong Property at Cedar Creek Conservation Area (2023).

4.1.4 Conservation Lands Infrastructure Maintenance

Infrastructure on conservation lands includes boardwalks, towers, trails, etc. that support passive recreation on conservation lands. These items are captured in a separate Asset Management Plan.

4.2 Non-Mandatory Programs and Services

Non-mandatory programs and services (Table 3) include land securement/acquisition as well as the operation of ERCA owned or managed facilities at Conservation Areas which support active recreation and education programming.

Table 2: ERCA's non-mandatory programs and services, along with their sources of funding.

Category 3 Non-Mandatory Program/Service	Source of Funding
Land Securement and Acquisition	Category 3 Non-Mandatory Municipal Cost Apportioning Agreement; Donations; Government, NGO/ERCF Grants
Regional Biological Services	Fee for Service; Government, NGO/ERCF Grants
Holiday Beach Operations	Self-Generated Revenue

<p>John R. Park Homestead (Museum Operations)</p>	<p>Category 3 Non-Mandatory Municipal Cost Apportioning Agreement; Self-Generated Revenue; Donations; Government, NGO/ERCF Grants</p>
---	---

4.2.1 Land Securement and Acquisition

Land acquisition is considered a non-mandatory program and service of the Authority. These activities are funded through support from Municipal Cost Apportionment agreements, donations and external grants. ERCA’s Land Securement Strategy is outlined in section 3.0 above.

4.2.2 Regional Biological Services

Biological services are undertaken on a fee-for-service basis combined with various provincial and federal grants partially supported by non-mandatory municipal funding. Activities include natural heritage technical advice, restoration, and invasive species management on non-ERCA owned properties. To achieve a sustainable future, mitigate climate impacts, expand tree canopy cover, improve water quality, and keep endangered species from extinction in Canada, partnerships must continue with private landowners and local municipalities to restore natural habitats in the region.

ERCA has restored over 163 hectares (~430 acres) of land on public and private property since 2017. These privately owned restoration sites are an invaluable contribution from the community as they further the rehabilitation of the Windsor-Essex-Pelee region. Some examples of these biological services projects include:

- Spring Garden Natural Area Restoration, City of Windsor (2016-present)
- Point Pelee Ecological Connectivity/Restoration Project (2021-present)
 - Sturgeon, Lebo, and Hillman Creeks (Leamington)
 - Sweetfern Woods (Pelee Island)
 - Hillman Marsh (Leamington).

4.2.3 Holiday Beach Operations and Activities

The Province of Ontario, with the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry (MNRF) as its representative, is the legal owner of Holiday Beach Conservation Area, however the site is operated by ERCA via a thirty-year management agreement (2001-2031). The operational costs associated with this site are covered by user fees related to camping, hunting, and cottage rentals; however, revenue generation is not sufficient to fund future capital replacement and major renovation costs.

Although significant investments have been made at this Conservation Area over the past 10 years, utilizing the infrastructure reserve, this funding mechanism is no longer available as operations at this site are now fully non-mandatory. Administration is currently in discussions with MNRF regarding this property and the management agreement.

4.2.4 John R. Park Homestead Operations and Activities

In 2008, ownership of the John R. Park Homestead (JRPH) Conservation Area was transferred from the Province of Ontario to ERCA. This transfer included a number of covenants and obligations regarding operations and preservation/maintenance of the assets at this site, including that:

- the site continues to operate as a Conservation Area and museum;
- the museum meets the Provincial Standards for Community Museums in Ontario; and,
- the site employs a full time Curator, to this purpose.

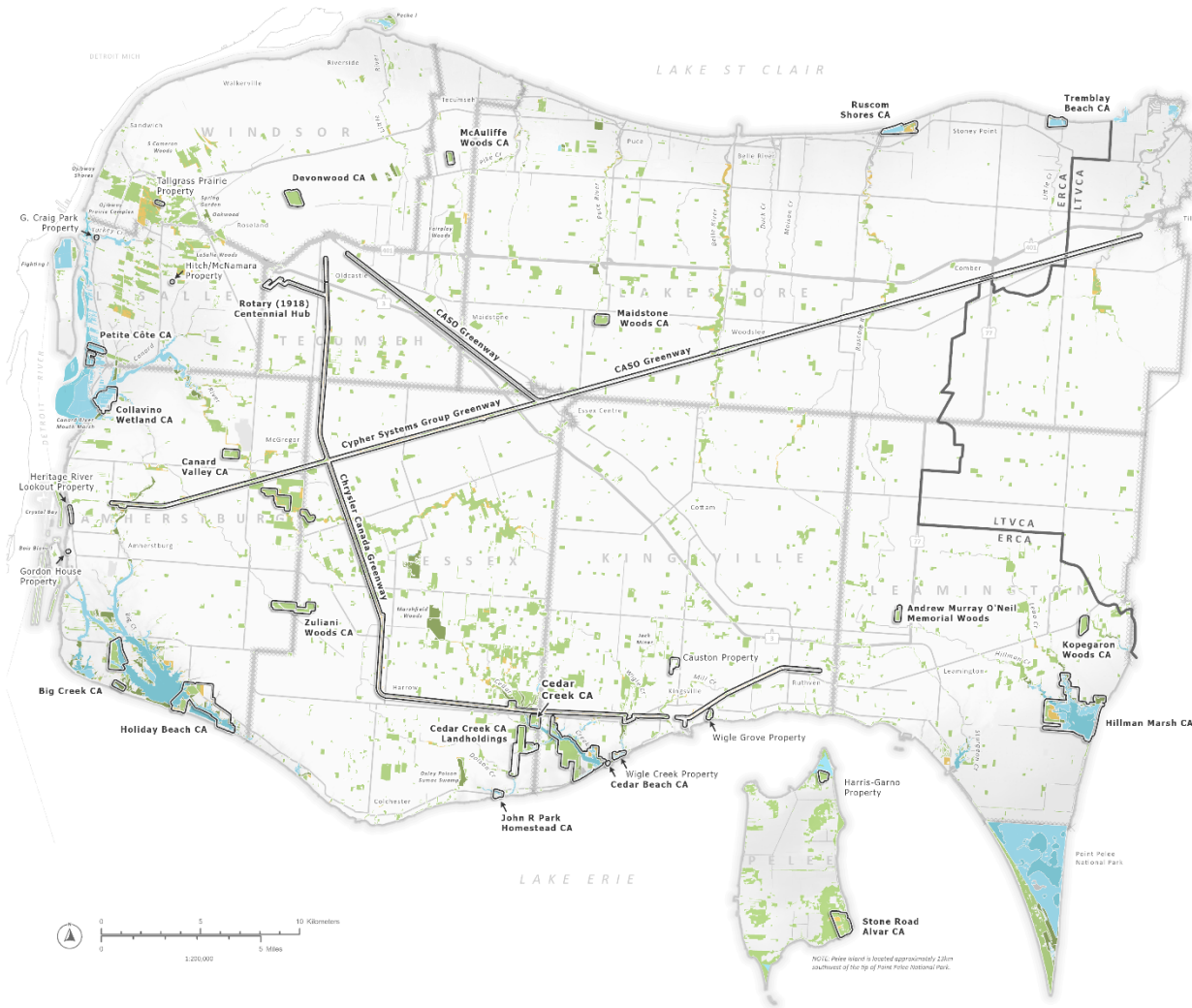
As a result of this encumbrance, ERCA is eligible to apply for the Community Museum Operating Grant from the provincial government. Regardless that maintenance activities of other conservation areas are subject to levy, ERCA has received confirmation from the Minister (MNRF) that the operation and maintenance of the JRPH museum and other heritage buildings, as well as the provision of education programs, are regarded as non-mandatory services.

5.0 Augmentation and Integration of Natural Heritage (O. Reg 686/21,10.(1)3)

The following information assesses how the lands owned and controlled by ERCA may augment any natural heritage and integrate with other federal, provincial or municipally owned lands or other publicly accessible lands and trails within ERCA's area of jurisdiction, in order to meet the requirements of 10.(1)3 of the regulation.

5.1 Augmentation of Natural Heritage

Prior to European Settlement, the Essex region was dominated by lush natural areas including Carolinian woodlands, wetlands, and tallgrass prairies. Since the time of settlement in the 1830's, much of the original natural resources of the Essex region have either been removed from the landscape or had become extremely degraded as a direct or indirect result of clearing and drainage for timber, agriculture, and urban development. This resulted in a degraded ecosystem characterized by a lack of sustainable natural area cover, buffers, large core areas, linkages, and corridors. Our region's remaining natural heritage, consisting of small, isolated remnants of forest, wetland, prairie, savanna, alvar, and riparian habitat, and constitutes one of the lowest percentages of natural cover of any region in Ontario. It has long been realized that this cumulative loss and alteration of the region's natural heritage has had profound consequences on the region's sustainability and ecosystem health, necessitating the need to not only protect and significantly increase the extent of remaining natural habitats, but also enhance the quality of those habitats.



Essex Region Conservation Authority
Conservation Area Strategy

Fig 5.1
**Natural Heritage Features
in the Essex Region**

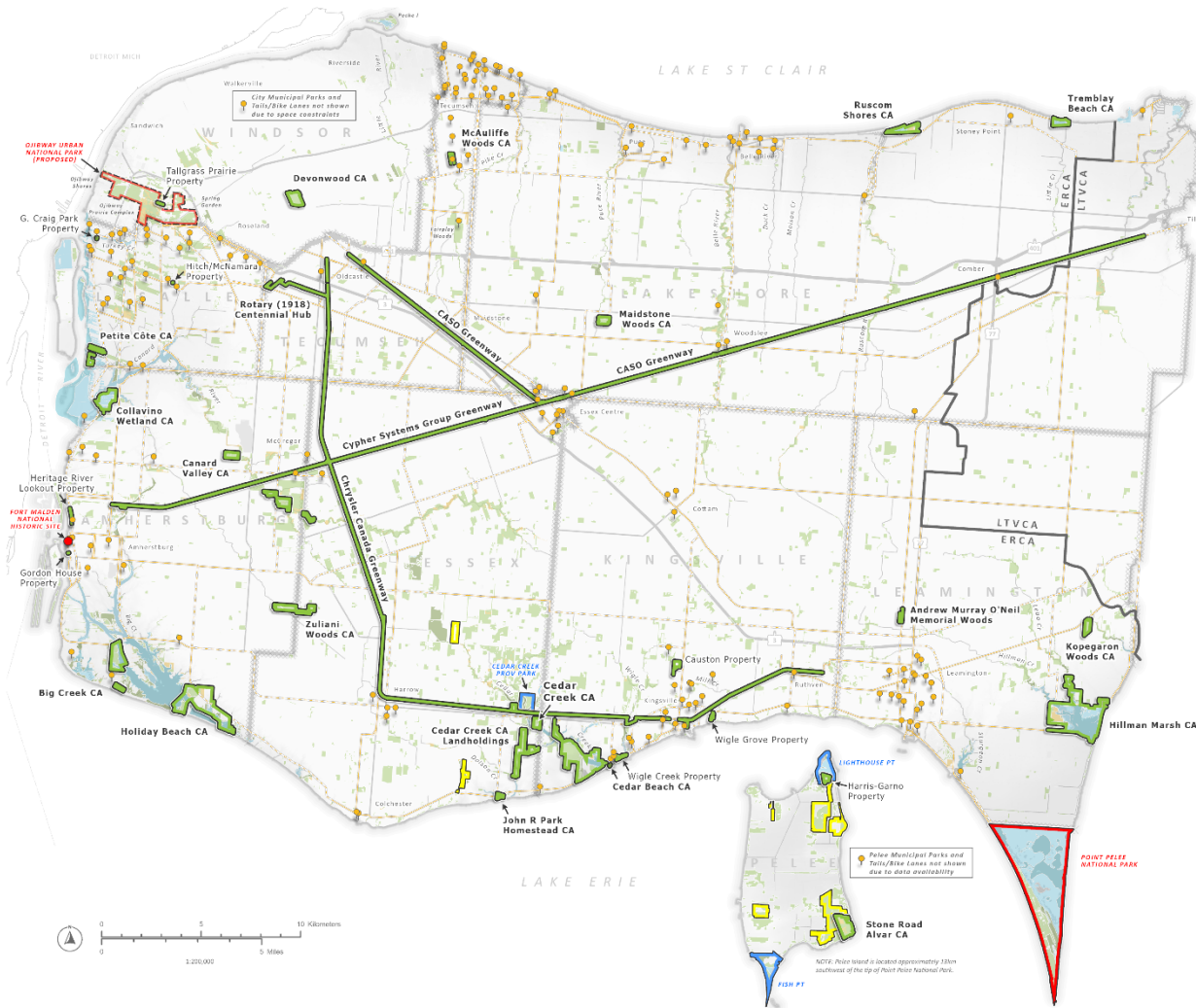
Terrestrial	
5.4%	Forest
0.5%	Other Terrestrial Natural Feature
Wetland	
0.5%	Swamp
1.2%	Marsh
0.9%	Open Water
8.5%	Percent Existing Natural Features in ERCA Watershed

- ERCA Boundary
- ERCA Owned/Managed Land

NOTES:
Data and figures compiled for the Essex Region Natural Heritage System Strategy (ERCA) released by ERCA in 2023.
The extent of existing natural features as shown on the map are approximate. Natural features were delineated from spring 2008 air photography. Wetland features are identified by the Ontario, Queen's Printer 2002. The location and character of these sites are subject to change.



Source: © Essex Region Conservation Authority/ESR - Document/Project/Department/Conservation Area/Conservation Area Strategy/Department/ESR - Natural Heritage/Map 5.1 - Natural Heritage Features in the Essex Region
Compiled by ERCA Geomatics/John Dufour 2024-10-18



Essex Region Conservation Authority
Conservation Area Strategy

Fig 5.2
**Integration of
Conservation Areas
with other
Publicly Accessible Lands**

Publicly Owned/Accessible Land

- Municipal Park
- Trail/Multi Use Path/Bike Lane**
- Existing Route
- Proposed Route
- Significant Public Natural Area**
- Federal
- Provincial
- NCC/Ontario Nature
- ERCA Owned/Managed Land
- ERCA Boundary

NOTES:
Lands represented include lands owned and/or managed by ERCA. Lands represented are for visual reference only, and are not considered legal boundaries. Locations and names are approximate. For a legal survey status of sites is subject to change. Copyright: ERCA 2024.
Other publicly accessible lands are representations for visual reference only and are not meant to show a complete inventory of public lands and are not considered legal boundaries. Data compiled by ERCA 2022.
County trail network source is ONMS 2023. Data copyright the City of Windsor use County of Essex 2024.



Source: © Essex Region Conservation Authority/ESCR - Disclosure/Point Pelee National Park Conservation Area Strategy/Report/Map 5.2 - Adjacent Public Lands/5.2 - CA/Adjacent Public Lands - Trail - 2024/10/04
Compiled by ERCA Geomatics/Tim Dufour 2024-10-18

The Essex region's natural area cover is approximately 8.5% of the total land area (~14,322 hectares). ERCA currently owns/manages approximately 1,800 hectares (~4,448 acres) of these natural heritage features, representing almost 12% of the total existing natural areas within the Essex region. The majority of ERCA's Greenway lands are in the process of regenerating naturally. The total corridor width required for trails is 10 metres, while the actual property width of ERCA's greenways range from 20-30 metres, leaving 10-20 metres of natural heritage linkage and restoration opportunities. The existing and proposed natural heritage corridors available on ERCA-owned trails may assist member municipality's needs to identify natural heritage linkages and corridors as referred to in the Provincial Planning Statement (PPS, 2024) and provides habitat for species at risk and other plants, birds, and wildlife species.

5.2 Integration with other Publicly Accessible Lands

To integrate with other publicly accessible lands, ERCA works closely with other organizations that share similar natural area management goals, such as the Nature Conservancy of Canada, Parks Canada, Parks Ontario, Ontario Nature, and the local municipalities. Recognizing that flora and fauna do not adhere to man-made boundaries, working with these organizations allows for the preservation of as much wetland and natural areas as possible, to create a network of connected, sustainable habitats.

5.2.1 County Wide Active Transportation System

In 2011, in partnership with all local municipalities, the County of Essex initiated a non-motorized active transportation study, which has led to the development of a trail system for both commuters and recreation enthusiasts, utilizing ERCA's Greenways as its backbone. This County Wide Active Transportation System (CWATS) links seven local municipalities with an active transportation network spanning 800 km. In time, CWATS will connect trails in Chatham-Kent to ERCA's Greenways, which also connects to the trail systems associated with the Laurier Parkway within the Town of LaSalle, and the Right Honourable Herb Gray Parkway in Windsor, LaSalle, and Tecumseh. MyCWATS has developed a series of interactive maps to document the trail system through the Windsor-Essex region which can be found here:

<https://www.countyofessex.ca/en/discover-the-county/cwats-maps.aspx>

5.2.2 Stone Road Alvar Conservation Area

The Essex Region Conservation Authority, along with the Nature Conservancy of Canada and Ontario Nature have acquired and protected 244 hectares (~603 acres) of natural land on Pelee Island. This area includes the Stone Road Alvar Conservation Area, a unique and biologically diverse ecosystem. Management efforts include periodic prescribed burns to prevent the natural succession of shrubs from closing in on the savannah communities.

5.2.3. Point Pelee Peninsula

ERCA actively works with Point Pelee National Park (PPNP) to manage the surrounding three watersheds: Sturgeon, Lebo, and Hillman Creeks. Despite its small size, PPNP supports a high diversity of flora and fauna, including many species at risk (at least 64 federally listed under SARA). About 5 km north of PPNP, within these watersheds, is the Hillman Marsh Conservation Area, which supports over 100 species of marsh, shore, and field birds in its diverse habitats.

Working with PPNP ensures the conservation of these watersheds as a natural corridor between these two ecologically diverse locations.

In 2013, ERCA developed the Essex Region Natural Heritage System Strategy (ERNHSS) to map existing natural heritage features and to prioritize habitat restoration opportunities within the region. The ERNHSS applied a broad, landscape level natural heritage modeling exercise that utilized ERCA's Geographic Information System. In 2020, ERCA entered into an agreement with PPNP/Parks Canada to provide updates to this mapping as well as to typify the vegetation communities using the Southern Ontario ELC system. The results identified that only 10% of this area is covered by natural vegetation types, and that these areas are poorly connected.

In 2021, ERCA and PPNP collaborated on the Ecological Connectivity/Restoration Project in order to identify and prioritize areas for potential terrestrial and wetland restoration and conservation in the three watersheds.

ERCA and PPNP hold a strong partnership and have open communication to continue to restore local wetlands and natural areas, with a goal of creating a network of connected habitats.

6.0 Land Use Categories (O. Reg 686/21,10.(1)4)

This section details information relating to the establishment of land use categories for the land inventory described in section 6.0, based on the types of activities that are engaged in on each parcel of land or other matters of significance related to the parcel, in order to meet the needs of 10. (1) 4. of the regulation.

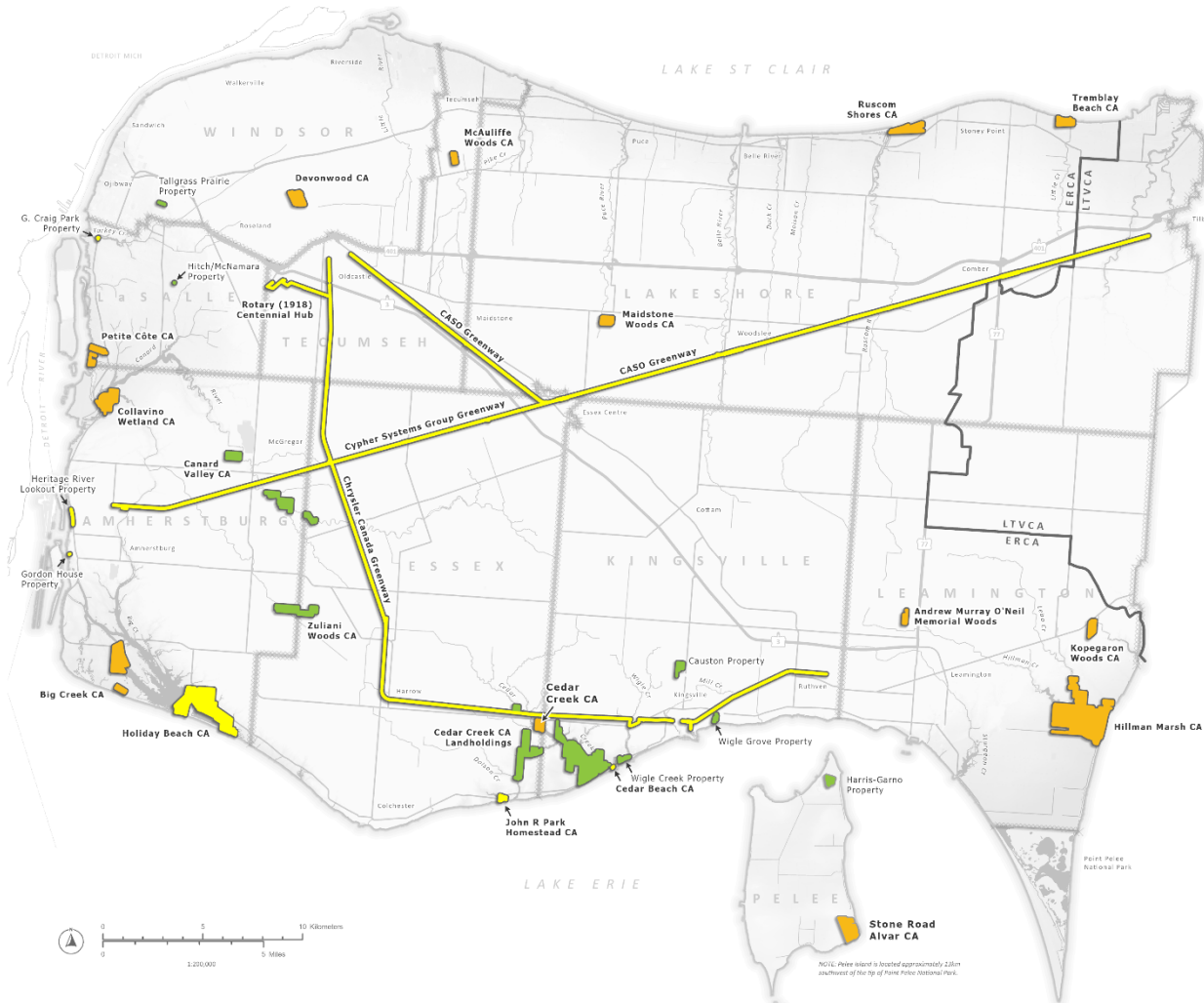
6.1 Classifying Conservation Areas

A Conservation Areas Classification System is a framework for identifying, planning, and managing different kinds of Conservation Areas for the long-term. This approach has the capacity to maintain ecological processes critical to conservation, ensure important lands are managed and protected for future generations, direct and guide management actions and restoration, and help decision-makers consider Conservation Area options in light of competing resources and visitor demands.

A Classification System assigns Conservation Areas to different, defined categories that reflect the emphasis or primary purpose of the Conservation Area, their roles, overall character, and the extent of visitor use and development permitted within them. There are three proposed classifications for Essex Region Conservation Areas:

- Management Areas (public accessibility varies and may be limited/prohibited);
- Conservation Areas - Passive Recreation (accessible to the public); and,
- Conservation Areas - Active Recreation (accessible to the public).

Fig 6.1
Land Use Categories
(O. Reg 686/21,10.(1)4)



Conservation Areas	CA - Active Recreation		CA - Private Recreation Management Areas
	CA - Active Recreation	CA - Private Recreation	
1. Andrew M O'Neil Memorial Woods			
2. Big Creek CA			
3. Canard Valley CA			
4. Cedar Beach CA			
5. Cedar Creek CA			
6. Cedar Creek CA Landholdings			
7. Collavino Wetland CA			
8. Devonwood CA			
9. Hillman Marsh CA			
10. Holiday Beach CA			
11. John R Park Homestead CA			
12. Kopegaron Woods CA			
13. Mauliffe Woods CA			
14. Mauliffe Woods CA			
15. Petite Côte CA			
16. Ruscom Shores CA			
17. Stone Road Alvar CA			
18. Tremblay Beach CA			
19. Zulfani Woods CA			
Greenways			
20. CASO Greenway			
21. Charles Canada Greenway			
22. Cypher Systems Group Greenway			
23. Rotary (1918) Centennial Hub			
Properties			
24. Causton Property			
25. Gordon House Property			
26. Harris-Garno Property			
27. Hillman Marsh Property			
28. Hitch/McNamara Property			
29. G. Craig Park Property			
30. Tallgrass Prairie Property			
31. Wigle Creek Property			
32. Wigle Grove Property			

NOTE:
Lands represented include lands owned and/or managed by ERCA. Lands represented are for visual reference only, and are not considered legal boundaries. Locations and extent are approximate. For a full survey status of sites is subject to change. Copyright ERCA 2024.

Conservation Area Index document as of 2024.

USA MI ON OH

Essex Region Conservation Authority
the place for life

Essex Region Geomatics

Source: C:\Users\laurie\OneDrive\Essex Region Conservation Authority\GIS - Documents\Projects\Conservation Areas\Conservation Area Strategy\SupportMap 6.1 - CA Land Classification\Map 6.1 - CA Land Classification - 11/17 - 2023/10/26.aprx
Compiled by ERCA Geomatics Team (Date: 2023-10-18)

6.1.1 Management Areas

Management areas have high ecological significance, encompassing Environmentally Significant Areas, habitats for Species at Risk, and other critical natural regions. The primary purpose of these areas is the protection of natural habitats and their inhabitants and are to be maintained or improved as natural heritage features.

Due to their sensitive nature, these sites have restricted public use to prevent disturbances and maintain the ecological integrity of the site for future generations. Consequently, management areas do not support public infrastructure but are instead protected and managed for the maintenance of biodiversity, its contribution to broader landscape connectivity, as well as its intrinsic natural heritage value to society.

Typical activities within these sites include research, ecological restoration, invasive species management, forest management, and projects benefiting Species at Risk. Public use of the site is limited to research and other activities deemed appropriate through the completion of a management plan such as controlled hunting to manage overpopulation, and invasive species removal to protect native biodiversity.

6.1.2 Conservation Areas – Passive Recreation

Passive Recreation Conservation Areas form a large percentage of ERCA's Conservation Areas, playing a crucial role in both the protection of natural heritage features as well as the provision of low intensity, passive recreational and educational opportunities. Passive Recreation Conservation Areas are maintained but do not have onsite direct support or supervision of staff employed by ERCA or by another body.

These areas are designed to facilitate activities with low environmental impact, including hiking, birdwatching, picnicking, and occasionally swimming, providing that they do not interfere with plant and wildlife populations. These areas also may serve as living classrooms for environmental education, offering opportunities for self-guided learning, as well as formal education programs and field trips.

6.1.3 Conservation Areas – Active Recreation

Active Recreation Conservation Areas support a variety of outdoor recreational activities that accommodate large numbers of people. These areas are equipped with related infrastructure such as campgrounds, trails, picnic areas, and heritage buildings, all provided with the direct support or supervision of staff employed by ERCA or by another body.

This classification also includes properties or buildings that have been designated under the Ontario Heritage Act and possess significant local or provincial historical value. The primary activities at these historical sites are historical preservation, research, and education/interpretation. By maintaining these sites, ERCA not only preserves important cultural landmarks, but also educates the public about the relationship between past cultures and their dependency on natural resources.

Table 3 illustrates the priority levels for conservation and protection, visitor experience, and heritage appreciation and education across the different classifications. Regardless of the

varying intensity of use associated with the different site classifications, all activities within these areas must comply with Species at Risk legislation and natural/cultural heritage values. Public use is carefully managed through Management Planning and site-specific zoning.

Table 3: The three classifications of Conservation Areas, and how each purpose is prioritized (high, medium, or low priority).

Purpose	Classification		
	Management Areas	Conservation Areas - Passive Recreation	Conservation Areas - Active Recreation
Conservation and Protection	High	High	Medium
Visitor Experience	Low	Medium	High
Heritage Appreciation and Education	High	Medium	High

6.2 Site-Specific Zoning

Most of ERCA’s properties sites include a variety of natural and cultural features and landscapes that together, contribute to the goals of an individual conservation area and the Conservation Authority. Site-specific zoning defines these different areas and describes appropriate uses for them, allowing for the protection of natural values or the development of recreational activities. The occurrence of sensitive or rare habitats or species can dictate the application of very restrictive zoning in order to limit or exclude any type of activity that may impact those sensitive values. There are five zones for ERCA’s Conservation Areas: Ecological Protection, Natural Heritage, Access, Development, and Cultural Heritage.

6.2.1 Ecological Protection Zone

The purpose of an Ecological Protection Zone is to ensure the protection of species and their habitats, to continue their presence in the Essex region. For this reason, management of valued natural features is encouraged, invasive species elimination or control programs should be developed and implemented when feasible and practical, and non-disruptive research is permitted, when it contributes to the scientific knowledge of the site. To discourage public access and disturbance, there are typically no visitor facilities or structured visitor services, and activities such as canoeing, kayaking, controlled hunting, and nature appreciation are limited but permitted through the management plan, and no other activities are permitted.

6.2.2 Natural Heritage Zone

Natural Heritage Zones protect significant natural features that represent the various forms of flora and fauna found in the Essex region. To protect natural features, a management plan and invasive species elimination or control programs are encouraged. Non-disruptive research is permitted, when it contributes to the scientific knowledge of the site. Where appropriate, these sites are utilized for facilitating passive day-use activity that allows for nature appreciation and

enjoyment, such as hiking, photography, canoeing and picnicking. Controlled/regulated hunting is only permitted through a site-specific management plan.

6.2.3 Access Zone

Access Zones within both Passive and Active Recreation Conservation Areas usually include a public parking lot and signage. However, in Conservation Areas classified as Management Areas, an access point may not be signed or suitable for the general public. It could simply be a gravel path for staff access or access for the limited permitted uses allowed within Management Areas.

6.2.4 Development Zone

Within Active Recreation Conservation Areas, development zones are able to allow for access to natural settings for larger numbers of people. These sites include parking areas, campgrounds, trails, beaches, large picnic areas, buildings, and other structures that facilitate both day use and overnight activities. Infrastructure such as roads, buildings, water lines and waste disposal systems should be in place to accommodate use of these sites. Controlled hunting is only permitted through a site-specific management plan, educational programs are encouraged, and non-disruptive research is permitted as long as it contributes to the scientific knowledge of the site.

6.2.5 Cultural Heritage Zone

The Conservation Authority owns and manages two sites designated under the Ontario Heritage Act. The primary purpose of these sites is to protect and preserve the significant historical features and to promote an understanding of the natural and cultural history of the region by conserving and exhibiting the buildings and collections for the public and delivering innovative education programs. Appropriate day-use activities, such as photography and picnicking, are permitted and encouraged at these sites, but controlled hunting is not. Facilities/infrastructure (buildings, water lines, and waste disposal systems) may also be in place to accommodate the use of these sites.

7.0 Review Process (O. Reg 686/21, 10.(1) 5)

Periodic reviews are essential to ensure the objectives, goals, and actions laid out in the Conservation Area Strategy are adapting with changing environmental conditions and challenges, as well as changing laws and regulations. Periodic reviews also provide the opportunity to review the outcomes of the goals and their associated actions, to evaluate successes and failures and allow for accountability and continuous improvement.

7.1 Public Consultation

Public engagement for the Conservation Area Strategy was undertaken in two phases. The first phase involved posting information regarding the development of the strategy and the associated regulatory requirements of Ontario Regulation 686/21 on the ERCA's dedicated website for the Conservation Area Strategy.

The second phase of the consultation process involved the circulation of the draft Conservation Area Strategy to the ERCA's Conservation Advisory Board and the ERCA's Board of Directors

prior to the strategy being made available for broader consultation. The intent of the circulation of the draft strategy was to provide an overview of the regulatory requirements and how ERCA staff had completed the document to incorporate these requirements. At this stage, the document will benefit from a broader review and will incorporate comments received through the consultation in order to complete a final strategy.

7.2 Periodic Review

Ontario Regulation 686/21 requires a process for the periodic review and updating of the Conservation Area Strategy including procedures to ensure stakeholders and the public are consulted during the review and update process. In this regard, the Conservation Area Strategy should be reviewed within a year after the appointment of a new Board of Directors for the ERCA. This timing allows for consideration of environmental, social and economic impacts while also aligning with the municipal election cycle in Ontario. A review can also be undertaken within the four-year period noted to address significant issues if they arise.

Stakeholder and public consultation will be undertaken during the above noted review periods to ensure awareness and transparency regarding the Conservation Area Strategy.

References

[Conservation Authorities Act, R. S. O. 1990, c. C.27](#)

[O. Reg. 686/21: Mandatory Programs and Services](#)

Canadian Wildlife Service, Environment Canada. (1995). *Invasive Plants of Natural Habitats in Canada*.

Essex Region Conservation Authority. (2009). *ERCA Forestry Manual*.

Essex Region Conservation Authority. (2009). *ERCA Tree Risk Management Program for the Essex Region Conservation Authority*

[Essex Region Conservation Authority. \(2016\). *Sustaining the Place for Life: Strategic Plan \(2016-2025\)*](#)

Essex Region Conservation Authority. (2021). Point Pelee National Park Ecological Connectivity/Restoration Project, a Report to Parks Canada

Manning, S. & Miller, J. (2011). Manual, Mechanical, and Cultural Control Methods and Tools. In *Invasive Plant Management Issues and Challenges in the United States* (pp. 231-244

Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry. (2017). *RX100 Low Complexity Prescribed Burn Worker*

Appendices

Appendix A: Public Consultation

In Summer/Fall 2024, ERCA conducted a series of public consultation and community engagement efforts to promote awareness of the Conservation Area Strategy, with a goal to seek feedback and support from the local community, understand priorities regarding Conservation Area use, foster a sense of community involvement by encouraging feedback and participation in the decision-making process, and increase use, perception, and appreciation of Conservation Areas.

Engagement and consultation efforts began with a survey that gathered feedback on the initial draft of the goals and objectives. This survey was released on July 25, 2024, and was shared on ERCA’s [website](#), through a press release (sent out to 55 different media outlets, newspapers, and journalists), and social media. Various newspapers and news stations picked up the story, including [AM800](#), and [Windsor News Today](#). This survey received 71 responses, gathering insight on frequently visited Conservation Areas, support for the goals and objectives, and general feedback.

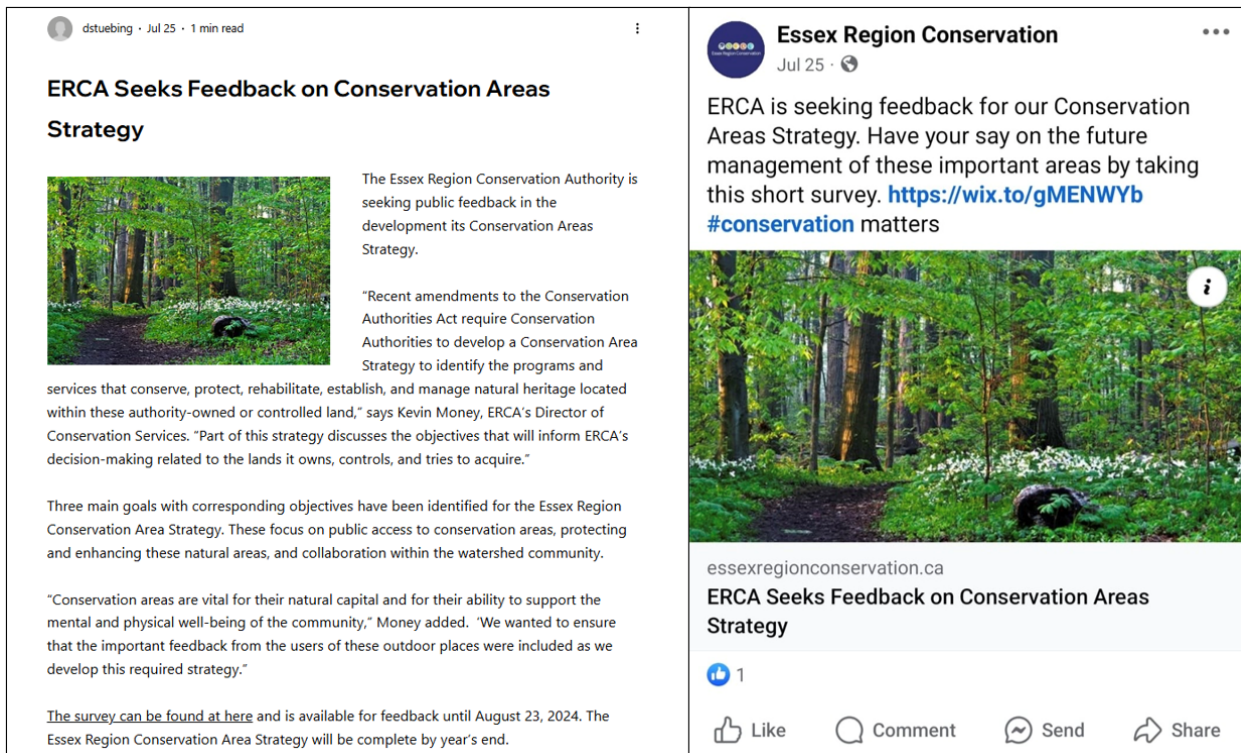


Figure 1: ERCA’s website post (left) and Facebook post (right) advertising and inviting feedback through the first survey.

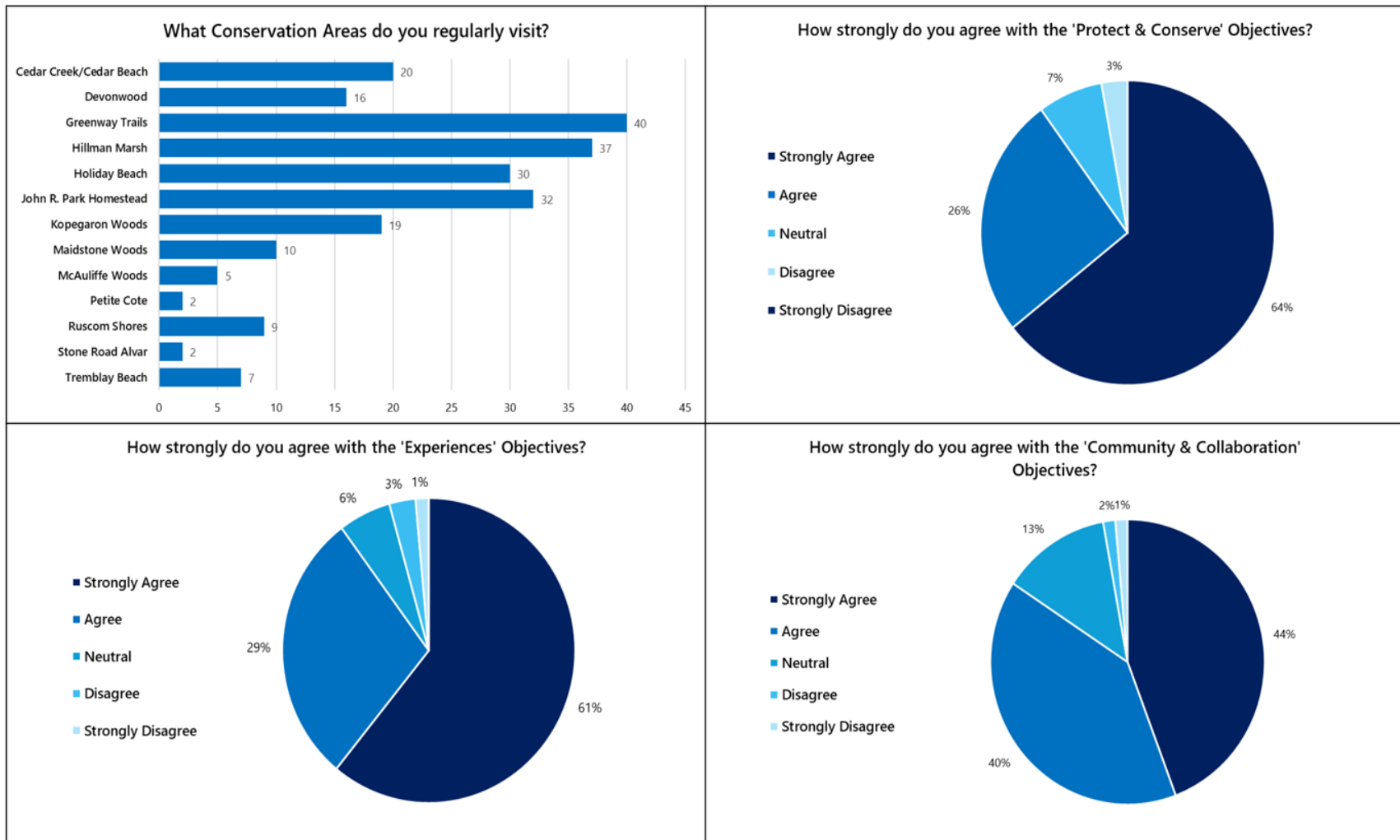


Figure 2: Feedback from the first round of surveys, gathering information on most frequently visited Conservation Areas and support for the goals and objectives.

Table 1: Key/common feedback received from the first survey.

Survey Question	Key Feedback
<p>In your opinion, is there anything missing from the 'Experiences' objectives?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Improved/increased access for active transportation - Increase accessibility (more benches and signs, non-disruptive access, ensure walker/wheelchair accessibility) - Signage to explain observations and rules for interacting with flora and fauna - Offer free or by-donation access - Safeguard natural areas from development
<p>In your opinion, is there anything missing from the 'Protect & Conserve' objectives?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Expand efforts to protecting ecosystems outside of Conservation Areas - Increase invasive species control efforts - More tree planting - Petition for funding to eliminate waterfront septic systems and replace with leak free sewer systems to help improve water quality - Promote environmentally friendly break walls and waterway edging
<p>In your opinion, is there anything missing from the 'Community & Collaboration' objectives?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increase the amount of press releases and newspaper prints rather than just posting on social media - Introduce more mix use trails (ATV, bicycle, and stroller friendly) - Implement historic plaques on ERCA managed land indicating land use change over time and/or indigenous heritage - Ensure various levels of government are aware of the long-term impacts of climate change - More direct involvement with Indigenous communities - Collaborate often with other "park" agencies (Parks Canada, Ontario Parks, municipal parks)
<p>With respect to all of the Goals and Objectives, is there anything that has been overlooked?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Implement light pollution control - Create a local shuttle service to Conservation Areas from pick up/drop off spots throughout Essex County - Focus heavier on environment than community/public engagement

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lobby the importance of local Conservation Authorities with provincial government - Add focus to conserving mature habitat, not just planting new trees and expanding
<p>Is there anything else you would like to add?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Keep Conservation Areas free of seasonal decor for bird safety - A lot of people don't know what ERCA does, campaign to educate locals and in turn receive their support

From these surveys and further refinement to align with legislative requirements, the goals and objectives were streamlined and sent out for another round of public consultation. A draft of the Conservation Area Strategy was uploaded to ERCA's [website](#) and a feedback form was provided. Two public open house sessions were held on November 13th, with an in-person session from 1:00pm-3:00pm and a virtual session from 6:00pm-7:00pm. The open houses included informative posters and graphics, a presentation, and a Q&A session. The open houses were advertised through ERCA's [website](#), a press release, email newsletter, and social media. Various newspapers and news stations picked up the story and advertised it as well, including the [Kingsville Times](#), [AM800](#), and [Windsor News Today](#).

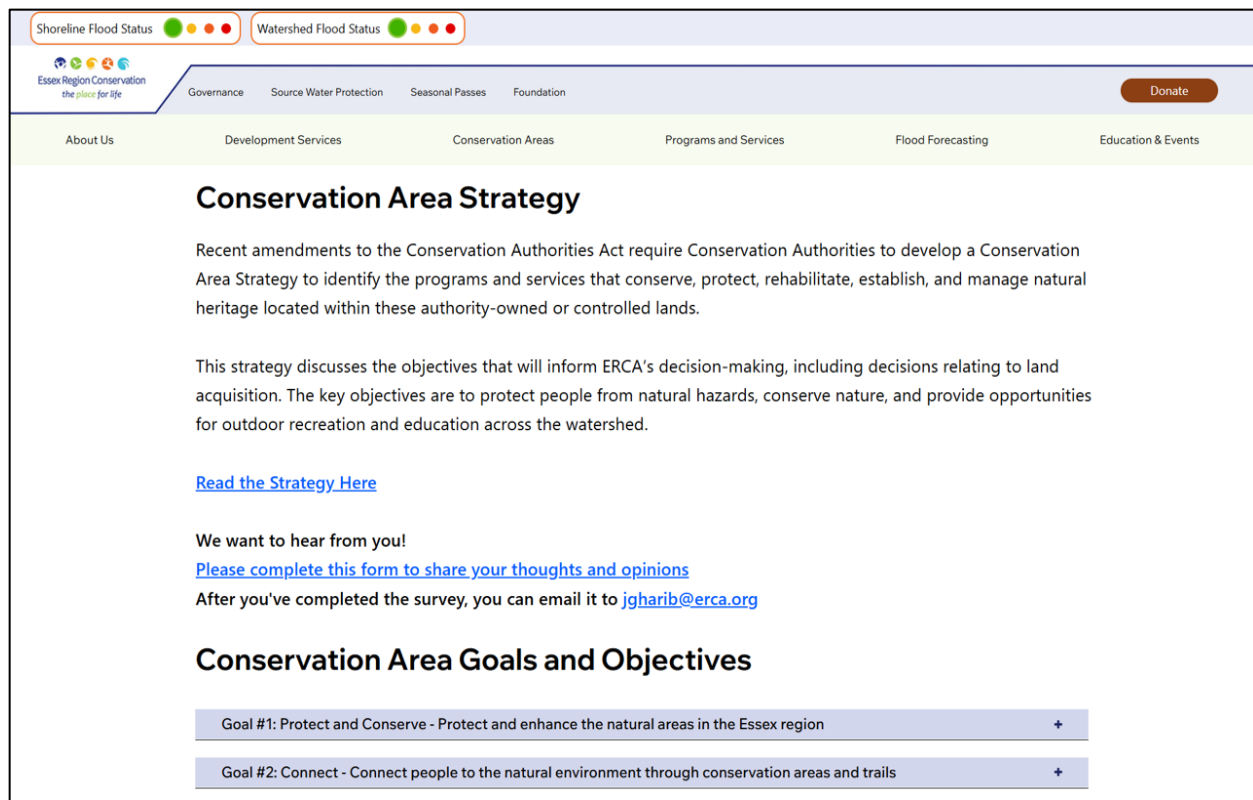


Figure 2: Conservation Area Strategy webpage, includes a link to read the draft copy and a feedback form.

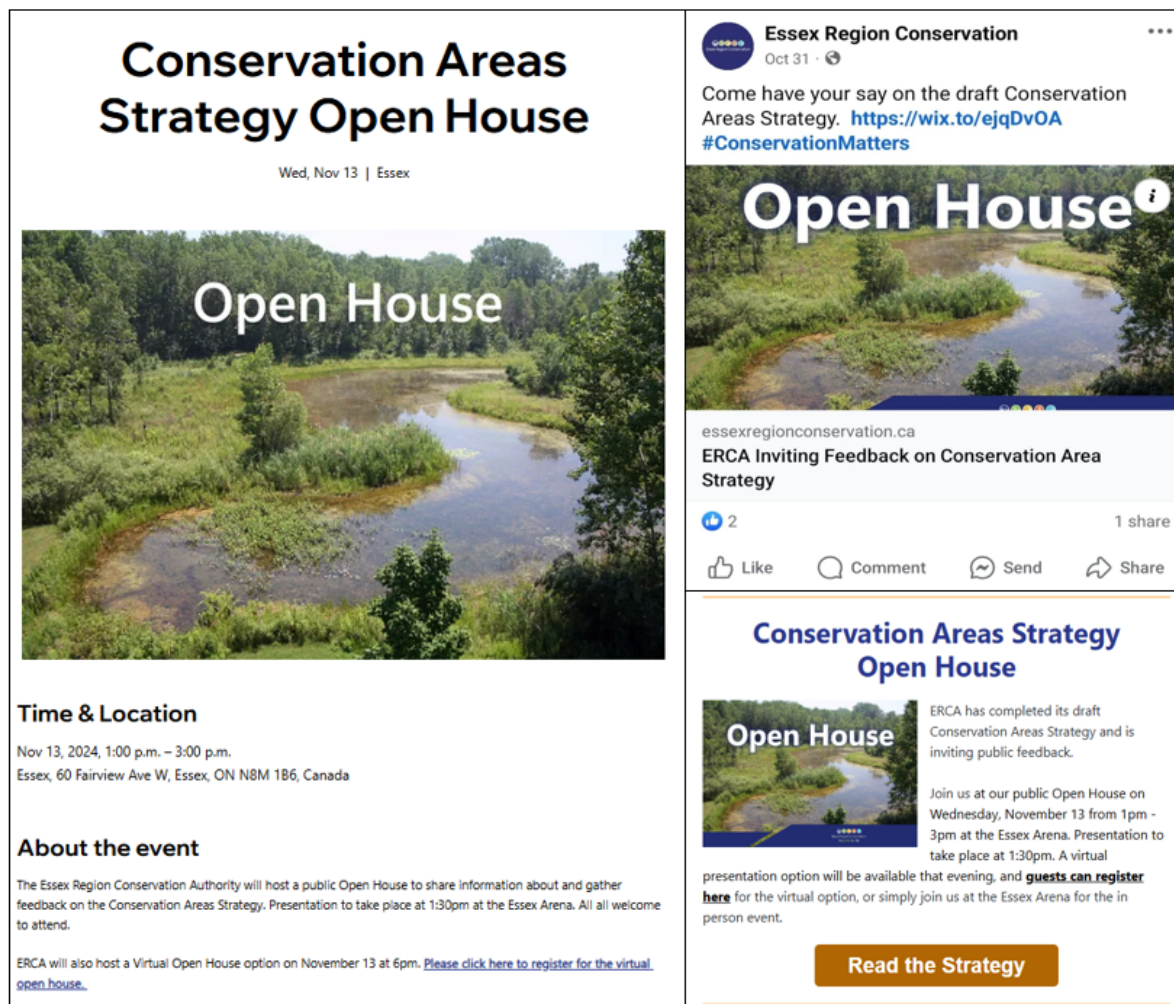


Figure 3: ERCA’s webpage (left), Facebook post (top right), and press release (bottom right) advertising and inviting the public to the Open House sessions.

The second round of public consultation did not receive as much traction as the first survey, with a total of 9 participants between both open house sessions. Across both sessions and all participants, there was unanimous support and positive feedback. The presentation prompted numerous questions, which were all focused on the following topics:

- Purpose of the Conservation Area Strategy;
- ERCA’s achievements regarding natural area cover and tree planting;
- What ERCA does with donated/acquired land;
- Development and construction and their impacts on the natural environment;
- The effects of greenhouses and why the region’s water quality is so poor; and
- Invasive species control with specific concerns regarding Phragmites.

Written feedback aligned with that of the first round of surveys: respondents want to see increased community engagement efforts through events, workshops, and school programs, and they want ERCA to prioritize ecological connectivity and conservation in the region.

The concerns raised during the public consultation meetings highlight the importance of addressing a wide range of issues and perspectives. These concerns will be thoroughly reviewed and considered in the decision-making process. This comprehensive approach will help inform well-rounded decisions that reflect both the needs of the community and the broader objectives of the Conservation Area Strategy.

