



Essex Region Conservation

The Essex Region Conservation Authority is a local watershed management agency, incorporated under the *Conservation Authorities Act* (1946). Since our establishment in 1973, we have been dedicated to protecting, restoring, and managing the natural resources of the Essex Region. Today, as one of 36 conservation authorities in Ontario, ERCA is committed to the core founding principles of the *Conservation Authorities Act*: watershed jurisdiction, local decision-making, and funding partnerships.

ERCA works with residents and communities, our nine member municipalities, senior levels of government, and agencies to: increase natural area coverage through tree planting and habitat restoration, improve water quality across our watersheds and our Great Lakes, protect people and property from flooding and erosion, and further our understanding of the environment through science and education. Our goal is a sustainable future, a vibrant economy, and a region we can all be proud of - one where people will want to live, work, play, and invest in.

ERCA At-A-Glance

The Essex Region is an 1,841 square kilometre area of land that spans nine municipalities. It is the southern-most part of the Carolinian Life Zone and contains some of Canada's most significant natural areas. Unlike most other Conservation Authorities, which generally focus on one large watershed, our region includes the watersheds of the Detroit River, Lake St. Clair, and western basin of Lake Erie. It is surrounded by almost 300km of Great Lakes shorelines, the largest freshwater system in the world. The region is blessed with a climate and geography that supports a rich agricultural and industrial tradition that has supported growth in our region. But, there are also significant challenges.

Our landscape has been intensively developed. In 200 years, we've drained more than 95% of our wetlands, lost almost all of our tall grass prairie and cleared more than 90% of our forests. What's left is disconnected and fragmented. Our Great Lakes watersheds are impacted by invasive species, nutrients, phosphorous and blue green algae. The water quality of our rivers and streams is degraded, which impacts aquatic wildlife, increases drinking water treatment costs, and negatively impacts recreational use such as swimming and boating. Changing and unpredictable climate patterns are causing significant flooding, impacting our shorelines, and creating erosion problems. And the frequency of these types of rainfall events are expected to increase.

Indeed, few parts of Canada have been as extensively developed as Essex Region. As a result, planning for growth and resilient communities and climate change will require different strategies and a more integrated approach.



OUR STRATEGIC DIRECTION

The **Place for Life** reinforces that all elements of a place are interconnected – our community, its environmental health, healthy lifestyles for our citizens, and our economy. Life recognizes our living, thriving and sustainable natural systems. Life refers to the people of our community – their health and protection and our shared heritage. We embrace this place and make it our home. For life.

We **envision** Essex Region as a sustainable, resilient and vibrant place with healthy and thriving watersheds, Great Lakes and a green culture.

Our **mission** is to improve our environment to enrich our lives.

ERCA delivers its programs and services to municipalities and residents in keeping with the *Conservation Authorities Act* (1946). Our 2016-2025 Strategic Plan: Sustaining the Place for Life provides the basis for our decision-making and priorities over the decade in five key areas:

1. **The climate will continue to change.** Efforts to slow climate change must continue, but we need to help our partners prepare to adapt to its impacts.
2. **The Great Lakes are our most significant natural resource.** Our 2017 Watershed Report Card identified failing grades in virtually every watershed. More must be done to protect and improve water quality.
3. **Our habitats are among the most significant in Canada.** We have planted more than 6 million trees and achieved 8.5% natural area coverage. But more action is needed to reach our 12% target.
4. **Our urban areas will continue to grow and expand.** ERCA will need to continue to work with all partners to plan sustainable communities that reduce urban sprawl, are walkable, have a healthy food supply and incorporate green infrastructure.
5. **ERCA is a sustainable, resilient and valued agency.** To achieve a state of sustainability for the Essex Region, ERCA must be sustainable as an organization

SUSTAINING THE PLACE FOR LIFE

Conservation Authorities are recognized for their efforts to address regional challenges through integrated watershed planning and management. The recently updated *Conservation Authorities Act* changes the way conservation authorities deliver programs and services, but continues to recognize that the objects, or mandate, of Conservation Authorities remains conservation, restoration, development and management of natural resources, which we do on a watershed basis.

As an integrated watershed management agency, our business is built on programs and services that support our region's ecological, social, and economic health. ERCA's staff that are recognized experts across numerous professional fields and while we have a long and accomplished history as expert practitioners, we don't do it alone. We are continually establishing and reaffirming partnerships at every level to support our vision and mission, which we deliver through five Service Areas described below with highlights for 2020.

WATERSHED MANAGEMENT SERVICES

Watershed Management Services ensures that development in the Region progresses in a sustainable manner, is directed away from natural hazards, protects natural heritage features, and protects our water resources.

- Update ERCA's Place for Life Policies to reflect recent changes to the *Conservation Authorities Act* (2017, 2019) and current provincial direction and best practices.
- Negotiate Municipal Memorandums of Understanding to provide clarity around ERCA's involvement in plan input and planning applications under the *Planning Act*.
- Undertake a 3rd party Fee Analysis including engagement with municipalities, the development sector and the Windsor Essex Economic Development Corporation.
- Continue to improve client services by seeking ways to reduce review timelines in keeping with Conservation Ontario Client Services Standards guidelines.
- Coordinate regional Hazard Mapping/Risk Assessment Scoping and Prioritization program with Municipalities, City of Windsor and County of Essex

- Assist in the development of Shoreline Management Plans in Lakeshore, Leamington and lead the Little River Hazard Mapping study at the request of Windsor
- Work with partners to develop short- and long-term plans to address the existing and expected impacts to our region as a result of current and future water levels, flood and erosion hazards, and climate change.
- Implement upgrades and expansions to the Essex Region Watershed Monitoring network including ERCA and municipal Climate Stations to assist in providing flood response, monitoring and reporting

CONSERVATION SERVICES

ERCA's Conservation Services programs protect, restore, and manage natural heritage areas and systems within ERCA's watersheds.

- Construct new pedestrian bridge over a municipal drain on the Cypher Systems Group Greenway to improve trail safety and not impact aquatic habitat.
- Complete road and facilities improvements, and develop a new wetland/ cycling facility at Holiday Beach (with Amherstburg Community Foundation).
- Finalize design and construct new Heritage Centre and shoreline protection at the John R. Park Homestead.
- Continue to replace entrance signs and directional signs leading to our Conservation Areas and explore opportunities for new or leveraged investment in capital facilities and infrastructure.
- Complete management plans for Cedar Creek and John R. Park Homestead.
- Facilitate the donation of the Collavino wetland to ERCA and the initiation of a management plan to allow the public to enjoy this site.
- Initiate the construction of the Peche Island erosion protection and fish habitat project with partners (City of Windsor, SwimDrinkFish, Environment Canada)

WATERSHED RESEARCH SERVICES

ERCA's Watershed Research Services programs protect our local watercourses and drinking water through increased uptake up of agricultural Best Management Practices, enhanced monitoring and policy implementation.

- Complete 45 Risk Management Plans to address Significant Drinking Water Threats on behalf of municipalities and complete Section 36 Assessment Report, Annual Report, and updates to the Essex Region Source Protection Plan Section.

- Continue development of a regional Phosphorus Management Plan and calculation of phosphorous loading in Leamington tributaries.
- Expand water quality monitoring program with support from the OSCIA through the ONFarm program and MECP, and initiate a new partnership with Agriculture Canada as part of Canada's Living Lab program.
- Develop and implement over 50 nutrient and soil health projects with the farming community.
- Host a 2020 WEC3 workshop series, which will include sessions such as Corporate Energy Planning, Asset Management, and Stormwater Financing to help municipalities prepare and plan for climate change.
- Initiate County-wide Municipal Energy Plan with County of Essex, county municipalities, residents and industry.
- Create the range of tools and implement actions identified in the Climate Change Communications Strategy for shared use amongst all municipalities.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH SERVICES

Community Outreach Services are critical to engaging regional partners in conservation practices toward climate action and a sustainable environment.

- Scale up the pilot Indigenous Education Program to all school boards in partnership with local First Nations
- Expand school-based programs offerings during shoulder season to broaden impact while responding to increasing bussing cost pressures.
- Enhance Citizen Science programs to meet regional environmental objectives, streamline schoolyard greening and corporate engagement events.
- improve nature and heritage event implementation to engage more participants and develop metrics to better evaluate engagement strategies and initiatives.
- Continue to evaluate, innovate and implement improvements across our digital platforms for streamlined and enhanced customer service.

CORPORATE SERVICES

Corporate Services provides leadership and management in the delivery of services central to the successful functioning of the entire organization. Corporate services is an enabling service and supports the other Program areas in the organization.

- Participate in consultations towards the development of new regulations pursuant to the *Conservation Authorities Act* to find the best local solutions to support community resilience.

- Finalize a comprehensive procurement policy to address changing needs and support fair and transparent procurement.
- Update the asset management plan, with long term financial strategy, to ensure a sustainable approach to asset replacement.
- Develop new 5-Year Sustainability/Business Plan to support the Strategic Plan and ensure that ERCA has the appropriate resources and is managed in the most effective and efficient way..
- Develop a succession plan to identify, develop and evaluate organizational needs
- Finalize negotiations for new Collective Agreement
- Beta-test new file management system with Corporate Services and Watershed Management Files.
- Launch an Open Data portal for public access to spatial data holdings and a self-service purpose driven GeoCortex property explorer to aid landowners to determine if their property is subject to ERCA regulations.

FUNDING CONSERVATION

ERCA's 2020 Budget totals \$10,576,317, which includes a total levy contribution of \$3,386,667. This represents an increase of \$148,000, or \$0.49 per person (\$10.00 to \$10.49 per person) though the actual cost per household (\$250,000) decreased by \$0.12 to \$19.57. The levy increase is primarily a result of the decrease in provincial transfer payments relating to the Flood Forecasting program (\$98,000) and costs associated with human resources.

The budget includes \$2.625 million in municipal special project funding, and \$2.6 million in fee for service revenues. Only 14% of ERCA's budget is funded through Federal Grant (10%), Provincial transfer (2% - natural hazards and source water protection) and Provincial grant (1.2% - Detroit River, Museum Operating Grant, Phosphorous monitoring program) funding.

While this builds a strong case for support, more action is needed to improve the health of our watersheds, reduce phosphorous and blue-green algae in our lakes, provide open spaces and trails that are accessible for people to use, connect and restore forests, wetlands and habitats.

These are essential for sustainable communities to build resilience to climate change, and importantly, attracting and retaining the talent this region desires and deserves.



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Essex Region Conservation
the *place* for life

2019



Annual
Report



“ Our programs and services are critically important to addressing serious challenges in the region. ”

A Message From The Vice Chair

There’s no question that 2019 was a year of unprecedented challenges. We were under an extended flood watch from April until October, and communities across our region felt the devastating impacts of 12 separate flood events. ERCA staff worked vigilantly – in some cases around the clock – to monitor conditions, provide warnings and assist in flood responses.

During this very difficult time, the Province of Ontario cut the funding allocation toward flood and erosion protection by 50%. Despite this significant cut, ERCA’s longstanding role in protecting the citizens of Windsor, Essex County and Pelee Island continued to prove crucial to the safety of our region’s residents.

Our programs and services are critically important to addressing serious challenges in the region – land degradation, natural

area coverage, water quality, phosphorous and harmful algal blooms, climate adaptation, and sustainable communities. The conservation areas, greenways and trails ERCA provides are key to our tourism industry, economic development and most importantly, the livability of our community.

As municipalities, we collectively identify the priority projects required within our watershed region through our strategic planning, sustainability planning and annual budgeting processes. Our Board and Administration follow the core principle of the *Conservation Authorities Act*: that people living close to the problems are required to solve them; that an Authority only undertakes programs and projects it could face economically, culturally and democratically. Indeed, a conservation authority like ERCA flourishes because

our residents and communities recognize the critical need for the programs and services we deliver within our watershed region.

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I’d like to extend my heartfelt appreciation to all of the partners, volunteers, residents and stakeholders who have come together this year to help create a more resilient and sustainable future for our region.

It is only by moving forward together, that we can improve our resiliency to climate change and ensure our region is the Place for Life.

Sincerely,
Tania Jobin

Tania Jobin
ERCA Vice Chair



“ *The Conservation Authority model is more relevant today than ever.* ”

A Message From The General Manager

In the 1940s, forestry, agricultural, naturalist and sportsmen’s groups began expressing concern that much of Ontario’s natural resources were in an ‘unhealthy state’ as a result of poor land, water and forestry practices. Though the responsibility for managing natural resources lay with the province, these groups argued that the scale of the problem required a new approach.

The province listened, and in 1946, the *Conservation Authorities Act* was passed, creating a tool that enabled municipalities, in partnership with the Province, to establish a Conservation Authority with a mandate “to provide, in the area over which it has jurisdiction, programs and services designed to further the conservation, restoration, development and management of natural resources other than gas, oil, coal and minerals”. Importantly, the legislation recognized that the

problems and their solutions are integrated, that decisions are best made by those living closest to the problem, and demanded that action be taken on a watershed basis.

Today, we are facing challenges of a similar scale and scope as a result of changes to our landscape. In fact, at a time when Canada is warming nearly twice as fast as the global average, and when we are experiencing catastrophic flooding throughout the region, the effective and efficient integrated watershed management approach taken by ERCA and all Conservation Authorities is more important than ever before.

Solutions to these problems are interconnected and need to be delivered on a watershed basis. Indeed, tree planting and restoration, agricultural stewardship, protecting and monitoring the health of our Great Lakes, a coordinated

approach to addressing climate change, and robust education and outreach programs are all critical to building a healthy and sustainable community that is resilient to change.

This year, in response to changes to the *Conservation Authorities Act* and the structure of program deliver, our Board of Directors, our municipal partners and the community were clear: the Conservation Authority model is more relevant today than ever; and the integrated watershed management approach is vitally important to the future of our region, the health of our residents and the Province of Ontario.

Yours in Conservation,

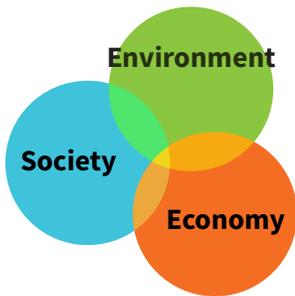
A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Richard J. H. Wyma'.

Richard J. H. Wyma
General Manager / Secretary Treasurer

Integrated Watershed Management

Integrated Watershed Management manages human activities and natural resources on a watershed basis, taking into account social, economic and environmental issues, as well as local community interests. It is the most effective way of managing environmental impacts and our changing climate, and is the approach used by Conservation Authorities across the province.

Integrated Watershed Management:



1. Is watershed-based, informed by science
2. Requires us to manage natural resources and human activities together
3. Considers the interests and needs of not just the environment but also the economy and society because they are connected and impact each other in good and bad ways
4. Relies on an adaptive management approach which establishes a plan, implements the plan, monitors and reports, and then re-evaluates and updates the plan, if necessary
5. Needs collaborative governance at many levels for shared decision-making and priority setting



Watershed Highlights

In 2019, we continued to implement the priorities identified in our Strategic Plan. Our programs and services are delivered using an integrated watershed management approach – recognizing that all elements of the environment, our economy, and our region’s well-being are interconnected and critical to the sustainability of our region. The following highlights are a snapshot of the projects and programs implemented this year to enrich and sustain the Essex Region as *the Place for Life*.



Climate Change

Our region experienced the impacts of our changing climate, perhaps more profoundly than any other in Ontario.

Following a Flood Watch that extended for more than six months, and 12 separate flood events, there's no question that the need to change our actions to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, slow climate change and adapt to its impacts, is more urgent than ever before. This year, in taking action to address our changing climate, we:

Initiated the Windsor Essex Climate Change Collaborative (WEC3) which includes sector-based implementation teams, including Human Health, the Built Environment, Natural Hazards, Agriculture, Nature & Ecosystems, and Energy; and developed a framework for assessing climate change impacts for these sectors.

Monitored record high lake levels and weather conditions resulting in 48 Watershed Condition days, 147 Flood Watch days and 25 Flood Warning days.

Hosted four High Water Information Workshops in Lakeshore, Windsor, Kingsville and LaSalle, facilitating knowledge exchange with over 1,500 residents.

Monitored 30 Climate Stations, including 18 within the City of Windsor. Initiated discussions with Lakeshore and Essex regarding siting and integrating 6 additional stations.

Created a Climate Change Communications Strategy to help stakeholders at all levels understand local impacts of climate change and actions that can be taken toward mitigation and adaptation.

Initiated a project to review tree species choices and utilization of genetic diversity via local or non-local seed, in partnership with the Forest Gene Conservation Association.

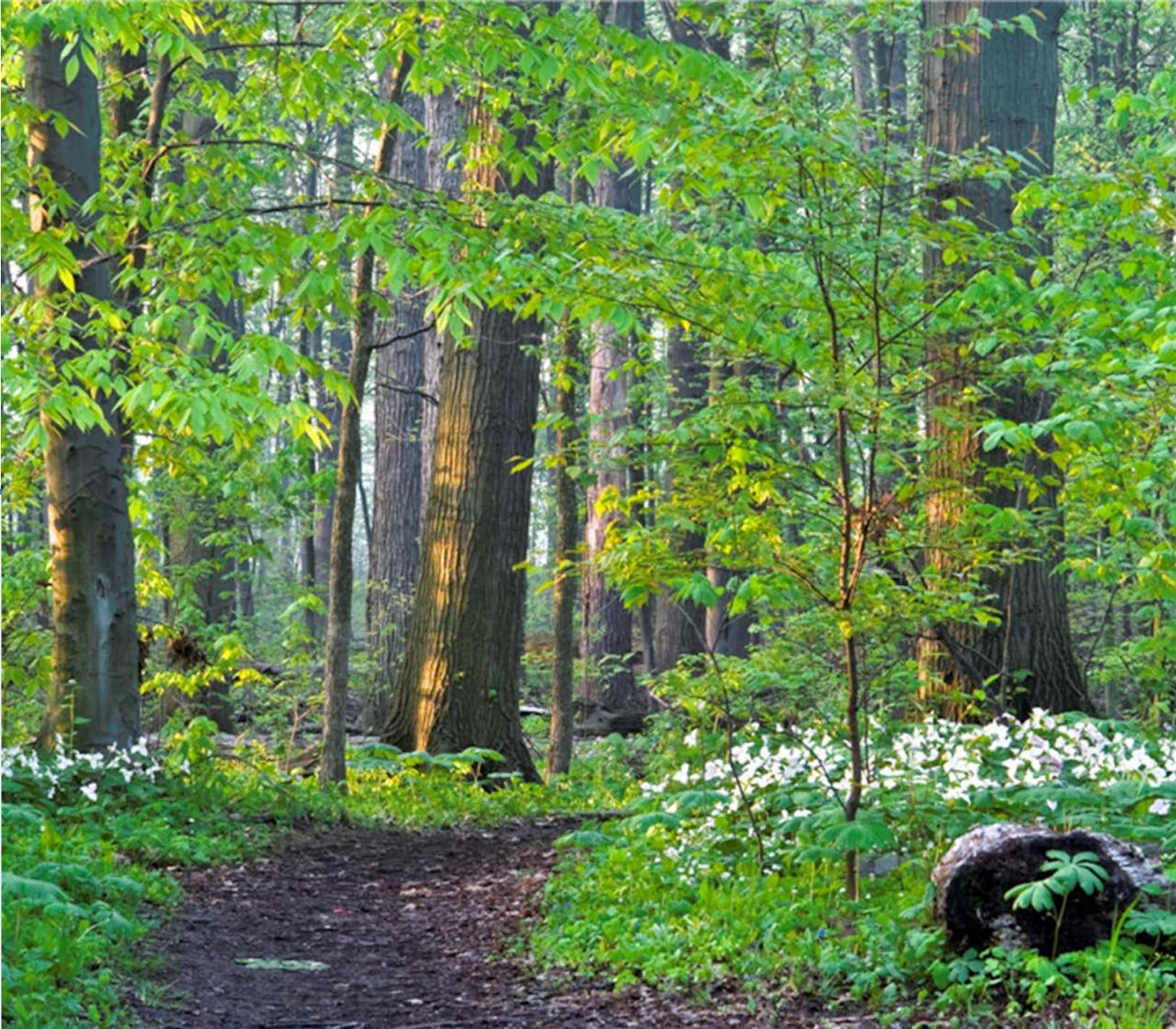
Worked collaboratively with the County of Essex and its seven municipalities to secure funding for a County-wide Community Energy Plan to help advance regional energy conservation priorities and lower emissions.

Hosted a Climate Action Symposium to begin to identify implementation actions and barriers from various sectors impacting and being impacted by Climate Change including municipal energy, natural heritage, and infrastructure.

Responded to high water and clean up after severe storm events at Holiday Beach and along ERCA's Greenways, including the removal of over 500 hazardous trees. High water levels required closure of Tremblay Beach Conservation Area, and areas within Holiday Beach, Hillman Marsh.

Met with Provincial Flood Advisor, and participated in South West Ontario Regional meetings regarding flood management, flood protection and emergency response. Flood Advisor's report includes the recommendation that ERCA and Lower Thames Valley Conservation Authorities work with Windsor-Essex municipalities, Chatham-Kent, and the Provincial and Federal Government to develop a short- and long-term plan to address flooding and shoreline/infrastructure issues in Lake Erie/Lake St. Clair/Detroit River.





“ When I see the projections for what our climate will be like in 2050 and 2080, I think of my daughter, and what it will be like for her. Will the Windsor-Essex community still be her ‘Place for Life’?



I think we can all make a difference, but we need to take urgent climate action and significantly reduce our own impacts, as well as asking our elected officials to put real plans in place to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. This year was a tipping point in awareness, with climate emergency declarations, the devastating spring storms and resulting flooding, and the County of Essex’s leadership in initiating Community Energy Plans. In 2019, there was significant growth in awareness, education and commitment to action that we must continue to build on – with urgency – in the coming years.”

- Claire Sanders, *Climate Change Specialist*

Great Lakes

The Great Lakes are our most significant natural resource.

Land uses, invasive species, and our changing climate continue to negatively impact the health of our Lakes. Our 2012 – 2017 Watershed Report Card identified failing grades for surface water quality in virtually every watershed. More must be done at all levels to protect and improve water quality. This year, to help protect and improve Great Lakes water quality, we:

Monitored surface water quality at 61 sites and groundwater quality at 8 sites across the region. In total, more than 2,500 water quality samples were collected to evaluate watershed health, and calculate nutrient and phosphorous concentrations and loads in partnership with Federal and Provincial Ministries of Environment.

Initiated a Phosphorous Management Plan with support from Environment and Climate Change Canada.

Monitored phosphorous levels impacting Lake Erie at the innovative 10 acre University of Windsor Alumni Association Wetland at Hillman Marsh, in partnership with the University of Windsor Biochemistry department.

Partnered with municipal and provincial implementing bodies to implement 50 policies designed to protect our sources of drinking water.

Completed 28 Risk Management Plans to address Significant Drinking Water Threats on behalf of municipalities.

Initiated required updates to the Essex Region Source Protection Plan and Assessment Report to ensure that our sources of drinking water are protected using the most current information available.

Completed over 25 agricultural Best Management Practices (BMPs) such as cover crops, nutrient management plans and buffer strips on over 500 hectares of land, with support from Environment and Climate Change Canada, as part of the Lake Erie Action Plan to meet phosphorous reduction targets.





“ One of the biggest factors affecting the health of our Great lakes is climate change.



As well, more frequent storm events in the spring are increasing the amount of runoff into our lakes from fields and our landscape. These nutrients feed the algal biomass that we see annually now each summer. It's a massive international problem, and we all have to do our part to be mindful of phosphate-free lifestyles. Using the 4 R's – right time, right rate, right source and right place, as well as implementing best management practices such as cover crops, can reduce the phosphorus running off into our lakes and streams. Phosphorus outputs from municipalities and greenhouses also have to be managed. It's important that we all do our part when it comes to keeping our lakes great.”

- Dr. Katie Stammler, Water Quality Scientist

Landscapes And Habitats

Our landscapes and habitats are among the most significant in Canada.

While we have planted more than 6.5 million trees and increased natural areas coverage from 3.5% to 8.5%, we need to significantly increase the scope and scale of this work to reach our 12% target and to urgently take climate action. This year, ERCA:

Planted almost 60,000 trees on public and private lands, creating an additional 13.5 hectares (35 acres) of new forest habitat despite the rainiest season on record.

Monitored 50 restoration sites demonstrating 85% tree survival rates.

Welcomed more than 100,000 visitors to our conservation areas and greenways to enjoy the outdoor natural and cultural experiences that contribute to community-wide health and well-being.

Introduced 'Greenway Etiquette Guidelines' to promote harmonious shared use of this important trail system.

Hosted 32 outreach events that engaged more than 4,200 regional residents in conservation programs and activities, including creating the Rotary Legacy Forest and the Solcz Family Foundation Forest.

Undertook a Holiday Beach Conservation Area Capital Investment Feasibility Study with Southwest Ontario Tourism Corporation and Tourism Windsor Essex Pelee Island.

Built new boardwalks, resurfaced the road, and began construction of the Enbridge Natural Playground and the University of Windsor Alumni Association Outdoor Classroom at Holiday Beach Conservation Area.

Undertook a shoreline engineering study to identify options to protect the historic John R. Park Homestead buildings.

Strengthened partnerships with First Nations, in order to work more collaboratively and achieve mutual goals.

Continued to monitor for Oak Wilt Disease.

Created new wetland habitat at the Collavino Wetland.

Finalized the Peche Island permitting processes with regulatory agencies.

Continued control of invasive species at Spring Garden Natural Area.

Enhanced Citizen Science Programs included Project Purple, Seed Collection, Garlic Mustard Pulls and Tree Monitoring and Assessment

Revitalized the Youth Engagement Ambassador (YEA) Team and How-To Crew, providing community volunteers with an advanced level of training to assist with proper tree planting techniques during large-scale outreach events.





“ Spring 2019 is the planting season that all foresters and farmers in Southern Ontario want to forget. We received a heavy rainfall each week that prevented the fields from ever drying sufficiently to achieve planting conditions.



As a result, we were unable to plant 20,000 trees that would have created 25 acres of new forest habitat. To try to adapt to these increasingly wet springs, we need to find innovative solutions.

This past fall, we planted 31 acres of planned restoration project lands with cover crops. This will provide traction for our tractors and much needed soil aeration, which will allow us to begin planting trees earlier in spring 2020, regardless of the weather. Ensuring we can carry out our planned tree planting programs is critically important in our region, where we have only 8.5% natural areas. Trees are identified as the most significant ‘natural solution’ to climate change, and so restoration is one of the most important things we can do to take climate action, create habitat and help to mitigate flooding.”

- Rob Davies, Forester

Sustainable Communities

As stated in the Climate Change Emergency declared by the City of Windsor, County of Essex, and many regional municipalities, ‘permanent and robust changes’ to the way we plan our communities are urgently required.

ERCA will need to continue to work with all partners to collaboratively plan sustainable communities that reduce urban sprawl, are walkable, incorporate green infrastructure and are resilient to the impacts of our changing climate. This year, we:

Evaluated 1,305 applications and issued 1,158 permits, including 305 for shoreline maintenance as a result of record high water levels in Lake St. Clair and Lake Erie.

Responded to over 1,300 Miscellaneous Development (MD) inquiries related to questions about property matters, or from prospective purchasers with questions concerning a potential property purchase.

Implemented new Client-centric service standards for high growth area Conservation Authorities and reaffirmed ERCAs Client Services Standards Policy to align with Conservation Ontario Client Services Standards guidelines.

Reviewed 13 Official Plans and secondary plans to ensure local planning decisions address provincial delegated authority responsibilities relative to natural hazards. Continued to advise local municipalities on natural heritage matters.

Reviewed over 800 planning applications under the *Planning Act* (Zoning By-Law amendments, minor variances, consents, etc.). The review of these applications assists landowners and municipalities in reducing risks associated with flooding and erosion and protecting natural heritage, and ensures best practices for sustainable communities are being incorporated into planning and development.

Finalized Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Guidelines with municipal partners to ensure regional consistency.

Finalized Stormwater Management Guidelines with municipalities to ensure a consistent set of standards for managing stormwater designs and submissions.

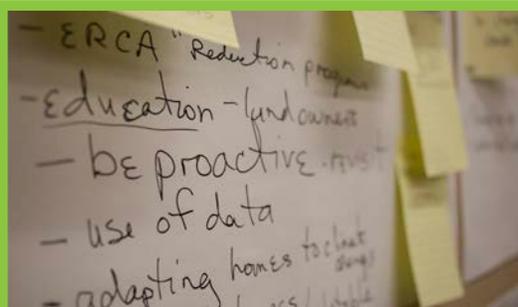
Provided curriculum-based outdoor education for nearly 15,000 elementary and secondary school students, including delivery of Special High Skills Major Certifications.

Improved our web-based permit application process to facilitate development reviews.

Expanded French-language human and natural heritage programs, and created a new interpretive Monarch Life Cycle education program.

Introduced a new pilot Indigenous Education program which was profiled amongst Conservation Authority educators across the Province.

Responded to Province of Ontario’s Environmental Registry policy consultations, including the Made-in-Ontario Environment Plan, *10-Year Review of Endangered Species Act*, Bill 66 (*Restoring Ontario’s Competitiveness Act, 2018*), proposed changes to Conservation Authority permitting and programs and services under Bill 108 (*More Homes, More Choice Act, 2019*), updates to the Canada-Ontario Agreement, and changes to the Provincial Policy Statement, among others.





“ 2019 brought record high water levels to our region that will have lasting impacts on our communities.

For the entire year, we were on guard around the clock, continuously checking water levels, wind direction, short-range and long-range forecasts to alert our municipalities about flood potential. People experienced significant flooding, erosion, financial losses and emotional hardship. Luckily, we were not hit with the 1% chance storm this year, or the results could have been far more catastrophic.



One of the most important outcomes is the growing awareness of what’s at stake if we don’t all make changes to the way we plan our communities. Climate change projections tell us to expect higher highs and lower lows, which brings about challenges that could be far worse than what we experienced this year. Working to avoid flood related impacts is multi-faceted and we are working closely with our member municipalities on Municipal Flooding Emergency Response Plans, updating Floodplain Maps, Shoreline Management Plans, and various other natural hazard mitigation projects. There is still a lot to do, but we’re on the right track.”

- James Bryant, Water Resources Engineer

A Strong, Resilient Organization

ERCA is a sustainable, resilient and valued agency.

Since 1973, ERCA has been striving to achieve a state of sustainability for the Essex Region. We are continually evaluating our programs and services to ensure they are delivered in a streamlined and efficient manner. This year, to further improve our organization's practices, we:

Trained 35 staff in Indigenous Relationship Building to improve consultation, collaboration and partnerships with Indigenous communities.

Implemented a number of mechanisms to ensure that programs and services are transparent to member municipalities and watershed residents and align with the proposed provincial mandatory programs and services.

Formalized policies for Customer Service Standards and Social Media.

Implemented new comprehensive Corporate Administration By-Laws as legislated under the 2017 Amendments to the *Conservation Authorities Act*.

Collaborated provincially on a communications strategy demonstrating the critical importance of Conservation Authorities in protecting the people of Ontario from the impacts of our changing climate.

Implemented significant improvements to our digital media platforms to streamline customer service for a variety of service areas, including permit applications.

Completed update of municipal drains dataset for Pelee Island.

Introduced new Annual Work Plan/Performance Review and Professional Development standards for all staff.

Updated Geocortex with 2019 Aerial photography in partnership with County of Essex and municipalities.

Implemented actions identified in the Employee Engagement Survey.

Continued to support the Essex Region Conservation Foundation in achieving the \$1 million fundraising goal of the Place for Life Campaign.

Advocated for the Essex Region on 56 local, regional, provincial, national and international boards and committees to ensure the unique needs of our region are represented.

Connected with more than 8,500 people through social media outreach.





“ This year we really focused on engagement with our staff.



We have an incredibly dedicated team who are addressing extreme workloads and in many cases, racing the clock to implement environmental protection and restoration priorities and provide exceptional customer service. Tools like our Employee Engagement Strategy, Annual Work Plans and Performance Reviews enabled us to recognize the many accomplishments of our staff while identifying areas of opportunity that allow us to plan for future organizational sustainability. Finding ways to streamline workflows and business processes improves our ability to serve our customers and helps to alleviate stress levels associated with the crucial work our team is undertaking every day.”

- Nicole Kupnicki, HR Manager

ERCA Accountability

The following provides a three-year ‘by-the-numbers’ comparison of achievements. This report follows the priorities identified in our Strategic Plan, and these actions help ensure Windsor-Essex County-Peel Island is the Place for Life.

Climate Change

		2017	2018	2019
Permits Requested		1,042	1,113	1,305
Permits Issued		1,005	992	1158
Clearances Issued		135	179	225
Request for Information Letters Issued		392	273	281
Permits to Take Water Applications		5	3	3
Appeals		10	18	22
Appeals in CA Favour		10	18	22
Violations Issued		34	25	38
Average Response Time for Permits (days)	Minor Development	9.13	9	15
	Major Development	34	12	10
	Alteration to Waterways	8.2	12	6
Number of Structures Located in Floodplain		10,000	10,000	10,000
Kilometres of Watercourses with Floodplain Mapping Completed		609	609	609
Hectares (area) digitally mapped delineating the CA Regulation Limit		38,304	38,304	38,304
Hectares (area) digitally mapped delineating the flooding hazard limit (flood plains)		38,304	38,304	38,304
Metres of shoreline protected from flooding and erosion		250	0	0
\$ Value of Water/Infrastructure Contributions to Municipalities		120,000	10,000	0
Flood Messages / Days	Watershed Conditions	13	17	15 / 48 days
	Flood Watches	11	20	24 / 147 days
	Flood Warnings	4	8	12 / 25 days
	Wind Warnings	1	0	7



Great Lakes

		2017	2018	2019
Water Quality Improvement Projects Implemented	Agriculture/Other (total)	28	30	80
	Detroit River Watersheds	10	3	7
	Lake Erie Watersheds	13	21	66
	Lake St. Clair Watersheds	5	2	7
Number of wells decommissioned		5	4	3
Number of landowners participating		23	20	16
Number of surface water quality monitoring stations		58	61	61
Number of ground water quality monitoring stations		8	8	8
Number of benthos monitoring stations		20	15	10



Landscapes & Habitats

	2017	2018	2019
Total Landholdings (Hectares)	1,735	1,742	1,740
Hectares of recreational land owned and managed	1,056.8	1056.8	1056.8
Total hectares under forest management plans	44.39	44.39	44.39
Total Taxes for CA Landholdings	\$66,661	\$70,227	\$92,186
Land Acquisition in Reporting Year (in acres)	160	7	0
Value of acquisitions (Fair Market Value)	\$1,562,250	\$426,000	N/A
Total Acres of Habitat Restored	92.5	143	31
Number and Acres of Trees	92,500 trees 70 acres	109,105 trees 96 acres	57,560 30 acres
Number and Acres of Wetlands	6 wetlands 15 acres	6 wetlands 31 acres	1 wetland 0.6 acres
Number and Acres of Prairie	5 sites 7.5 acres	5 sites 16 acres	0
Number of landowners involved in restoration	222	191	217
Trees planted by volunteers	2,973	3,259	6,217
Native plants planted by volunteers	1,610	1,600	30



Sustainable Communities

	2017	2018	2019
Planning Services—transactions/year	822	850	811
Kilometres of Trails owned, managed & developed	98	98	98
Number of volunteers	2,064	2,185	2,057
Number of outreach events	19	30	32
Number of schoolyard naturalization projects	2	2	1
ERCA hosted special events	29	24	22
Number of schools	71	72	75
Number of unique education programs	434	256	307
Number of students	12,224	9,958	14,588
Number of public meetings/workshops	31	22	28
Day Use Visitors to JRPH (estimated)	11,830	11,910	11,625
Day Use Visitors to HBCA (estimated)	12,588	9,600	10,800
Number of seasonal campsites purchased	67	72	72

A Strong, Resilient Organization

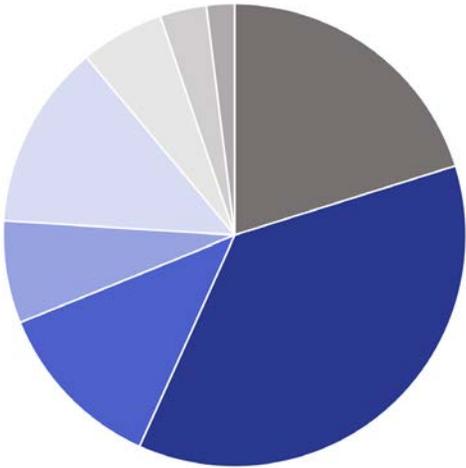
	2017	2018	2019
Area of CA Jurisdiction	1,681.3 km ²	1,681.3 km ²	1,681.3 km ²
Watershed Population	325,351	323,793	322,715
Staff—Permanent and Long-Term Contract	36	39	38
Staff—Special Grant and Short-Term Full-Time Equivalent Contract	10	12	10
Average Full Time Staff Length of Service	12	9	10
Number of Local Committees, Boards and Advisory Panels with ERCA representation	29	28	24
Number of Provincial Committees, Boards and Advisory Panels with ERCA representation	28	28	26
Number of research studies with ERCA involvement	8	12	7
Number of unique visitors to our website	70,997	65,528*	71,918
Number of Facebook followers	2,948	3,168	4,011
Number of Twitter followers	2,676	2,896	3,159
Number of Instagram followers (launched October 2016)	225	1,061	1,313
Number of Youtube video views	2,550 views 4,893 min	2,400 views 4,500 min	3,500 views 7,854 min

*Some data unavailable due to website changeover.

2019 Financial Review

Projected Use of Funds by Function

\$7.24M



Conservation Services	\$2,648,031
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Watershed Research Services	\$877,558
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Community Outreach Services	\$515,498
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Corporate and Shared Services	\$937,245
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Capital Projects	\$423,202
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Transfer to 2020 Activities/Projects	\$235,993
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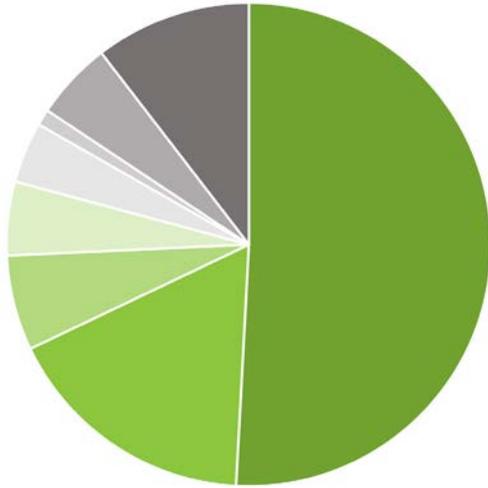
Transfer to Reserves	\$141,550
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Watershed Management Services	\$1,459,879
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Projected Use of Funds by Expense

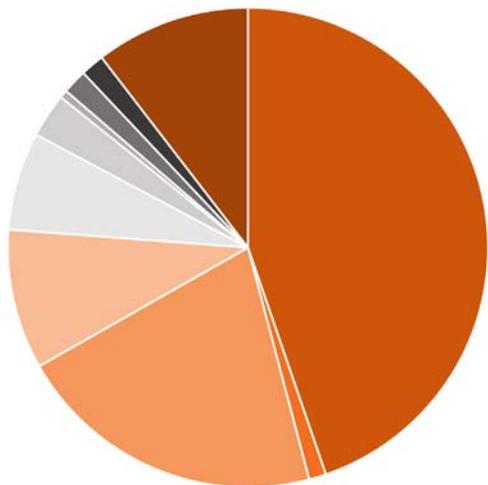
\$7.24M



Compensation	\$3,680,855
Program Materials & Supplies	\$1,234,743
Construction Contracts	\$461,370
Rent, Taxes, Utilities & Insurance	\$356,100
Contracted & Prof Services	\$295,244
Vehicle/Equipment Replacement	\$78,000
Transfer to Reserves & Future Years	\$377,543
Internal chargebacks & recoveries	\$755,100

Projected Funding by Source

\$7.24M



Internal chargebacks/recoveries	\$755,100
Municipal levies	\$3,238,666
Municipal special project contributions	\$83,508
Fee for service	\$1,510,997
Other/ERCF grants	\$682,800
Federal grants	\$478,340
Provincial transfer payments	\$215,976
Provincial special project grants	\$39,000
Prior year's surplus	\$119,568
Interest/in kind/sundry	\$115,000

2019 At A Glance

79

Surface, ground and benthos water quality sites **monitored**.



172

Days under **flood watch or warning**—a record in this changing climate.



15 days

Average **permit response time** for minor developments.



83

Events and workshops hosted to connect people with the Place for Life.



31

Acres of forest and wetlands restored.



57,560

Trees planted to increase green space.



80

Projects implemented to improve **water quality**.



14,588

Students educated through outdoor education programs.



1,305

Permits requested and reviewed to ensure landowner protection.



2,057

Awesome **volunteers** helped enrich & sustain the Place for Life.





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