

2017 ANNUAL REPORT



Kettle Creek
Conservation Authority



Snapping Turtle Hatchlings

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Snapping Turtles are species of Special Concern in Ontario meaning they may become threatened or endangered due to a combination of biological characteristics and identified threats.

Staff monitored a snapping turtle's nest and waited for 90 days until 40 hatchlings emerged from the ground. Staff released all of the hatchlings successfully to their new home.



Bucke Field Sunrise

MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

It is my pleasure as the Chair of the Kettle Creek Conservation Authority to present and endorse the accomplishments of our Board of Directors and dedicated staff over the past year.

The 2017 Annual Report is a visual testament – a story board of our achievements, and there are many.

The work of a Conservation Authority has always been very tactile. Our staff and board can often see the changes our efforts make on the landscape. The planting of over 50,000 trees is hard to miss, especially when so many are planted throughout our community with the assistance of youth and community volunteers.

We can see the devastating impact invasive species such as phragmites is having on our watershed as it strangles and suffocates native vegetation. In 2017, staff literally fought back cutting the invasive weed out of areas surrounding the perimeter of Lake Whittaker. This work will continue and be expanded over the next couple of years to ensure that the weed does not have a strong hold on our conservation lands.

New technology is improving our ability to view the landscape and identify solutions or mitigate the harmful effects of erosion. The Authority is three years into a four-year plan to introduce a comprehensive GIS program. KCCA is the first Authority within the central Lake Erie basin to have an unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) fleet. In time, this program will allow the Authority to identify areas in the watershed that are at high risk of erosion and accurately predict how that rate may be decreased through best management practices and stewardship projects.

New GIS capabilities at the Authority also create the opportunity to better communicate our works visually to the community. We now have a bird's eye view of our major infrastructure, stewardship and tree planting projects, and we can better assimilate that information into meaningful results in our soon to be released 2018 Watershed Report Card.

Enjoy this visual story of our successes over the last year – each one made possible by positive partnerships between our Board of Directors, staff and the watershed community.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Heather Jackson'.

Heather Jackson
Chair, Board of Directors



Record Lake Erie Water Levels

FLOOD FORECASTING AND LOW WATER CONDITIONS

Environment Canada's December 2016 - February 2017 winter forecast for southern Ontario indicated it would be a return to a "classic Canadian winter" with an abundance of snow due to the cooling effects of La Niña. This prediction however, did not materialize as January and February were very mild with limited snowfall—not a classic Canadian winter at all! In 2017, the KCCA watershed received only 55% of the normal amount of snow.

According to Environment Canada, the average temperature in the Great Lakes/St. Lawrence climate region for the winter of 2016/2017 was 3.8°C above the baseline average, which is the 4th warmest winter observed since nationwide recording began in 1948. The Great Lakes/St. Lawrence region also experienced the 8th wettest winter in 2016/2017 at 24.1% above average, while the rest of the country experienced drier than normal conditions.

By March 8, 2017, most of the remaining snow had melted away, leaving the creeks, waterways, and Lake Erie open and ice-free. Above average precipitation in the spring contributed to the highest water levels observed in the Great Lakes in the last 20 years. In May 2017, Lake Erie was 52cm above average and 17cm above its level the previous May, which was the highest water level recorded since 1997. Lake Ontario's daily average level of 75.88m recorded on May 29, 2017 broke the record set in June 1952 by 6cm.

The high lake levels concerned shoreline property owners who worried about increased erosion and storm damage due to stronger wind and wave action. The main concern in the KCCA watershed was that higher lake levels could increase the risk of storm surge and wave uprush events in Port Stanley — especially when winds were gusting from the south or southwest. KCCA staff rely on data collected from lake level recorders in Lake Erie that record water level and



Union Dam

wave height, along with Environment Canada marine forecasts, weather data from the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry, and Port Stanley Lakeshore Flooding Look-Up Tables to determine the potential for and severity of a wave uprush event. KCCA issued one Watershed Condition Statement—Water Safety due to sustained gale force winds coming from the southwest in October 2017.

Higher lake levels can have a positive impact on the watershed by creating and rejuvenating wetland habitats, bringing essential nutrients to new areas and allowing for additional fish spawning and nursery habitat in the coastal wetlands surrounding the Great Lakes.

The watershed maintained its Level 2 Low Water Condition implemented in October 2016 throughout the winter months. The unusually wet weather experienced in spring 2017 bolstered water levels enough to move out of Level 2 Low Water Condition on February 13, 2017 and then move out of Level 1 Low Water Condition to normal on March 10, 2017. Water levels remained stable until the summer months, where water levels typically drop below normal. Summer convection storms passing through the region contributed to base flows until water levels improved in the fall.

Staff partnered with neighbouring Conservation Authorities to facilitate a presentation on their role in flood forecasting and warning, as well as insight into the type of data that is collected and provided to municipalities, emergency services, and the public during a flood event. This presentation was given at several municipal training workshops that included:

Central Elgin, Elgin County, and Middlesex County.

In 2017, staff completed some minor masonry and embankment maintenance on the training wall at Dalewood Dam. Regular vegetation and tree removal as part of the maintenance of earthen embankments at Union and Dalewood Dams was also completed.

KCCA staff use a network of stream gauges, precipitation gauges, weather stations and lake level recorders to monitor water levels and flow throughout the KCCA watershed during a flood event. In 2017, KCCA introduced the Weather Event Factsheet, a new communications tool that summarizes significant weather and flood events in the watershed. The factsheet describes the weather conditions leading up to and during the event, provides event statistics such as total precipitation, water level and flows and summarizes actions taken by the Authority and affected municipalities during the event. The inaugural fact sheet summarized a rain event in May, 2017 that caused significant water levels and flows throughout the watershed. Recent factsheets are available on the KCCA website and are shared with KCCA's member municipalities and flood contacts. KCCA issued three Water Conditions Statement—Water Safety, four Water Conditions Statement—Flood Outlook and one Flood Watch in 2017.

For up-to-date flood information, watershed residents and businesses can visit the KCCA website kettlecreekconservation.on.ca where they can register to receive automatic flood related emails, or connect with KCCA socially on Twitter, Instagram and, Facebook at @KettleCreekCA.



Water Festival Public Day

AWARENESS AND EDUCATION

St. Thomas-Elgin Children's Water Festival

KCCA coordinated the St. Thomas-Elgin Children's Water Festival in May 2017 at Pinafore Park in St. Thomas. Over 3,500 grades two to five students attended the Festival and participated in hands-on and interactive activity stations linked to the Ontario Curriculum. The activities taught students about stream and wetland critters, groundwater protection, and proper disposal of household hazardous waste.

Ultimately, the goal of the Children's Water Festival is to motivate behavioural changes in students and stress the importance of clean, safe water in their lives and communities. Consequently, the organizing committee wanted to showcase water, more specifically the Great Lakes as a precious national treasure to the broader public as part of Canada Day celebrations. With funding support from Ontario150 Community Celebration Program, the historically school-based Festival was opened to the public as part of the City of St. Thomas' 2017 Canada Day celebration on July 1, 2017.

The Public Day showcased 10 activities that focused on Ontario's history with water, a First Nations perspective, and the importance of the Great Lakes for drinking water, fishing, and tourism.

The Public Day was a huge success with approximately 10 – 15,000 adults and children attending the event.

#ichoosetapwater

The #ichoosetapwater campaign was part of the St. Thomas Elgin Healthy Kids Community Challenge. St. Thomas - Elgin is one of 45 communities across Ontario taking part in The Healthy Kids Community Challenge that unites communities with a common goal: promoting children's health through physical activity and healthy eating.

The #ichoosetapwater campaign consisted of a video contest and a water bottle giveaway. The contest invited Grades 3 to 7 classes from across Elgin County and St. Thomas to submit a video highlighting the importance of choosing tap water over bottled water and sugary drinks. A first prize of \$1,000, second prize of \$500, and third prize of \$250 were promoted as incentives for school participation.

Kettle Creek Conservation Authority and Elgin St. Thomas Public Health (ESTPH) hosted a Blue Carpet Event on February 22, 2017 at the St. Thomas-Elgin Public Art Centre showcasing the #ichoosetapwater video contest finalists and revealing the contest winner - McGregor Public School.

Lake Erie Student Conference

KCCA hosted a Lake Erie Student Conference for 125 high school students from St. Thomas, Elgin County and London on October 19, 2017 in Port Stanley. The Conference featured presentations about the Great Lakes and Lake Erie's phosphorus and invasive species issues followed by hands-on activities at Main Beach in Port Stanley. Students were able to learn about benthic invertebrate sampling, electrofishing, see native birds of prey up close, learn about local history from members of Heritage Port Stanley and paint wooden fish that will form a lasting art legacy in Port Stanley.

Scholarship

Abbey Taylor was awarded the Elgin County/Kettle Creek Agricultural Conservation Scholarship. The \$500 scholarship is awarded each year to a student pursuing agriculturally-related studies at a post-secondary institution with an emphasis on compatibility with the natural environment. KCCA, Kettle Creek Environmental Trust, Elgin County Junior Farmers Alumni and the Elgin Federation of Agriculture continue to fundraise to ensure the scholarship can be awarded in perpetuity.





Carolinian Forest Festival

Carolinian Forest Festival

The Carolinian Forest Festival celebrated its 10th anniversary in 2017, educating over 13,000 grades 6 and 7 students to date. Due to demand, the 2017 Festival increased from three days to four to accommodate over 2,000 students from St. Thomas, London, Elgin, Middlesex and Oxford Counties. The Festival showcased 38 hands-on activities that illustrated the importance of the Carolinian Life Zone, stewardship and conservation, and species at risk, including 4 new activity stations.

Go Wild Grow Wild

Staff were contracted to support the organization of Carolinian Canada's Go Wild Grow Wild Expo held April 8, 2017 in London. The Expo showcases the region's businesses, experts, organizations, and groups committed to growing a greener future. The Expo saw over 100 exhibitors, featured 25 speakers/workshops and saw 3,000 people attend.

Source Water Protection and Outdoor Education

KCCA staff bring the classroom outdoors with programs like Wetland Explorers, Watershed Report Card and Source Water Protection. Each year the programs attract new school groups and summer camps.

Source Water Protection program highlights include: in-class presentations for a local school; reminders published in the CE Buzz; flyers mailed out to landowners within Central Elgin; and training sessions for Central Elgin Fire Rescue and Canadian Coast Guard staff.



STEWARDSHIP

KCCA continued to promote stewardship and Best Management Practices at many local events including the Elgin Soil and Crop Annual Meeting and Summer Tour, the Elgin ALUS tour, the Elgin Farm Forum and the Elgin Plowing Match. In addition, two erosion control workshops were held in February - one geared to farmers and certified crop advisors and the other to local contractors. A soil and water conservation workshop was held in December featuring presentations on reduced tillage, cover crops, 4R stewardship and land lease agreements.

With the support of Ontario Power Generation's Regional Biodiversity Program, 11 wetland projects were created or restored in the Kettle Creek and Upper Thames River watersheds. The eleven wetland sites totaled over 16 acres in wetland habitat created or restored and over 85 acres naturalized.

The Elgin Clean Water Program continues to be a great source of technical advice and funding for landowners. Elgin County and the Green Lane Community Trust Fund provided \$40,000 and \$30,000 respectively in project funding in 2017 in addition to support from the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs for projects that will reduce erosion and sediment loading to Lake Erie. In total, 28 projects were completed with \$77,638 in ECWP grants and total project costs exceeding \$375,000. Since the ECWP's inception in 2012, 130 projects have been completed with total project costs exceeding \$1,600,000. The Elgin Clean Water Program also launched a cover crop incentive program which provides farmers with up to \$1,000 in funding to plant overwintering cover crops, thereby helping to protect the soil and reduce erosion. Twelve cover crop applications were approved in 2017.



Community Tree Planting

FORESTRY

KCCA continued its partnership with Ontario Power Generation and the Upper Thames River Conservation Authority to plant 60,000 trees across the two watersheds in Spring 2017. In the Kettle Creek watershed specifically, 50,000 seedlings were planted with an additional 2,940 seedlings sold to landowners through the Greening Communities program.

KCCA in conjunction with the Municipality of Central Elgin planted 250 native, large stock trees along municipal roadsides to replace those that have been lost over the years. KCCA partnered with the Ministry of Transportation to plant 1,500 spruce seedlings along Highway 401 to act as a living snow fence.

KCCA supported TD Friends of the Environment Foundation's TD Tree Days event by organizing the planting of 300 trees and shrubs along the western approach of the St. Thomas Elevated Park with the assistance of 70 community volunteers. Members of the St. Thomas Railway City Rotary Club partnered with KCCA to plant 100 large stock trees at V.A. Barrie Park in St. Thomas in recognition of the Rotary Foundation's 100th anniversary.

Railway City Brewing Company donated the proceeds of their Earth Day Social Tap Program to support the planting of 750 trees at Common Ground Farm. In addition, Railway City employees, families and friends came out to help plant those trees.

KCCA engaged local youth in tree planting by leading an event for the Scoutrees program and grades 7 and 8 students from Port Stanley Public School who helped to plant 1,200 seedlings in May.

CONSERVATION AREAS

Campgrounds

Infrastructure upgrades continued at both Dalewood Conservation Area and Lake Whittaker Conservation Area. Accessible pool walkways and pool lifts were installed at both campgrounds. This project was funded in part by the Government of Canada's Enabling Accessibility Fund. Other infrastructure improvements included a new playground at Dalewood and a new accessible swing at Lake Whittaker Conservation Area.

A new online reservation system was introduced in 2017. The system provides people booking online with a picture and a description of each campsite. It was well-received by both Dalewood and Lake Whittaker, each reporting record attendance. Dalewood Conservation Area had an estimated 2,200 permits sold and was host to a number of events including the Early Years Summer Day Camp, Canadian Raptor Conservancy Show, and Canada Day Fireworks.

Lake Whittaker Conservation Area had an estimated 4,200 permits sold and was host to a number of events including the Early Years Summer Day Camp, Get Out There Teen Camp, and Victoria Day and Canada Day Fireworks. With the great summer weather Lake Whittaker's 30-amp campsites were booked to nearly 100% capacity every weekend in July and August.

In an attempt to better connect with campground visitors two new Facebook pages were launched @DalewoodCA and @LakeWhittakerCA. Campers can now check in at their preferred campground and share photos, videos and messages with staff.

Re-Wild the Family

In collaboration with Kettle Creek Environmental Trust, KCCA introduced the Re-Wild the Family program at Dalewood Conservation Area. The program provides a free campsite, camping gear and a mentor to families that have never camped before because of financial need, social hardship or another unique circumstance. In each case the family must be new to camping. The hope is that the families will enjoy the experience and recreate it on their own in the future. Two families were participated in 2017. KCCA and KCET hope to expand the program to seven families in 2018.



Paddling at Sunset



Lake Whittaker Campsite



Accessible Pool Lift



Dalewood Pool

Invasive Species Control

In 2017, KCCA staff began the daunting task of attempting to control the aggressively invasive *Phragmites australis* at Lake Whittaker Conservation Area. One of the primary methods of spread of this invasive plant is by floodwater, so initiating control of this invasive plant at Lake Whittaker, the headwater of Kettle Creek, made it the logical location to start. Control efforts began with the cutting of a 1.1 acre patch of invasive phragmites on the south side of Lake Whittaker, near the day use beach. This stand at Lake Whittaker was well established, with many stalks reaching over 12 feet tall. Cutting this patch of phragmites opened up views of the lake that haven't been seen in years. The area will continue to be monitored and additional control efforts will be undertaken as required over the next several years, including the planting of native vegetation if necessary.

Dalewood Trail

The 4 km Dalewood North Trail was revitalized in 2017 after being closed for several years due to erosion and maintenance concerns. An outside contractor was hired to rebuild the trail in accordance with sustainable trail methods. The trail was redesigned to create two new loop trails; one connecting the Dan Patterson trail under Highbury Avenue to a new loop in the Dalewood North tract; and another loop connecting the Dalewood Reservoir trail to a loop north of Ron McNeil Line in the Dalewood North tract. The project accomplished its ultimate goal to introduce a new safe access to the Dalewood property under Highbury Avenue. In addition, the number of trail structures was significantly reduced. As reconstructed, there are now only two trail bridges. A third bridge was replaced with armour stone rock creating erosion control and a trail feature.

Staff were also trained on the various techniques of sustainable trail building to ensure this method of construction and maintenance is transferred to KCCA's other trails. The revitalization project was undertaken with assistance from the TD Friends of the Environment Foundation and the Elgin-St. Thomas Community Foundation.



Phragmites Lake Whittaker - Before



Phragmites Lake Whittaker - After



Dan Patterson West Trail



Dan Patterson West Trail New Bridge



Lake Erie

PLANNING AND REGULATIONS

Ontario's long-term prosperity, environmental health and social well-being depend on reducing the potential for public costs or risk to Ontario's residents from natural or human-made hazards.

One objective of Ontario's planning and development policies is to direct development away from areas of natural or human-made hazards where there is an unacceptable risk to public health or safety, or of property damage, and not create new or aggravate existing hazards.

The Kettle Creek Conservation Authority (KCCA) is responsible for managing development within areas of natural hazards in the Kettle Creek watershed through 'Ontario Regulation 181/06 – Development, Interference with Wetlands and Alterations to Shorelines and Watercourses'.

To prevent future risk and protect the interests and liability of our member municipalities, O.Reg.181/06 requires landowners to obtain permission from KCCA prior to developing within natural hazard areas, associated river or stream valleys, shorelines, wetlands and watercourses.

Conservation Authorities also have provincially delegated responsibilities for natural hazard policies of the Provincial Policy Statement (PPS). With this responsibility, KCCA reviews and comments on municipal planning applications with regard to its responsibilities for natural hazard management. Through pre-consultation with proponents and member municipalities, natural hazard constraints are discussed and avoided up front in most cases.

In 2017, KCCA reviewed and commented on over 100 planning applications and issued 36 permits under Ontario Regulation 181/06.

KCCA also responds to requests for property information from members of the public, lawyers, and real estate agents. These inquiries are very important so that perspective buyers of property or people wishing to undertake development in natural hazard areas have a prior understanding of the potential restrictions and risks involved.



SPOTLIGHT ON MUNICIPAL DRAIN CLASSIFICATION AND ELECTROFISHING

Many rural, open watercourses in Ontario have been designated as municipal drains under the Drainage Act, 1990. These municipal drains are classified into a number of categories (A, C, D, E, F, Not Rated, or Species at Risk) to facilitate the review and approval of drain maintenance activities with respect to fish species, communities and fish habitat. This is done under a Class Authorization Process developed by Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO). A municipal drain segment's class is determined by its flow characteristics (permanent or intermittent) and the fish species that occur within it (the presence or absence of sensitive species and the presence of species at risk (SAR)).

Historically, most municipal drains found within the Kettle Creek watershed were classified as C (permanent flow with no sensitive fish species) or F (intermittent flow). A new DFO mapping and classification system was introduced in 2015. Due to limited fisheries data for the Kettle Creek watershed, many drains that were classified in the old system were reclassified as "Not Rated". In 2017, KCCA received funding to collect fish and flow data on 15 "Not Rated" drains within the Kettle Creek watershed. DFO will use this up-to-date data to determine the drain classification of those sampled drains.

Potential sampling sites were selected using 2015 South Western Ontario Orthoimagery Project (SWOOP) aerial photography in QGIS and ground-truthed. Drain sites were assessed for flow characteristics (flowing water, the types of terrestrial and aquatic plants and algae in and around the drain) and fish species present in the drain. Data was collected using the 2017 DFO protocol.

Fish were sampled using a backpack electrofishing unit. Electrofishing uses direct current electricity flowing between a submerged cathode and anode. Fish tend to swim towards the anode where they can be netted for identification. Electrofishing is a common scientific survey method used to sample fish populations to determine abundance, density and species composition. When performed correctly, electrofishing results in no permanent harm to fish, which are returned to their natural state shortly after being caught.

A total of 14 fish species were collected from 15 drain survey sites; split 60:40 cool to warm water thermal regimes. Forty-two percent of the fish caught were Creek Chub, 27% were Brook Stickleback and 12% were Blacknose Dace. No species at risk were collected and only one aquatic invasive species, the Goldfish, was collected at one location.

Fish community and flow data collected in 2017, along with data collected in 2016 was submitted to DFO to update the watershed drainage maps. KCCA has received just over \$17,000 in funding from DFO over the last two years to collect drain classification data. Staff are hopeful that additional funding will be made available in 2018 to continue this important work.

The three most common species collected in 2017—Creek Chub, Brook Stickleback and Blacknose Dace are three of 48 species of fish that can legally be used as live bait in Ontario. It may be surprising that municipal drains are home to many species of fish. However, other than panfish like Pumpkinseed and Bluegill, none of the fish found in local drains would be considered “sportfish” as they are often quite small. In fact, one common species, the Least Darter, is the smallest fish in Canada.

Many anglers group these small fish together as “minnows.” However, upon closer inspection, most baitfish species can be distinguished from one another by using body shape, fin shape, scale size, mouth position, colour markers, habitat and range. The ability to distinguish among small fish is important, as the use of some fish species for bait is illegal—some are aquatic invasive species, while others are listed as species at risk and are protected. The legal status of baitfish species may change over time. Be sure to check the latest version of the Ontario Recreational Fishing Regulations Summary (Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry) for up-to-date information.



Brook Stickleback



Blackside Darter



Creek Chub



Blacknose Dace



Lake Whittaker Drone Footage

GIS/INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

Unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), or drones, have a variety of applications in conservation. They can be used to monitor the health of agricultural land, wetlands, and woodlands, document flood events by capturing high quality video and photographs, and inspect buildings or infrastructure more safely. One promising application is the ability of UAVs to monitor the rate of in-field and coastal soil erosion.

Through support from the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, KCCA developed a UAV program to help monitor ephemeral gully erosion. Ephemeral gullies are naturally formed channels that contribute significantly to the rate of soil erosion on agricultural fields. Along with the soil, agrochemical runoff enters local waterways where they eventually contribute to large algae blooms, as seen in Lake Erie.

To help mitigate the environmentally harmful effects of ephemeral gully erosion, predictive models have been developed that compute the potential rate of erosion. By using UAVs to quickly collect in-field measurements over time, more accurate predictive models can be developed. In time, we will not only be able to identify fields that have a high risk of erosion, but also accurately predict the rate of erosion under different agricultural management strategies. Through KCCA's stewardship programs, it may then be possible to implement a long-term solution by adopting best management practices.

To support the increasing need for spatial data, several internal tasks and projects were completed. With support from Natural Resources Canada's STIP Green Jobs Initiative, a GIS Intern was hired to update several key data sets, namely wetlands, woodlots, linear assets, and hydrology. Staff also digitized over 8,730 km of watercourses and 6,918 water bodies in the Kettle Creek, Catfish Creek, and Long Point Region Conservation Authority watersheds. Staff also collaborated on a number of external projects with partners, notably a project with Grand River Conservation Authority that investigated topographical depression storage and an aerial videography project with Environment Canada.

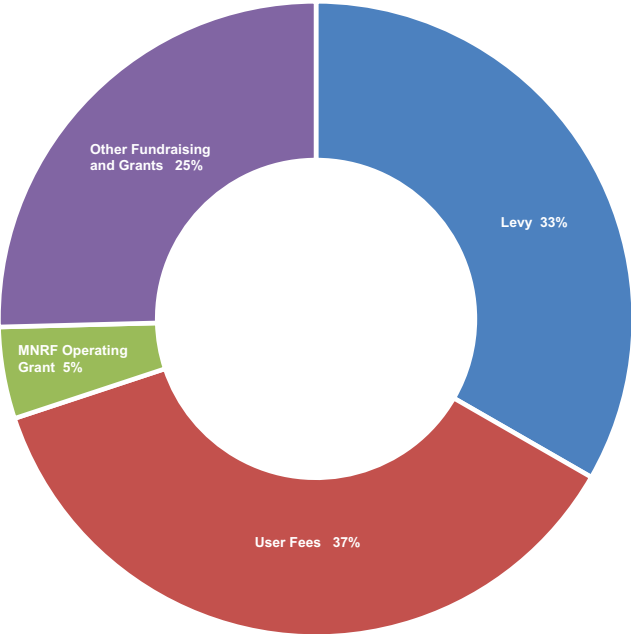
KCCA's information technology infrastructure was also updated. The main server and a number of workstations were upgraded.



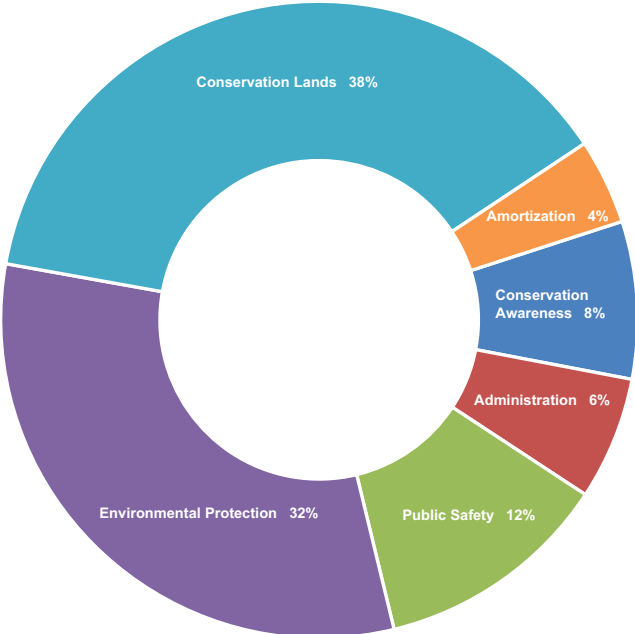
Milkweed

FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

Total Revenues



Total Expenditures



Full financial statements are available at www.kettlecreekconservation.on.ca

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(Please notify our office of any errors or omissions.)



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