



Conservation Ontario 2008 Annual Report

Building Resiliency in Ontario's Environment



Ontario Conservation Authorities

Strengthening Our Environment

Chair/General Manager Message

The year 2008 will be remembered as a turning point for decades to come, not just in Ontario and Canada but throughout the world. The global economic and financial system literally fell off a cliff, and the ensuing chaos left governments scrambling. The focus on the economy is inevitable and necessary, yet strategies for a sustained economic recovery must incorporate environmental sustainability as an integral component. Ontario's Green Energy Act promises a first step in the creation of the new green economy, and will be critical to meeting our energy needs without increasing carbon emissions. This is an essential strategy for mitigating climate change.

Of equal importance will be our strategies for adapting to climate change, since greenhouse gases already in the atmosphere, coupled with the positive feedback mechanisms already in play (e.g. melting polar ice caps increase absorption of solar energy thereby accelerating warming) will result in warming in Ontario by at least several degrees Celsius by mid-century. The implications for Ontario's watershed managers are profound. The increase in atmospheric energy has resulted in a marked increase in extreme weather events, from torrential downpours to prolonged droughts, to ice storms. These weather phenomena create havoc with our built infrastructure and will require us to rethink how we protect it and our population from the increasing risk of damage to property and loss of life.

But it is not just our built infrastructure that is under siege. Science shows us that ecosystems already under stress are less resilient and less able to adapt to conditions created by a changing climate. It is imperative that we in Ontario continue to make investments that enable our green infrastructure – our forests, wetlands, rivers and streams – to adapt to these changing conditions.

Watershed management programs provided by Conservation Authorities are important not only for their contribution to the resiliency of our ecosystems but are critical services that ensure public safety through protection of life and property from water-related hazards of flooding and erosion, and through the protection of drinking water sources.

Conservation Authorities can also play a part in transitioning to the next 'green' economy using our local networks and skills in innovations and partnerships. We believe we represent an important opportunity for governments to leverage their own resources and achieve significant benefits for the people of Ontario.



Dick Hibma
Chair



Don Pearson
General Manager

Integrated Watershed Management

In 2008 a partnership was formed between Conservation Ontario, Ministry of Natural Resources and Department of Fisheries and Oceans that launched the Integrated Watershed Management (IWM) Initiative.

This work will:

- Assess the IWM process from a global, national, great lakes basin and local watershed perspective;
- Condense the work carried out in Ontario to date in IWM;
- Identify the legislative requirements for IWM in Ontario;
- Identify connections to other initiatives ongoing in Ontario and Canada;
- Identify key issues facing Ontario;
- Identify the gaps in IWM in Ontario;
- Identify strategic shifts needed to address gaps;
- Make recommendations for next steps;
- Produce a Report on an Integrated Watershed Management Framework for Ontario.

90%
of Ontario's population
live in a Conservation
Authority watershed.

Consultation Work

A series of interviews were held seeking to assess the status of IWM amongst Conservation Authorities (CAs). The results from the 33 Conservation Authorities who participated indicated strong support for the concept of IWM and for the opportunities that would be realized through wider watershed planning. As well, a number of barriers were identified including staff capacity, data gaps, need for science, lack of public and political support.

This initiative will be completed in June 2009.



Investing in Science

Making good decisions that promote greater resiliency in our communities requires an understanding of the current state of Ontario's natural environment. This typically begins with collecting information and making assessments. Understanding the science of our land and water resources can then be correlated to community or land issues that can impact natural resources.

Ontario Drinking Water Source Protection Program

Protecting Sources of Drinking Water for Ontario Municipalities

Through the Provincial government's Ontario Drinking Water Source Protection Program, Conservation Authorities and Municipalities have been able to assemble data and carry out studies that benefit a wide range of watershed management plans in addition to contributing to the success of the Ontario Drinking Water Source Protection Program.

Watershed Characterizations - Conservation Authorities have been able to develop comprehensive watershed characterizations of their local areas. These reports describe natural features, land use and settlement patterns, as well as identifying sources of drinking water, water use, water quality and known existing water-related trends and problems.

Water Budgeting - Increasing water demands from a growing population put greater demands on water supply from groundwater and surface water sources throughout the Province. In partnership with the Province, Conservation Authorities are developing local water budgets to help determine how much water is in the watershed right now and how it is currently being used, as well as determining how much water will be available in the future and how much we will need to use.

Water Quantity Risk Assessment - As part of the water budget process, Conservation Authorities and the Province assess risks that impact how much water we have available now and in the future. This entails developing a 'conceptual understanding' right up to identifying specific water quantity threats as more information is collected and analyzed.



Surface and Groundwater Vulnerability Analysis - Under the Source Protection Program, we also identify surface and groundwater vulnerable areas around our drinking water intakes and recharge areas. Keeping these areas as clean as possible by managing activities that impact them is critical to ensuring the safety of our drinking water.

Drinking Water Quality Issues and Threats - Both the Province and the Conservation Authorities identify land uses or other activities that impact or may impact sources of drinking water for Ontario's municipalities. These studies rate the various threats to drinking water quality as significant, moderate or low.

Conservation Ontario Source Protection Activities

- All 19 Source Protection Committees were established and operational by early 2008.
- Throughout 2008, Conservation Ontario supported the work of Conservation Authorities in developing Source Protection Committee Terms of Reference. These documents help guide the various Source Protection Committees throughout the Province to develop local watershed Source Protection Plans to protect municipal sources of drinking water.
- The Ministry of Environment released the second phase of the Clean Water Act regulations in two parts. Conservation Ontario coordinated comments on the first part in May which included the regulations governing the Ontario Drinking Water Stewardship Program and Property Entry Training. The second part included recommendations on the contents of the Watershed Assessment Reports as well as the Directors' Rules.
- The release of the Director's Rules in December allow the Committees to begin to do their work on the Watershed Assessment Reports.

Watershed Monitoring

Because our lives are directly affected by the health of our land and water resources, there is a growing interest by residents, municipalities and agencies to understand the health of our watersheds. Ontario's 36 Conservation Authorities carry out watershed monitoring because it helps us better understand local environmental issues, focus actions to where they are needed most and track progress over time.

Several of Ontario's Conservation Authorities have developed Watershed Report Cards as a means of assessing and reporting on surface water quality, forest conditions and groundwater as well as provide a summary of local watershed features and actions being undertaken locally.

By the end of 2008 a total of 20 Conservation Authorities produced watershed report cards. These report cards can be viewed on Conservation Ontario's website: www.conservationontario.ca. More report cards are being developed.

Conservation Authorities provide data in conjunction with Provincial partners to a variety of provincial monitoring networks including: Provincial Water Quality Monitoring Network (PWQMN). Conservation Authorities have 400+ sites monitoring surface water conditions for this network.

Provincial Groundwater Monitoring Network (PGMN) Together, Conservation Authorities have 465 groundwater monitoring wells.

Ontario Benthos Biomonitoring Network (OBBN) Conservation Authorities regularly sample benthic invertebrates to determine surface water quality. A total of 25 Conservation Authorities participate in this network using 1,067 monitoring stations.

Ontario Streamflow Network Conservation Authorities operate approximately 500 streamflow gauging stations to measure water quantity.



Policy & Planning

Development, Interference & Alteration Regulation

In 2008, Conservation Ontario and the Conservation Authorities endorsed the “Guidelines to Support Conservation Authority Administration of the Development, Interference with Wetlands and Alterations to Shorelines and Watercourses Regulation” for submission to the Ministry of Natural Resources for approval. A one day training session was hosted for 70 participants from 34 Conservation Authorities in November.

As well, Conservation Ontario developed and distributed a brochure for Conservation Authorities’ – Development, Interference and Alteration Regulation. It provides information around the regulation and the areas/features which are regulated including: River or Stream Valleys, Great Lakes and Large Inland Lakes Shorelines, Hazardous Lands (Unstable Soil and Unstable Bedrock), Watercourses, and, Wetlands. The brochure can be found on Conservation Ontario’s website.

A multi-stakeholder facilitated meeting was held in early 2008 to review Conservation Authorities Act/ Drainage Act issues. In response to a clear commitment by all stakeholders to work together on solutions, a multi-stakeholder Drainage Act and Section 28 Regulations Team (DART) was formed with the Ministries of Natural Resources and Agriculture, Food & Rural Affairs as the co-chairs and representation from Conservation Authorities, the Drainage Superintendents, Municipalities and the Agriculture sector. Work is ongoing in 2009.

Managing Water Information

The Source Protection Program has provided an opportunity for Conservation Authorities to develop more sophisticated information management systems. Significant progress is being made in adopting new technologies such as databases, Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and web access, as well as promoting improved information sharing between Conservation Authorities and Provincial Ministries such as Natural Resources and Environment. These enhancements in water resource information will benefit all watershed programs.

Watershed Stewardship

Ontario Drinking Water Stewardship Program

Conservation Ontario continued throughout 2008 to support Conservation Authorities to participate in the Ministry of Environment’s Ontario Drinking Water Stewardship Program.

As well, Conservation Ontario produced the second version of the Stewardship Toolkit – a series of fact sheets that provided information on vulnerable drinking water zones, water quality & quantity issues and landowner Best Management Practices such as runoff & erosion protection, septic systems and private wells. These fact sheets were provided to Conservation Authorities for local distribution and are available on Conservation Ontario’s website.

Ontario Soil and Crop Improvement Association

Conservation Ontario and Conservation Authorities continued to provide technical support to producers in partnership with the Ontario Soil and Crop Improvement Association and Federal and Provincial partners in the delivery of Greencover Canada and other beneficial management practices during the Growing Forward Continuity Program Year. The Upper Thames River Conservation Authority led a special Collaborative Action Project.

Trees Ontario

Conservation Authorities planted just under two million trees in 2008 and Conservation Ontario continues to participate on the Board of Trees Ontario. Conservation Ontario and the Conservation Authorities are significant contributors to the Province’s climate change initiative to help plant 50 million trees by 2020. As well as leading the coordination of local tree planting efforts, Conservation Authorities are contributing their technical expertise and advice to assist Trees Ontario and the Province in ongoing program development and capacity building.

Great Lakes

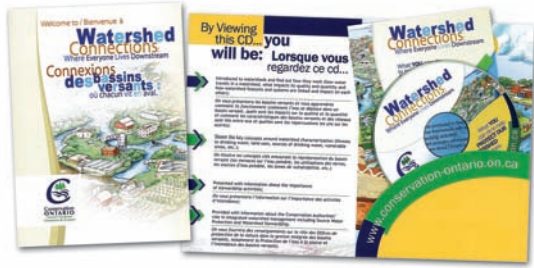
In 2008, workshops were conducted with Conservation Authority staff, coordinated by Conservation Ontario and the Nature Conservancy Canada with support from the Canada-Ontario Agreement Respecting the Great Lakes Basin Ecosystem (COA). These workshops helped review and refine the draft Lake Ontario Biodiversity Conservation Strategy. Actions are recommended within this strategy to help address climate change impacts within watersheds targeted for improving the biodiversity of Lake Ontario. As well, Conservation Ontario coordinated Conservation Authority participation in additional workshops around the start up of the Lake Huron Biodiversity Conservation Strategy. Sitting on the steering committee for both these initiatives provides a good opportunity for liaising with other key agencies to promote the importance of integrated watershed management and to encourage coordinated actions across levels of government to achieve COA 2007-2010 commitments.

Conservation Ontario is a member of the Agreement Advisory Panel providing input to the Ministry of Natural Resources / Ministry of Environment on the implementation of the Great Lakes / St. Lawrence River Basin Sustainable Water Resources Agreement. As part of this, Conservation Ontario provided early input into an Ontario Water Conservation and Efficiency Strategy.

Aging Infrastructure

In 2008, Conservation Authorities implemented a total of 85 projects worth \$10 million (\$5M from the Ministry of Natural Resources) to ensure the maintenance of aging infrastructure which was built to protect lives and property from flood and erosion. A total of 21 Conservation Authorities received funding approval for 54 repair projects and 31 studies. In 2008/09, there was actually a potential to invest \$14 million (provincial & local) demonstrating a strong demand for investment in public safety infrastructure.

Marketing & Communications



Bringing Watersheds to Life

With funding assistance from the Ontario Drinking Water Stewardship Fund, Conservation Ontario produced an animated product that shows the functions and features of a watershed in order to promote greater understanding of the principles behind watershed management, source water protection and the benefits of local stewardship best management practices. This product was provided to Conservation Authorities for use locally and also to a number of partner agencies. The animated watershed can be found on Conservation Ontario's website.



Close to home and across the province, Ontario's 36 Conservation Authorities own and protect over 135,000 hectares of natural lands and offer more than 250 Conservation Areas for people to visit and explore. In 2008, Conservation Ontario published a new **Guide to Conservation Areas** promoting Conservation Authorities' unique outdoor activities, education opportunities and the large network of hiking trails offered at these natural areas.

As well, a new website was developed that provides people with a variety of ways to search for activities, Conservation Areas or even Conservation Authorities. The website also features a number of articles on some of the Conservation Areas and listings of many of the seasonal events that are open to the general public. The website is ontarioconservationareas.ca



2009 Calendar

Conservation Ontario published a 2009 calendar in partnership with the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources (Southern Region), Ontario Stewardship Councils and Fisheries and Oceans Canada. The theme of the calendar is Local Solutions for Global Challenges and features many of the different actions taking place across the province that protect Ontario watersheds from more 'global' environmental challenges such as climate change, rapid growth and loss of biodiversity.

CONSERVATION AUTHORITIES PROTECT SPECIES AT RISK

Stewardship Partners Working Together to Recover Species at Risk

Our health and quality of life depends on biodiversity – a rich mix of wild plants, animals and habitats. Conservation Authorities, landowners and community groups are already working together in stewardship partnerships to improve, restore and secure natural habitat for species at risk. With funding from the Ministry of Natural Resources, Conservation Ontario produced a series of fact sheets that showcase eight projects taking place across the province:

- Buffers and Livestock Fencing (Ausable Bayfield CA & local landowners)
- Butternut Recovery Program (Rideau Valley CA & local landowners)
- Communities for Nature (Upper Thames River CA, local landowners & residents)
- Habitat for Reptiles (Upper Thames River CA & local communities)
- Restoring Habitat for the Prothonotary Warbler (Essex Region CA, Holiday Beach Migration Observatory)
- Restoring the Shore for Fish (Essex Region, Kettle Creek, Catfish Creek & Long Point Region CAs, Stewardship Councils & local landowners)
- Restoring the Wainfleet Bog (Niagara Peninsula CA, local landowners, conservation clubs, nature clubs, universities, municipalities & government agencies)
- Wetland Creation & Enhancement Program (St. Clair Region CA)

Stewardship Partners Working Together to Recover Species at Risk and the eight fact sheets can be found at Conservation Ontario's website: conservationontario.ca



conservationontariospeciesatrisk.ca



Dick Hibma, Conservation Ontario Chair and Stephen Lewis, former Canadian Ambassador to the United Nations

A.D. Latornell Conservation Symposium



In 2008, the A.D. Latornell Conservation Symposium celebrated its 15th Anniversary with record breaking attendance numbers. The theme, *Local Solutions for Global Challenges*, refers to how programs and services being provided by Ontario practitioners and policy makers are critical in helping us to adapt and mitigate larger environmental challenges such as climate change which are being felt globally.

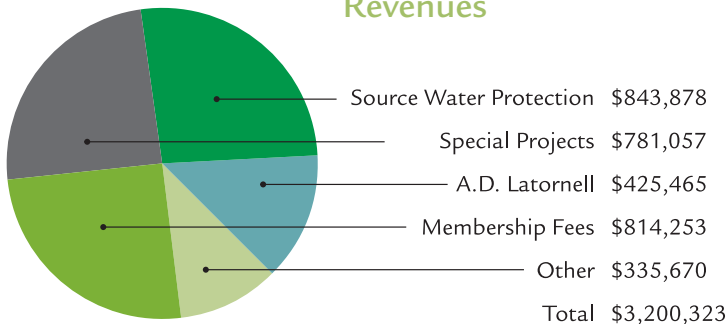
A number of impressive key speakers were showcased for the event including Stephen Lewis, former Canadian Ambassador to the United Nations, Dr. Quentin Chiotti, a member of the Premier's Expert Panel on Climate Change Adaptation; Provincial Ministers John Gerrestsen (MOE) and Donna Cansfield (MNR); and Adventurer & Filmmaker Jean Lemire (Antarctic Mission).

A total of five Ontario conservationists were recognized for their impressive lifetime achievements showing extraordinary leadership, dedication to improving science, protecting biodiversity and educating landowners and residents. The 2008 Pioneers included Dr. John Gunn, James Myslik, Harold Parker, Lorne Smith and Bob Whittam.

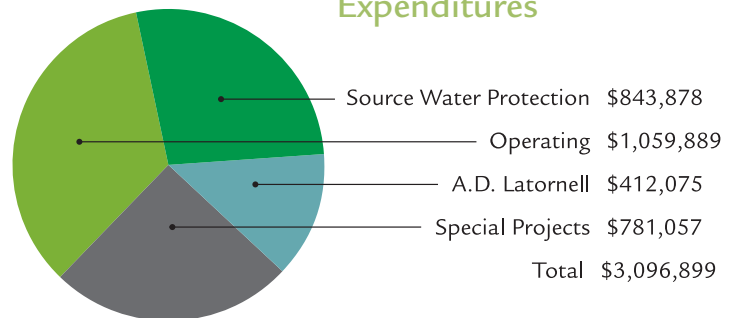
The Ministry of the Environment also provided an important grant which assisted Symposium organizers to bring a number of representatives from Ontario Environmental Non-Governmental Organizations to this year's event.

2008 Financial Information

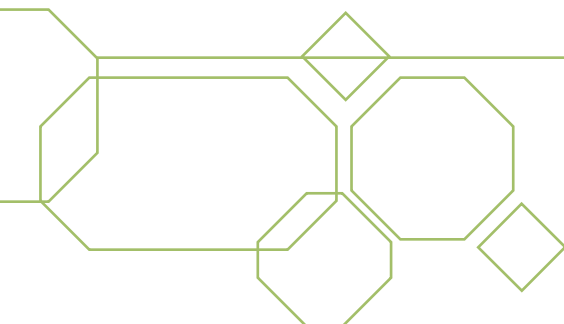
Revenues



Expenditures



These figures do not include the \$13,109,566 transferred to the Conservation Authorities for Source Protection.



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