



Strategic Plan
2011-2016



**Essex Region
Conservation
Authority**





A place is not a place
until people
have been born in it,



have grown up in it,

lived in it, died in it -
have experienced
and shaped it,



as individuals, families,
neighbourhoods and
communities, over more
than one generation.



Some are born in their place,
some find it,



some realize after long
searching that the place
they left is the one they
have been searching for.”



WALLACE STEGNER



Message from the General Manager

On behalf of the members of the Essex Region Conservation Authority's Board of Directors and staff, I am very proud to present our new Strategic Plan for 2011-2016. This is a community-based plan and I thank those of you who participated in our on-line survey, stakeholder roundtable, or planning sessions to assist in planning our future direction. This Plan sets four goals with desired outcomes based on what you told us, and will be used to develop specific Action Plans. In return, it tells you what the Conservation Authority believes are the important steps we need to take for our vision of 2020 to achieve a sustainable environment with healthy watersheds, highlighted by clean creeks, rivers, and Great Lakes, thriving natural areas, productive agricultural lands; and vibrant places.

This is not the end of the process. ERCA is committed to developing an Action Plan with success measures to ensure the Strategic Plan is an action document. We will also report regularly to our Board and the community on the information related to the action steps we are taking.

Our success in implementing the plan rests on participation from residents, partners, and stakeholders. We cannot do it alone. We ask everyone to embrace this plan and take an active part in helping our region enjoy a more vibrant and sustainable future. I ask you to join us, as we take these strategic directions and provide opportunities to make a real difference for the future of the Essex region.

Together we can achieve this shared vision.

Richard Wyma
General Manager



Everywhere is Some Place

Our region, not unlike any other area, is made up of places – where we live, where we work, where we gather, and where we play. We give meaning to these places based on how we use them and appreciate them. We become attached to places that are important to us, and as a result, we have an obligation to protect and preserve those places.

ERCA has a responsibility to help our region and our communities, by ensuring the places we live in provide clean water and landscapes, are protected from flooding and erosion, and support healthy living through recreation and conservation. To do so, we have to consider how changes in our urban and rural landscapes impact our communities and region ecologically, by understanding the places we live in and the impacts of change in our region. The more we know about our region, the greater our attachment will be to it; the better we'll be able to care for it, and ultimately, the greater our experiences will be of the Essex region as a place.

This Strategic Plan is ERCA's commitment to ensuring our region meets those needs, and ultimately, that the Essex region is sustainable and resilient to change; and is a place we can be proud of and celebrate.

"I can relate to how much cooler, pleasanter, and prettier my backyard and home are because of the 2 oaks and maple we planted years ago. The quantity of birds, squirrels and rabbits think so too. The small difference 3 trees makes on my small property. Imagine thousands ..."

Survey Comment Online



Where We're Going

ERCA Strategic Plan: 2011 - 2016

A sustainable future is what the Essex Region Conservation Authority is striving for. Realizing this goal through protection, restoration, education, planning and management not only improves our local environment, but also helps create an enhanced community identity we can all be proud of, and a more vibrant economy that can set this region ahead of others.

ERCA developed its first Strategic Plan in 1995 with a vision for 2020. To update this plan, we reached out to the broader community, our Board, staff, and stakeholders to develop a plan towards a sustainable future for the Essex Region over the next five years.



The Essex Region Conservation Authority

The Essex Region Conservation Authority (ERCA) is a community-based organization dedicated to protecting, restoring, and managing the natural resources in our region. Through 36 years of conservation, we have worked in partnership with the Province of Ontario, Government of Canada, our nine member municipalities, and the community to increase natural areas coverage, improve water quality across the region, protect people and property from flooding and erosion, and provide education and recreation opportunities.





Drivers of Change

From our on-line survey, stakeholder roundtable, and planning sessions, we heard a number of themes and ideas that resonated with the community and our stakeholders. From this, six “Drivers of Change” were identified. These Drivers became the opportunities, challenges, and external forces that can affect how we plan for and develop our region in keeping with our Vision for 2020.



The Great Lakes: Our Most Threatened Resource

The Essex region’s 230 km Great Lakes shoreline is located in the middle of the most important freshwater system in the world which is, both our greatest and most threatened resource. Despite some improvements over the last 40 years, the water quality in the Essex region is still poor, evidenced by inland stream and near shore degradation from contaminants that flow downstream from community to community. In the last several years there has been an increase in nutrient concentrations, causing harmful blue-green algal blooms and other effects. More resources are needed for monitoring and projects to improve our region’s water quality.



Understanding the Science of Our Changing Landscapes

ERCA has developed a vast amount of scientific knowledge on our region’s natural and cultural landscapes, shoreline, and watersheds. We know from our experience that our region is impacted by habitat loss, coastal processes, and changing land use patterns. The ability of the region to adapt to changing climate conditions, unpredictable weather, and associated flood threats directly impacts the safety, security, and economic well-being of our residents. Combined with the emergence of projects such as the Detroit River International Crossing and large scale infrastructure projects, it is clear we must step up our efforts to understand our lands and waters to help our communities prevent major losses and build a more resilient natural infrastructure to withstand the changing landscape. As we plan our future we must collaborate with partners on a range of scientific issues from which everyone in the region can benefit.



Building Sustainable Communities

The shift towards sustainable living may prove to be an important part of this region's economic revitalization. Growing populations, shifting demographics, and renewable energy innovation in our region, are demanding we create places for people that are green, healthy, and connected. This provides us with an opportunity to evolve our region, promote and demonstrate responsible green energy and conservation initiatives, foster sustainable living choices for a more resilient place to live in, and better respond to stresses. Green spaces, clean water, and a healthy environment are among the top features in attracting and keeping individuals in an area and are key to our region's environmental sustainability. A Sustainability Plan developed with partners, will help guide a shared sustainable future.



Protecting and Restoring Our Natural Areas

Our region lies fully within the Carolinian Zone, which supports a higher diversity of plant and animal species than any other region in Canada; including the highest concentrations of globally rare species in Ontario and one third of Canada's rare plant and animal species. Yet 350 years of growth has diminished the region's natural areas cover to 7.5%, amongst the lowest natural area coverage in Ontario and a long way from our goal of 12% by 2020. To date, we have planted more than 5 million trees but need to plant another 12.5 million to reach our goal. At our current rate, we won't reach that target until the end of this century. It is essential that we dramatically accelerate restoration efforts by working with landowners, municipalities, industry and corporate partners to increase the pace of habitat restoration.



Healthy Living and Healthy Environment

The health of people and the health of the environment are inherently linked. It is imperative to think of both when planning our region. Being active in a Conservation Area or along a trail is a fun, safe, and a healthy way to experience the outdoors in our region. Active living in natural areas has proven mental, physical, and spiritual health benefits. In our region, there is much to explore, from woodland trails and marsh boardwalks, to lakeside beaches and meandering waterways. Enhancing those opportunities, through a regional trail system and well-managed conservation areas, will help secure a healthier community and environment.





A Strong ERCA

The community survey pointed to improved multi-purpose, nature-based recreation with more conservation education for both youth and adults. ERCA needs to deliver services to compete in the modern world, by making changes to our own structures, processes, infrastructure and involve into a green organization. The survey confirmed our direction, but also encouraged ERCA to explore new partnerships and opportunities to promote sustainable communities, healthy living, and increase our knowledge of the landscape. ERCA has a track record and a proven ability for leveraging funds beyond what any other agency or organization can do, but as priorities and interests shift and development patterns change, the regional economy emerges in a new direction. ERCA responds to these changing demands by ensuring our programs are responsive and managed effectively and efficiently.

Our Strategic Directions

Quality of place is an essential human need for restoration and well-being. From our community survey, there was an overwhelming response that all aspects of what ERCA does are important for enabling the region to be a desirable place to visit and in which to live and work. With the “Drivers of Change”, our Guiding Principles, and Mission as the foundation for new and better services, four overarching Strategic Directions for 2011-2016 have been developed.

“Environmental sustainability is the wave of the future for a cleaner greener way of living and it should be a bigger priority”

Survey Comment Online



“Trails get people excited about conservation and will boost support and create new partnerships. Partnering with restaurants, campgrounds and hotels to promote the trails.”

Survey Comment Online

Vision, Mission & Principles

Our vision was developed by the community in our first Strategic Plan fifteen years ago. It was updated in 2004 to reflect the importance of sustainability and remains our guide going forward. Throughout the public engagement process, many ideas emerged around the importance of place and community, which have again reshaped our vision in keeping with the spirit of our original vision.



Our Mission

To provide locally based leadership in creating a sustainable environment for the residents of the Essex region.

Vision for 2020

To achieve a sustainable environment with healthy watersheds highlighted by clean creeks, rivers, and Great Lakes, thriving natural areas, productive agricultural lands, and vibrant places.



Our Guiding Principles

Regardless of the issues of the day or community priorities, there are timeless principles that unify the way we choose to provide service.

- Commitment to providing excellent customer service and a solution-oriented approach
- Dedication to open communication and responsive to communities we work with
- Accountability and responsible use of resources
- Collaboration on environmental issues and priorities.
- Adaptability to change to best serve the emerging needs of the community

Our



Strategic



Directions

connect



Strategic Direction

Connect people to our landscape, waterfronts, and our Great Lakes and rivers with attractive natural areas, trails, and Conservation Areas as a part of a vibrant and sustainable community.

Outcomes



Revitalize Conservation Areas

To enhance appreciation of natural and cultural heritage, promote eco-tourism and education, and the protection of nature.



Increasing Natural Area Coverage

To protect and increase natural areas through property purchase, management, land use planning, habitat restoration and other initiatives.



Linking People

To create a regional trail system in partnership with municipalities and others for a healthier environment and healthier lifestyles.



engage

Strategic Direction

Engage our community to create an increased awareness of conserving and enhancing our environment, to leave a legacy of a clean and healthy natural world for generations.

Outcomes



Rejuvenate Environmental Education

Deliver innovative curriculum-linked outdoor education programs and experiences that promote lifelong learning and a never ending appreciation of our natural and cultural heritage.



Build Knowledge

Expand conservation education for developers, landowners, associations, agencies and businesses to promote sustainable communities, healthy living and an increased awareness of our landscape.



A Community Resource

Build a stronger ERCA to anticipate and proactively respond and communicate efficiently both internally and within the community.

collaborate



Strategic Direction

Reach out and engage existing and new stakeholders to create a partnership for a sustainable environment in our region.

Outcomes



Build and Strengthen Relationships

Mobilize landowners, corporations, and new sectors and associations.

Facilitate

Implement innovative land use planning for municipalities and residents with best practices and watershed plans, while respecting important lands. This better enables ERCA to solve problems in keeping with regulations, provincial and federal legislation, and infrastructure to protect homes and people.

Provide Leadership

As a local environmental leader with foundations, agencies, the federal and provincial governments, municipalities and residents, clarify and influence the practical application of regulations and policy.



discover

Strategic Direction

Develop greater scientific knowledge of our region in order to adapt to climate change and respond to its impact on the safety, health, and economic well-being of our residents.

Outcomes



Developing Science

Gathering up-to-date science on our region's natural landscape to enable systems for tracking and adapting to climate change and renewable energy. Share this expertise and monitoring work to further our knowledge base through joint projects with teachers, faculty, and students.



Promote a 'Green' Culture

Demonstrate green energy and water conservation alternatives through building design and innovative community planning towards sustainable communities.



Improving Water Quality

Increase resources for water quality monitoring, plans and projects to improve and protect our region's water quality, nearshores, and watersheds.

Where we go from here

Next Steps

ERCA will use this Strategic Plan to shape our priorities, processes, and plans as well as our budgets and resource allocations. Its success will be first measured by the level of commitment from our residents in delivering these goals. The enthusiastic response to this Strategic Plan process demonstrates your desire to be involved, and your interest in celebrating our region.

Each goal and outcome described in this plan will be connected to specific action items which propel the plan forward. These key action items will be outlined in an Action Plan, which we will prepare and report on to our Board of Directors and the community annually, and which will help us all monitor progress. We will also continue to engage the community in delivering our goals and in ensuring we all remain focused on the outcomes of our Strategic Plan.

As we continue to implement the plan, we will be able to monitor our success by seeing positive changes to our region. We will find ourselves making better use of our conservation areas and trails, we will see the quality of the water in our rivers and lakes continue to improve, we will see more natural areas restored and protected, and we will increasingly want to become involved in continuing to make our region a healthier, more sustainable place that is resilient to change.



“The kids of today will be the ones to change the world if they are equipped with the knowledge to do so. The educational system needs to expand to encompass these valuable lessons so that we learn to protect this important resource.”

Survey Comment Online





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