

ABCA Program Report

To: Board of Directors
Date: September 18, 2025
From: Nathan Schoelier
Subject: Draft Rock Glen Conservation Area Master Plan
Report Type: ACTION REQUIRED

Recommendation:

THAT the Ausable Bayfield Conservation Authority Board of Directors approves the draft Master Plan update for Rock Glen Conservation Area to be made available for public and stakeholder feedback.

Background:

The 2025 recreation budget included funds for updating the Rock Glen Conservation Area (RGCA) Master Plan. The original master plan was developed in 1979, with updates being completed in 1988 and 2004.

Appended to this report is the first draft of the Master Plan update for RGCA. One of the primary goals that staff had for the update was to reintroduce institutional knowledge to the master plan. Reintroducing this information allows decisions to be made that consider historic information, alongside new tools and resources.

The update is being completed according to the process approved at the March 20, 2025 Board of Directors meeting. The next step is to make the plan available for public and stakeholder feedback. Staff have identified the following stakeholders:

- Arkona Lions Club
- County of Lambton
- Chippewas of Kettle and Stony Point First Nations
- Municipality of Lambton Shores
- Municipality of Warwick
- Residents of the Town of Arkona and surrounding area
- RGCA season pass holders

Staff will utilize various engagement methods and tools to complete meaningful engagement within the organization's capacity and resources. Upon completing engagement, any necessary changes will be reflected in the final draft of the plan and it will return to the Board of Directors for approval.

Preface

The Rock Glen Conservation Area (RGCA) Master Plan is the guiding document for the management of this conservation area which is owned and managed by the Ausable Bayfield Conservation Authority (ABCA). The recommendations in this master plan are intended to help direct property management that considers the needs of the environment, and the needs of the community.

This master plan was developed using the goals, objectives, and considerations described in ABCA's Conservation Lands Strategy (CLS), approved November 21, 2024. This master plan includes the collective input from (contributing partners to be listed in final draft).

This master plan was approved by ABCA's Board of Directors on (approval date to be included in final approved plan).

Land Acknowledgement

Ausable Bayfield Conservation Authority acknowledges the original stewards of this land, the Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabe. We recognize the Huron Tract Treaty signed in 1827. We recognize this territory was subject to the Dish with One Spoon wampum, under which multiple nations agreed to care for the land and resources, including plants and animals, in peace. As shared stewards of this land and water, ABCA is grateful to work in this territory.

Executive Summary

The Ausable Bayfield Conservation Authority (ABCA) has updated the Rock Glen Conservation Authority (RGCA) Master Plan, building on the original (1979) and revised (1988 and 2004) plans. This update reflects current usage and management challenges, offering a progressive framework that balances conservation goals with sustainable operations. The plan was guided by the Conservation Lands Strategy (2024).

Located at 8680 Rock Glen Road in Arkona, Municipality of Lambton Shores, RGCA is a 26-hectare conservation area formed through the acquisition of three parcels between 1954 and 1969. Originally established to protect the Ausable Gorge and support compatible recreation, its core goals – protection, preservation, and public access – remain unchanged, despite evolving challenges and opportunities. The Ausable River borders the property to the east, while the Hobbs – Mckenzie Drain runs through the property, featuring the Rock Glen Falls, an 11-metre waterfall and RGCA's most popular attraction. RGCA also contains an abundance of fossils, providing a key attraction for visitors.

It is an ecologically significant site within the Ausable Gorge, part of the Ausable River watershed and the biodiverse Carolinian zone. The Carolinian zone supports a high level of biodiversity, including species at risk (SAR) and species that are not found anywhere else in Canada.

RGCA is primarily used for passive, nature-based recreation such as hiking, birdwatching, and picnicking. It also hosts events like family reunions, weddings, and community gatherings. Visitation continues to grow, with approximately 38,000 annual visits at the time of this update. A key attraction is the Arkona Lions Museum and Information Centre, developed in partnership with the Arkona Lions Club, which welcomes thousands of the visitors each year.

The original, and 1988 master plans focus on the environmental degradation caused by intensive, uncontrolled use and a two-part strategy to balance environmental and community needs. The two-part strategy included adding recreational amenities to the more resilient tablelands to reduce pressure on sensitive valley lands and creating a defined trail system to guide access. This approach successfully supported a balance between conserving natural areas and recreation by addressing the insufficient availability of sustainable recreational features relative to the public use and demand of the property. This updated plan builds on past challenges and successes, with recommendations that reinforce this strategy.

ABCA works to adapt to the needs of the environment, and the needs of the community, using the best available information at the time; therefore, the master plan will be updated every ten years.

Master Plan Process

Placeholder: This Master Plan is being updated according to the process approved by the ABCA Board of Directors at its March 20, 2025 meeting. In the final draft of this Master Plan, this section will describe how that process was applied to this specific plan update.

What We Heard – Engagement Summary

Placeholder: This section will be incorporated into the final draft of this Master Plan.

Conservation Lands Strategy

The development of this master plan was directed by the goals, objectives, and management considerations detailed in the CLS (2024) and reinforced by the Watershed Based Resource Management Strategy (2024). Some conservation areas may have CLS goals and objectives that are not, or are less applicable to the property, and its management; however, due to the dynamic and multifaceted nature of RGCA, all CLS goals and objectives are applicable. The public recognizes RGCA primarily for its nature-based public use opportunities, highlighting the importance of other CLS goals, such as balancing recreational use, with responsible conservation-based management.

Management Goal

The Ausable Bayfield Conservation Authority and its partners are dedicated to conserving the ecological integrity of Rock Glen Conservation Area, while offering compatible recreational and educational opportunities that encourage nature appreciation and help fund the sustainable management of conservation lands.

Background

Land Acquisition and Disposition

RGCA, as it exists today, was formed through the acquisition of three separate parcels of land. In 1954, the Ausable River Conservation Authority purchased a 4.1-hectare parcel from the Arkona Lions Club, which had managed the site as a park from 1948 to 1954. In 1958, and 1969, the adjacent parcels were purchased to enlarge the conservation area to its current size, 26 hectares. The area was established to help preserve and protect the Ausable Gorge, while offering recreational opportunities compatible with its natural environment. Since then, its development and management have followed this vision, making RGCA a successful nature-based destination for thousands of visitors.

No property disposition has occurred at RGCA.

Connections with Other Publicly Accessible Lands

RGCA is not connected to any other publicly accessible lands. The Rock Glen Family Resort, a private campground with recreation facilities, is directly across the road from RGCA.

Land Use History

While RGCA is located in an area with a rich cultural heritage, spanning much longer than described in this master plan, this section focuses on the period documented by ABCA through aerial imagery and past master plans, beginning in 1947.

Before ABCA's ownership, the land that now forms RGCA was primarily used for agriculture. A 1947 aerial image (Figure 1) shows sparse tree cover, suggesting that the property was used for pasturing livestock, and growing row crops or forage in the small fields. Areas with difficult access due to watercourses and steep slopes appear less disturbed. In 1948, the Arkona Lions Club began managing a 10-acre parcel of the property as a park, which the Ausable River Conservation Authority purchased in 1954.



Figure 1: 1947 aerial image of Rock Glen Conservation Area. The red polygon denotes the approximate property boundary of RGCA in 2025.

Figure 2 shows the property and surrounding area in 1972, shortly after ABCA acquired the final parcel in 1969. Figure 2 suggests that the most intensive agricultural use occurred just before ABCA's ownership of the complete area. The 1972 aerial image (Figure 2) highlights the transition in agricultural practices that likely occurred at the property. More land was cleared for fields to support row crops, and it appears that the forest matured where it was not cleared, suggesting that livestock were no longer present to inhibit regeneration.

By 1979, several elements of the conservation area were already in place, as outlined in the original master plan. The property included a picnic area, pavilion, and sports area, all located north of the gorge. A gatehouse, and parking lot were located at the entrance, and the two areas were connected by three bridges that were all located above the falls, one of the bridges supported vehicular access. The washroom was also nearing completion when the plan was developed in August 1979.



Figure 2: 1972 aerial image of Rock Glen Conservation Area. The red polygon denotes the approximate property boundary of RGCA in 2025.

In the 1970s and 1980s, staff recognized that intensive, uncontrolled use of the gorge was degrading its condition, as evidence by a maze of random, intersecting trails. A two-part strategy was implemented: developing recreation within the more resilient tablelands, and creating a defined trail system to minimize ecological impact. The 1988 Master Plan built upon the original plan, emphasizing sustainable recreation through responsible development of the site. Early improvements to the tablelands are visible in the 1989 aerial image (Figure 3). To guide access, stairs to the Ausable Gorge were also constructed during this time. The Arkona Lions Museum and Information Centre was constructed in 1986.



Figure 3: 1989 aerial image of Rock Glen Conservation Area. The red polygon denotes the approximate property boundary of RGCA in 2025.

By the late 1990's, development at RGCA was substantially complete. The 1999 aerial image (Figure 4) shows a layout similar how RGCA is at the time of this update. According to the 1988 Master Plan, deciduous and coniferous plantations – planted between 1974 and 1976 using species such as soft maple, white ash, white pine, and spruce – had reached heights of 2 to 5 metres in height by 1988. Some plantations are visible in the 1999 image, though the sparse conifers in the northwest suggest low survival rates. A single row of each, white pine, cedar, and spruce, was also planted along the northern boundary.



Figure 4: 1999 aerial image of Rock Glen Conservation Area. The red polygon denotes the approximate property boundary of RGCA in 2025.

The 2004 Master Plan proposed converting a low-quality ash plantation into a more suitable ecosystem, such as tall grass prairie or old-field transition. Soon after, Emerald Ash Borer (EAB) killed the ash trees at RGCA, prompting significant staff resources to remove hazardous trees. In 2014, ABCA and community groups planted native species, including sugar maple, silver maple, tulip tree, sycamore, Kentucky coffee tree, red oak, chinquapin oak, Ohio buckeye, and redbud, to reforest the area. Some areas, particularly in the northwest have naturally transitioned to old-field conditions, this is visible in Figure 5.

To promote safe areas for children to play, and build upon the early strategy established for RGCA, two playgrounds were established in 2008. These playground structures are located in the tablelands of RGCA.



Figure 5: 2020 aerial image of Rock Glen Conservation Area. The red polygon denotes the approximate property boundary of RGCA in 2025.

In response to high visitor numbers in 2020, staff implemented several upgrades to increase capacity while protecting RGCA's ecological integrity. The lower parking lot, west of the Hobbs-McKenzie Drain crossing was expanded to accommodate an additional 24 vehicles. Additional parking spaces were also added to the upper loop, to support increased use of the pavilion. To reduce pressure on heavily used amenities, a new trail was established in 2023. It encourages visitor dispersion and offers an alternative route through the Ausable River Valley, linking the lower drain crossing to the tablelands near the north pavilion.

Staffing

RGCA has a dedicated on-site team consisting of a Superintendent, and two Conservation Area Assistants who staff the property from May through October. Additional staff from ABCA's Administration Centre provide support as needed.

The Arkona Lions Museum and Information Centre is managed by volunteers from the Arkona Lions Club, with assistance from ABCA staff.

Permitted Activities

Birdwatching	Geocaching	Snowshoeing
Cross-country skiing	Hiking	Picnicking
Fishing*	Walking dogs on leash	

**Fishing is only permitted in the Ausable River. Fishing is not permitted in the Hobbs-McKenzie Drain due to the high volume of visitors in this area.*

Programs and Services

RGCA is a key part of ABCA's conservation lands, and passive recreation programs. It supports the organizations broader mandate by contributing to several core programs and services, including:

- Conservation Education Program
 - RGCA is a primary site for hands-on, nature-based learning that fosters environmental awareness and appreciation.
- Flood Forecasting and Warning Program
 - RGCA is a site where snow depth and water equivalent measurements are collected, contributing critical data for assessing flood risk throughout the watershed
- Biomonitoring
 - RGCA offers access to the Ausable River for long-term monitoring of fish and mussel species – hosting a long-term index station for both fish and mussels
- Provincial Groundwater Monitoring Network
 - RGCA hosts a monitoring well as part of Ontario's Provincial Groundwater Monitoring Network (PGMN), a partnership between the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks (MECP) and Conservation Authorities. Water quality at the RGCA well is assessed annually, while groundwater levels are recorded hourly to track hydrological trends.

Beyond these defined programs, RGCA plays a vital role in integrated watershed management. Natural areas support essential ecological and hydrological functions, which support the core mandate of conservation authorities: protecting people and property from flooding and other natural hazards.

Infrastructure

RGCA contains a significant amount of infrastructure relative to ABCA's other conservation areas. This includes, but is not limited to: an entry gatehouse, mid-level watercourse crossings, museum and information centre, and a fully serviced washroom. The infrastructure at RGCA is a valuable asset to its operations, supporting visitor satisfaction and, ultimately, the viability of its operations.

Unless specifically addressed in the recommendations of this Master Plan, existing infrastructure is considered an asset to both the conservation area and the organization. Its maintenance, rehabilitation or replacement will be guided ABCA's Capital Asset Management Plan (2024) and will be integrated into financial forecasts and annual budget preparations to ensure existing infrastructure remains safe and continues to support a high level of visitor satisfaction.

Visitor and Community Use

Visitor Numbers

The numbers described in this section include gate entries from day-use visitors, event and program attendees, and visits from season pass holders.

The number of people visiting RGCA has increased steadily over the past decade (Figure 6), increasing from approximately 10,000 visitors in 2014, to approximately 41,000 visitors in 2024. The pandemic was an exception to the otherwise, linear growth realized at RGCA. The pandemic generated exceptionally busy times for conservation areas across the province; during this time, RGCA realized an annual attendance as high as 71,461 people. Since that time, the visitor numbers have returned to a pattern, consistent with the linear growth that was occurring prior to the exceptional years of 2020, and 2021. During the post-pandemic period of 2022 – 2024, RGCA has averaged approximately 38,000 people per year, but the growth from 2014 – 2024 suggests that this may continue to increase steadily.

Approximately 20% of the total number of annual visitors is realized during statutory holiday long weekends. Canada Day, Civic Holiday, and Labour Day weekends receive the highest number of visitors, often having more than 2000 visitors over the course of three days during each of these weekends.

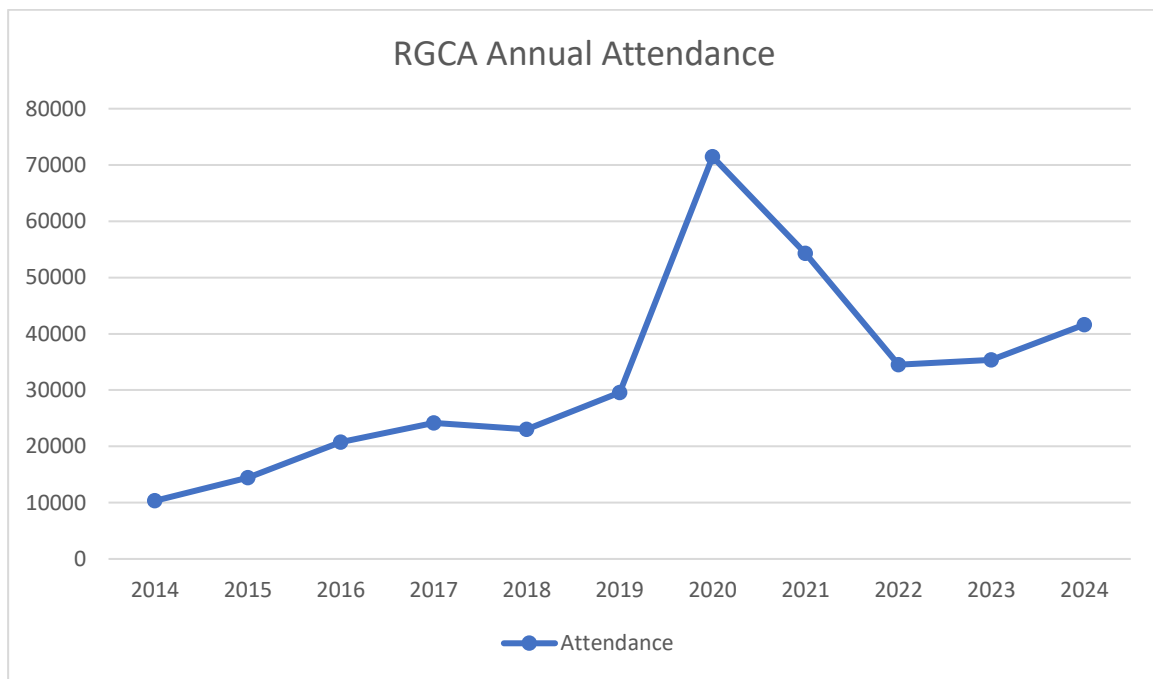


Figure 6: Total attendance by year

Figure 7 demonstrates how visitor numbers are distributed across the season when RGCA has staff present. Understanding how visitor numbers are distributed across the year helps guide management decisions that conserve the ecological integrity of RGCA, while ensuring sustainable growth and outdoor opportunities.

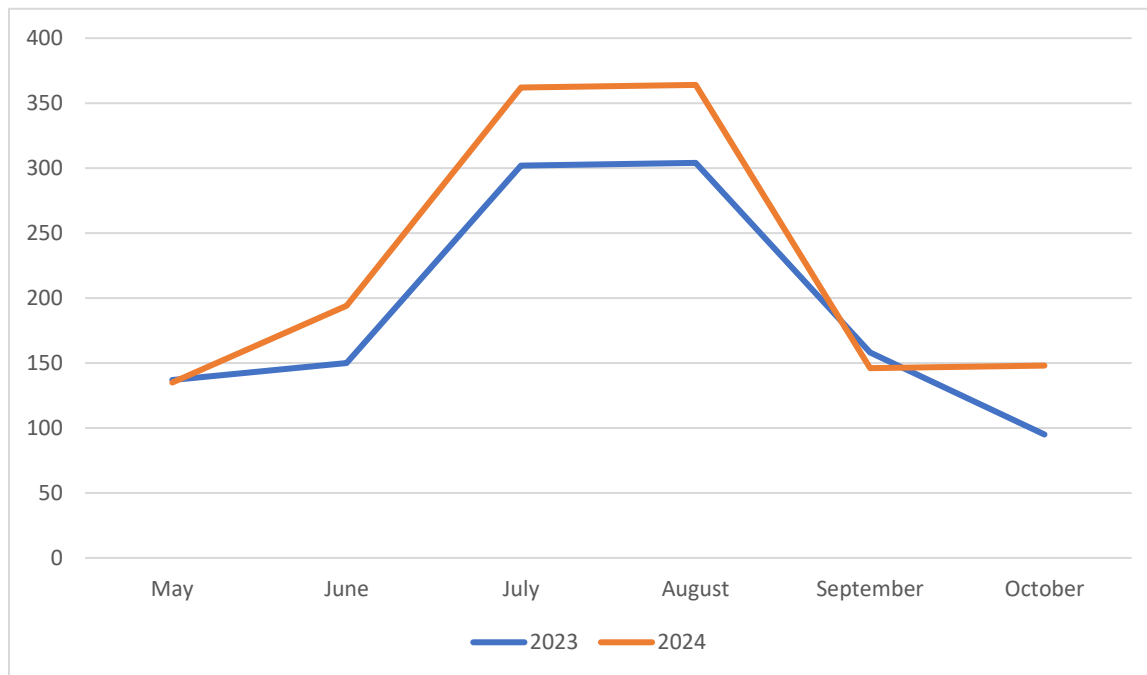


Figure 7: Average of daily entries by month for 2023 and 2024

Season Pass Holder Numbers

RGCA offers two options for season passes, including a season pass for an individual person, as well as a season pass for a family. The season pass program is an appreciated, and growing program. In 2024, 62 family passes, and 11 individual season passes were purchased.

Events

RGCA hosts a variety of events each season, including community partner events (e.g., Bruce Redman Car Show by the Arkona Lions Club) and private functions (e.g., weddings, reunions, and corporate gatherings).

Event fees, set annually, help cover staff time and contribute to funding conservation area operations. Fee waiver requests are reviewed on a case-by-case basis, considering community benefit, ABCA resource requirements, and potential impacts to RGCA operations. All waivers require approval by the ABCA Board of Directors.

Cultural and Heritage Resources

While RGCA is situated in an area with a rich cultural heritage that extends beyond what is described in this plan, this section includes only the information documented in previous plans. RGCA provides a unique cross-section of ancient history as well as examples of the more recent cultural history of the immediate area.

When the area was covered by the Devonian Sea, deposits containing simple life forms were left behind. Erosion by the Ausable River and Hobbs – McKenzie Drain has since exposed these layers, exposing these fossils. The abundance, and ability to view these fossils have made RGCA well known.

Cultural history, including early agricultural practices is also evident on the property. The foundation from a grist mill may be viewed immediately below the falls; three different mills have been constructed on the site since 1837. Only the foundation of the last mill, built in 1870 remains. The ruins of the McGibbon homestead, once home to the last mill owner, are located near the pavilion in the lower picnic area.

Nearby in the Ausable River, remnants of a hydroelectric dam that was removed in 1937, reflect early power development in Arkona. The original dam was constructed in 1907, only to be destroyed by flooding in 1908. The dam was blown out in 1937, following pressure from upstream anglers who demanded a fish ladder, or an end to the dam, to allow for natural movement of fish.

Though only remnants of these structures remain, a considerable amount of history is known and recorded in publications about the history of Arkona.

Natural Areas

Watershed Context

RGCA is located within the Ausable River watershed, in an area of the watershed known as the Ausable Gorge. For much of its course, the Ausable River runs alongside the Wyoming Moraine, with RGCA situated near the point where the river cuts through the moraine as it continues toward its outlet at Lake Huron.

While the broader watershed is dominated by agricultural land use, RGCA and the surrounding Ausable Gorge support diverse forest habitats.

Site Characteristics

The property includes several ecosystem types, ranging from restored areas transitioning from former land use to natural conditions, to relatively undisturbed natural areas.

The riparian and valley lands of the Ausable River, which forms the property's eastern boundary, are dominated by natural forest habitat, including Carolinian species. This ecosystem extends into the Hobbs-Mckenzie Drain watershed upstream to Rock Glen Falls. The forest shows minimal signs of disturbance from invasive species or past land use practices, likely due to steep valley terrain limiting access.

Outside of the valley lands, the landscape features flat to rolling terrain sloping toward the Ausable River and Hobbs-Mckenzie Drain. Several intermittent watercourses cross these areas, some with steep terrain similar to the valley slopes. The flattest areas show the most disturbance and are either used for access and recreation or have been reforested to support natural regeneration.

Environmental Designations and Protections

Environmental designations and protections are an important component of conserving the ecological integrity of RGCA. This master plan may not present a comprehensive inventory of environmental designations and protections.

Area of Natural and Scientific Interest

Approximately 80% of RGCA is provincially designated as being part of the Ausable River Valley Life Science Area of Natural and Scientific Interest (ANSI). ANSIs are areas of land and water containing unique natural landscapes or features. There are two types of ANSIs, Earth Science, and Life Science. Life Science ANSIs represent significant biodiversity and natural landscapes.

Conservation Authorities Act

Areas of RGCA are subject to *Ontario Regulation 41/24: Prohibited Activities, Exemptions and Permits* under the *Conservation Authorities Act*. Ontario Regulation 41/24 directs development away from natural hazards, supporting the core mandate of conservation authorities of managing watershed resources and protecting life and property.

Municipal Zoning By-Law

The Municipality of Lambton Shores Municipal Zoning By-Law establishes and regulates land use by implementing the general policies from the Municipality of Lambton Shores Official Plan. The zoning regulations applicable to RGCA are Open Space – 1 (OS1), Environmental Protection – Hazard (EP-H), and Environmental Protection – Woodlot (EP – WD).

Woodlands Conservation By-Law

The forested areas of RGCA are subject to regulation under the County of Lambton's Woodlands Conservation By-Law. The Woodlands Conservation By-Law aims to promote good forestry practices, and conserve forest habitat, and forest resources for future generations.

Natural Heritage Augmentation

The ecosystem benefits provided by the natural areas at RGCA extend beyond property boundaries by contributing to overall ecosystem health.

The natural areas at RGCA build upon the forests and other ecosystems that line the Ausable River. From approximately Sylvan Road, through RGCA, and downstream to just north of Elginfield Road, the Ausable River valley is some of the most intact natural areas in the entire Ausable River watershed. This forms a natural connection that supports movement and migration of floral and fauna species.

The watershed model recognizes the direct link between land management and aquatic health. The natural areas at RGCA, along with those throughout the broader valley, play a positive role in

supporting healthy aquatic ecosystems. This contribution is both in the aquatic ecosystems adjacent to the terrestrial ecosystems, as well as throughout the larger, downstream areas of the Ausable River.

Species at Risk

Ontario's Natural Heritage Information Centre (NHIC) provides species-at-risk (SAR) data using one-kilometre grids, two of which apply to RGCA. Several SAR have been documented within this area.

It is essential that staff are aware of these species, or their potential presence, and manage the site accordingly. Staff maintain detailed records and monitor for new occurrences. Responsible management not only supports terrestrial species, but also protects and enhances conditions for nearby and downstream aquatic species.

To help safeguard SAR from potential threats, detailed information is not published in this plan.

Summary of Prior Management Plan Implementation

Status	Action Item
Implemented. ABCA and the Arkona Lions Club maintain a strong partnership at RGCA.	Continue the partnership with the Arkona Lions Club.
Implemented.	Develop signs to educate visitors about the geological and cultural history of the park and species at risk.
Implemented/ Ongoing. Conserving the ecological integrity of RGCA while providing compatible recreational and educational opportunities continues to be the top management priority.	Continue current management techniques which focus on visitor use in non-sensitive parts of the park in order to protect the geological features, Carolinian species and species at risk.
Implemented/ Ongoing. Aquatic and terrestrial inventories have been completed since the last plan. It is important to inventory and update this information periodically; therefore, it is considered an ongoing action item.	Update the aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems inventory.
Implemented. The primary ash plantations have succeeded to old-field habitat. A smaller, centrally located, ash plantation was replaced with deciduous trees after it was impacted by the EAB.	Convert the low-quality ash plantation to a more appropriate ecosystem such as tallgrass prairie or old-field transition.
Ongoing. ABCA's Stewardship and Healthy Watersheds departments continue to promote best management practices (BMPs),	Encourage good land use upstream of the park to improve water quality for recreation and aquatic species.

and facilitate technical and financial support to landowners to implement BMPs.	
Ongoing. ABCA permits research and scientific study through a Special Use Permit system. Researchers provide their findings to ABCA, augmenting institutional knowledge of the site.	Encourage research and scientific study.
Addressed in this Master Plan.	Remove invasive, exotic tree species.

Management Statements

To support the Management Goal for RGCA, the ABCA provides the following management statements:

- To preserve and protect the unique natural resources for the benefit of present and future generations.
- To promote an appreciation and awareness of unique natural, cultural, historical and geomorphological features.
- To foster appreciation through experience by providing opportunities for low-impact, passive recreational activities, and educational programs.
- To foster and support partnerships that align with the management goal.

Implementation

The following recommendations support implementation of the Master Plan in line with management goals, statements and the CLS (2024). The recommendations propose enhancements and operational changes at RGCA, with existing operations assumed to continue unless specifically addressed.

Partnerships

Recommendation 1.1: Collaborate with the Arkona Lions Club and County of Lambton to develop a plan to enhance accessibility, self-guided interpretation, and security at the museum.

Description: The museum is an important asset to the conservation authority. Through collaboration, partners - including ABCA – can enhance the museum to support the long-term viability of its operations and improve the visitor experience. Collaboration also strengthens the partners’ ability to secure external funding to support these efforts.

Recommendation 1.2: Work with local partners to explore ways to improve the pedestrian link between Arkona via Ann Street and Rock Glen Road.

Description: RGCA is an integral part of the Arkona community, with many residents visiting regularly and holding season passes. The Arkona Lions Club enhanced local access by installing a pedestrian bridge at the Community Centre Playground, linking the town with Rock Glen Road. With support from the Municipality and community partners, a defined pedestrian corridor could further strengthen this connection and promote active transportation. While ABCA recognizes this is a major project, it expresses interest in discussing its potential with the Municipality prior to future major maintenance of Rock Glen Road.

Recommendation 1.3: Work with the Chippewas of Kettle and Stony Point First Nations to better incorporate traditional knowledge, as well as indigenous history, and modern uses of the land.

Description: ABCA acknowledges the original stewards of this land and is grateful to have the opportunity to meet and work in this territory. Through collaboration with the Chippewas of Kettle and Stony Point First Nations, traditional knowledge can be integrated into management decisions. To further acknowledge the long-standing connection Indigenous people have to the land, Indigenous history, traditional ceremonies and modern land uses can be better reflected in cultural heritage resources and educational programming.

Visitor Numbers, Activities, and Programming

Recommendation 2.1: Host recreation and education events that encourage people to visit during non-peak times.

Description: Unique and attractive recreational and educational events may be facilitated during the 'shoulder-season' months of May, June, September, and October, when attendance is historically lower than the peak-busy season. Strategically timed events may encourage a more consistent distribution of visitors throughout the season, supporting sustainable growth that mitigates potential ecological impacts, and enhances visitor satisfaction.

Recommendation 2.2: Implement a tiered-rate system to the season pass program which offers a pass at a lesser rate for those who utilize active transportation methods (e.g., walking or cycling).

Description: Available parking space is often a limiting factor for visitor capacity. Implementing this recommendation may help to encourage active transportation, provide an affordable option for those who live within walking, or cycling distance; and increase capacity at RGCA. ABCA recognizes the importance of consulting with the Municipality of Lambton Shores, to mitigate any unintended consequences, such as people parking on the roadside and walking into RGCA to receive a pass at a reduced rate.

Recommendation 2.3: Host an annual appreciation event for RGCA season pass holders.

Description: The season pass program helps foster relations between staff and regular visitors. Often these pass holders help report unauthorized use, vandalism, and provide feedback and ideas

to staff for improvement that may be made. An appreciation event both recognizes the commitment of season pass holders to RGCA, and encourages new season pass holders.

Environmental

Recommendation 3.1: Remove all Norway maple trees from RGCA; continue to monitor and manage Norway maple regeneration.

Description: Norway maple is an invasive species that impacts biodiversity in forested areas. It is often planted as a shade tree in residential areas; however, some Norway maple trees were planted throughout RGCA in the past. Removing the mature Norway maple trees from RGCA will reduce the immediate seed source; however, ongoing monitoring and management will be required due to seeds from Norway maple trees on adjacent properties.

Recommendation 3.2: Complete bi-annual invasive species monitoring by trained staff to ensure the 'Early Detection and Rapid Response' (EDRR) framework for managing invasive species is utilized.

Description: EDRR is recognized as the most effective, and cost-effective approach for managing invasive species. Staff who are trained to identify invasive species will monitor for their presence, and if invasive species are detected, management will be employed accordingly. Invasive species management may be prioritized at the direction of trained staff; species of greater concern for ecological health and risk management (e.g., Giant hogweed, invasive phragmites, oak wilt) will be prioritized.

Recommendation 3.3: Update terrestrial and aquatic species inventories.

Description: Terrestrial and aquatic species inventories should be updated periodically, as resources permit, to ensure that management decisions are based on up-to-date, and accurate species information.

Infrastructure

Recommendation 4.1: Consider the most southern staircase and trail, adjacent to Rock Glen Road, an end-of-life asset.

Description: The staircase, and trail that are located between the Hobbs-McKenzie Drain and Rock Glen Road will be considered an end-of-life asset and will be removed prior to their condition degrading to a level that is no longer safe for visitor use. The infrastructure is located adjacent to the watercourse and its steep bank, which are subject to ongoing erosion which may eventually compromise the integrity of the infrastructure and create a hazard for visitors. The infrastructure will be maintained through regular maintenance efforts to prolong its suitability but should the erosion progress expeditiously or the overall condition of the infrastructure degrade to an unsafe condition, the infrastructure should be closed, and removed. The infrastructure may be removed

entirely, or in phases (e.g., the lower section may be left up to the main landing to create a viewing platform), as it determined by its condition at the time.

The eventual closing of this infrastructure will limit access and trampling at the top-of-bank, allowing native vegetation to regenerate and increase the buffer between the table lands, and the watercourse, mitigating erosion. The trail established in 2023 provides an alternative route for continued enjoyment of the property. Although this may be a significant change to RGCA, it is one of the recommendations that achieves ABCA's commitment to balance the recreational enjoyment of the property, with its ecological integrity.

Master Plan Review

To ensure this management plan remains a current, a review and update will be conducted every ten years. If changes are required during the term of the strategy, the Board of Directors may approve updates accordingly.

The Board of Directors will guide the public engagement process that is completed for the review of the strategy based on the scope of the updates recommended by staff.