Preface

The Morrison Dam Conservation Area Master Plan is the guiding document for the management of this conservation area which is owned and managed by the Ausable Bayfield Conservation Authority. 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 stakeholders and the community.

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

Acknowledgements

Placeholder: This section will be incorporated into the final draft of this Master 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 Morrison Dam Conservation Area (MDCA) Master Plan, building on the 2004 Master Plan. 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 71108 Morrison Line, near Exeter, Municipality of South Huron, MDCA is a 44-hectare (108-acre) conservation area formed through several land acquisitions in 1956, as well as in 1984. The initial land acquisitions in 1956 were to construct Morrison Dam; acquisitions in 1984 expanded the conservation area and further protected the natural corridor.

Based upon data collected by the County of Huron in 2024, MDCA is estimated to be ABCA's busiest conservation area. MDCA is primarily used for passive, nature-based recreation such as hiking, birdwatching, and accessing the Morrison Reservoir for fishing, canoeing, and kayaking. Although not maintained in the winter, the trails are used throughout the year. MDCA is also a primary site for ABCA's Conservation Education department to host education programs and is a conservation area that is regularly used to host community-based events.

First Draft – This draft Master Plan was approved by the ABCA Board of Directors, to be issued for public and stakeholder engagement, at the July 16, 2026 Board meeting.

MDCA is linked to MacNaughton Park in Exeter by the accessible South Huron Trail (SHT). The MacNaughton–Morrison section, completed between 2002 and 2004, reflects a strong, community-led initiative supported by partners including the ABCA, Ausable Bayfield Conservation Foundation (ABCF), Exeter Lions Club, the Municipality of South Huron, local landowners and donors. The Friends of South Huron Trail (FoSHT) continue to support the trail through cleanups, events, and fundraising, while promoting accessibility and responsible use.

Although this Master Plan focuses only on the MDCA, east of Morrison Line, it recognizes the conservation area as a fundamental part of the SHT. The plan emphasizes strategies that balance public access with ecological integrity, promoting nature appreciation through experience. 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). While all goals are connected to MDCA to some degree, the proximity of MDCA to a growing community; its natural environment features within an agriculturally dominated landscape; and the recreation and educational opportunities it provides highlight the relevance of the following goals:

- To integrate ABCA properties as part of a sustainable watershed, supporting a balance between the demand for public use and need for protecting ecological function
- To encourage healthy living by providing access to natural areas for safe, enjoyable and sustainable outdoor recreation opportunities
- To foster environmental appreciation amongst the watershed community through conservation education

Management Goal

The Ausable Bayfield Conservation Authority and its partners are dedicated to protecting the ecological integrity of Morrison Dam Conservation Area while offering compatible recreation, education and low-impact events that foster nature appreciation and community connection.

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Background

Land Acquisition and Disposition

In 1955, the Ausable River Conservation Authority's Board of Directors received an engineer's report proposing the Exeter-Usborne Dam, following discussions with the Town of Exeter and Exeter Public Utilities Commission (PUC) who identified interests in building a dam for flood control and water supply east of Exeter. The Board then determined the Exeter-Usborne Dam be known as the Morrison Dam in recognition of the service rendered to the Ausable River Conservation Authority by its then Chair, John Morrison. The Morrison Dam was approved as 'Scheme No. 4' of the Ausable River Conservation Authority in February 1956. The Board subsequently approved a special Advisory Board to purchase the land required for the proposed dam.

In 1956, the Ausable River Conservation Authority acquired most of the lands that are now known as MDCA to facilitate the construction of the Morrison Dam. In 1984, additional properties were acquired to expand the conservation area.

No property disposition has occurred at MDCA.

Connections with Other Publicly Accessible Lands

MDCA is encompassed within the SHT; an accessible trail that links MacNaughton Park in Exeter to the MDCA. The MacNaughton – Morrison section of the SHT, which provides the link between Exeter, and MDCA, was constructed between 2002 and 2004. The SHT is an example of a progressive, community-based initiative led by the volunteer group, The Friends of South Huron Trail (FoSHT). This collaboration is successful due to the partnership that includes the ABCA, ABCF, Exeter Lions Club, Municipality of South Huron, local landowners, and other donors, including service organizations, businesses, and individuals.

Although the MDCA is encompassed within, and is a fundamental part of the SHT, this Master Plan focuses only on the MDCA. Recognizing this connection, the Master Plan identifies considerations for developing a cohesive Master Plan for the SHT, in collaboration with the Municipality of South Huron.

It is important to note that the access and permitted activities at the properties listed in this section may change. Individuals planning to visit any of these properties should consult official resources related to the specific property for the most up-to-date information.

Land Use History

This section focuses on the period documented by ABCA through aerial imagery and past master plans, beginning in 1955.

The riparian areas that now make up MDCA, ranged from livestock pasture ground within the flood plain, to upland forest in varying states of succession. Surrounding land-use was predominantly agricultural, though at a smaller, family-owned mixed farm scale than is typical across the landscape today.

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The 1955 aerial image (Figure 1) shows the area shortly before the Ausable River Conservation Authority acquired the lands and created the Morrison Dam.

Figure 1 1955

Upon the approval of Morrison Dam by the Ausable River Conservation Authority, construction began in 1956 and was completed by 1959. The area quickly transitioned from forested riparian areas and pasture to a reservoir. By the early 1970's (Figure 2) the Morrison Dam resembled the landscape present today.

Open areas of the property that were not affected by the dam that was in progress were planted with trees. Between 1957 and 1959 approximately six acres of MDCA was reforested using red pine, white ash, white spruce and white pine.

During this time, the conservation area also began to support outdoor recreation. A pedestrian trail, small parking lot and picnic pavilion were created to facilitate this use.

Across southern Ontario, including the area around Morrison Dam also went through a significant period of transition during this time as small, family-owned mixed farms gave way to larger, more automated agricultural practices. This agricultural transition modified the landscape to adapt to new technologies, larger equipment and changing markets. This transition is evident by the removal of windrows to create larger, more uniform fields.

Figure 2 1972

During the late 1980's, ABCA's Administration Centre and Workshop were constructed at the conservation area, a pivotal point for the conservation area, and the organization. The 1989 aerial image (Figure 3) shows the presence of the Administration Centre, Workshop, and expanded parking lot to service these areas.

The property continued to grow as an outdoor recreation destination. To help facilitate this growth, a parking lot was added to the south side of the reservoir, and the picnic pavilion was moved from its original location on the north side of the reservoir when the Administration Centre was constructed.

Figure 3 1989

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In 2001, a light commercial improvement harvest was completed on approximately 30 acres of natural deciduous forest at the east end of the MDCA. The commercial harvest was completed using the single tree selection system. Information on the number of trees and volume of wood removed is incomplete, but it is known that the timber was sold for $18,464.

In the early 2000's, southern Ontario was impacted by Emerald Ash Borer (EAB) resulting in the decline and death of ash trees. In the early 2010's EAB began impacting the health of the ash trees at MDCA. In 2014, several hundred declining ash trees were removed from MDCA to maintain safe trail conditions. To accomplish this in a safe and efficient manner, the removal was conducted by a contractor using a mechanical tree harvester who completed the work in two days. The logs were harvested for firewood as the size of the logs limited their use for sawlogs; the project was revenue neutral. A two-acre section of the forest, east of the parking lot south of the reservoir, was affected by EAB the most. This area was planted with alternating rows of Eastern White Pine and White Ash in the 1950's. Some tree planting occurred following the harvest; however, the forest recovered mainly on its own with residual white pine, and naturally regenerating species. The forest composition at the property tells the story of its past land uses. Early successional species dominate areas that were once devoid of trees of were disturbed by agricultural practices, such as livestock pasturing. Over time, these pioneer species gradually give way to longer-lived, shade-tolerant species, including hard maple. Areas that were already forested when Morrison Dam was constructed continue to mature into an excellent example of a maple-dominated upland forest community. Growth ring counts on a windfall hemlock tree cut for trail maintenance indicate trees at least 170 years of age. Through ongoing stewardship, the forest will continue to progress through its natural succession.

The trail at MDCA was expanded by establishing the Deer Run Loop, which provided the opportunity for a longer trail at MDCA, and enhanced the visitor experience by introducing a new trail type, a single-path natural surfaced tail.

In 2004, the SHT was completed, connecting the MDCA to the community of Exeter via the MacNaughton-Morrison section of the SHT. The completion of the SHT was a monumental achievement by the community, led by the FoSHT volunteer group. This work greatly enhanced the MDCA as a community-oriented, outdoor recreation asset, and it remains largely the same today (Figure 4).

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Figure 4: 2025 aerial image

Staffing

MDCA does not have dedicated staff; however, ABCA's staff are primarily based at the Administration Centre, located within MDCA, making staff readily available to manage the conservation area.

The FoSHT provide support through maintaining a presence within the MDCA and surrounding community, contributing to fundraising efforts, and participating in volunteer-led trail maintenance and cleanup events.

Through a partnership between the ABCF, ABCA, FoSHT, and Municipality of South Huron; trained volunteers operate a large golf cart, deemed *The Trail Mobile*, to provide rides for visitors with mobility challenges, supporting continued access to the trail system. The Trail Mobile is a unique service that is rarely found across the country, and was made possible through contributions from local families, along with municipal and ABCF support. Volunteer drivers are essential to the success of this valued service.

Permitted Activities

Birdwatching	Fishing	Walking dogs on leash
Bicycling*		
Canoeing and Kayaking	Geocaching	Snowshoeing
Cross-country skiing	Hiking	Picnicking

*Bicycling permitted on enhanced surface (i.e. stone dust) pathway only

Programs and Services

MDCA 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:

- Biomonitoring
    - MDCA offers access to the Ausable River, and the reservoir, for long-term monitoring of fish and mussel species. It hosts a long-term index station for both fish and benthic invertebrates.
- Conservation Education Program
    - MDCA is a primary site for hands-on, nature-based learning that fosters environmental awareness and appreciation.
- Corporate Services
    - MDCA is the primary location of ABCA's operations, hosting its Administration Centre, Annex, and Workshop
- Flood Forecasting and Warning Program
    - MDCA is a site where snow depth and water equivalent measurements are collected, contributing critical data for assessing flood risk throughout the watershed.

Beyond these defined programs, MDCA 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

MDCA contains infrastructure that supports outdoor recreation activities, this includes parking areas, a pavilion, a privy washroom, trails, pedestrian bridges, docks, canoe/ kayak launch, and a boardwalk. The infrastructure at MDCA is an asset to its operations, helping balance recreation opportunities with the ecological integrity of the property.

The Morrison Dam offers recreational opportunities, which are secondary benefits to its original intention. Although this Master Plan recognizes these recreational opportunities, it does not include specific references or recommendations regarding the dam infrastructure. ABCA's Dam Maintenance Manual and Capital Asset Management Plan (2024) guide the operation and maintenance of this infrastructure.

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 by ABCA's Capital Asset Management Plan 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

In 2024, the County of Huron's Economic Development Department worked in partnership with the Regional Tourism Organization 4 (RTO4) to capture visitor data for the SHT, utilizing georeferenced cellphone data, through a platform called Propulso. This survey encompassed the entire SHT, providing meaningful information to guide management and investment, including insights that also support the MDCA specifically. It is important to recognize that this data reflects only one year; this Master Plan includes recommendations to enhance visitor data collection to better guide management and investment. The data received from the County of Huron is summarized below.

Stat(s)	**The SHT hosted 20,877 individuals in 2024**
Notes	• The highest number of unique visitors per month was in January and February; this suggests the trail is used year-round by repeat visitors who are only counted once at the start of the year • Except for January and February, the trail sees the highest number of unique visitors from April to July, with the annual low occurring in August
Considerations	• The distribution of unique visitors across the year suggests that ABCA and its partners may consider hosting outreach events between April and July to effectively reach the most individuals • The distribution of unique visitors across the year suggests that ABCA could plan trail work that has service disruptions in August to disrupt the fewest number of unique visitors
Stat(s)	**The SHT was visited a total of 91,064 times in 2024** **Approximately 45% of visitors visit the SHT once per month**
Notes	• The SHT was visited the most in July (9,877 visits) followed by December, and April, respectively. March saw the fewest number of visits (6,521 visits).
Considerations	• The frequency of use, combined with travel distance information demonstrates how well the community values MDCA and the SHT • This information demonstrates the value of maintaining and investing in high-quality access points to the trail for community, both today and as it continues to grow
Stat(s)	**Approximately 52% of visitors travelled less than 19km to visit the SHT** **The average distance travelled to visit the SHT was 37km**
Notes	
Considerations	• The distribution of visitors suggests that outreach campaigns could be strategically expanded to communities guided by the data. This outreach may be completed in partnership with local organizations

	(e.g., Exeter BIA) to promote other local attractions alongside the SHT.

Stat	**65% of visitors spent 29 minutes or less per visit on the SHT** **The average visit duration was 30.3 minutes**
Notes	• This information is expected to be largely reflective of the various loops that may be completed along the MacNaughton – Morrison section of the SHT
Considerations	• Although this information is thought to be more reflective of the MacNaughton – Morrison section of the SHT, it suggests that prioritizing investment in existing trail infrastructure may provide greater value than pursuing opportunities for trail expansion.

Events

MDCA provides an important place for community connection, supporting both connection between people and the environment, and with one another in the community. This connection is evident through the number of community-led events that are hosted at MDCA; MDCA hosts the most events relative to any of ABCA's conservation areas.

Events include but are not limited to family-oriented events hosted by local community service groups (e.g., South Huron Optimists' Easter Egg Hunt, and Exeter Lions' Fishing Derby); fundraising trail runs (e.g., Terry Fox Run, SHT Run); dedication ceremonies (e.g., Haskett Funeral Home's Memorial Tree Planting Dedication Ceremony); and environmental outreach events (e.g., Huron Stewardship Council's Turtle Release). The ABCA, and ABCF are active partners in many of these events, and support local community groups, organizations, and individuals with hosting compatible events at the MDCA.

Cultural and Heritage Resources

While the Ausable Bayfield watershed is rich in cultural and heritage resources, this plan only focuses on the MDCA within the time that ABCA has stewarded the area.

The creation of the Morrison Dam was a significant change to the local landscape, and how the community connected with it. The dam was completed in 1959, rapidly altering the landscape and providing a new feature that supported local industry, municipal operations, and provided outdoor recreation opportunities that did not exist prior to then. Since the creation of the dam, its use has changed significantly, but it remains a key place for the community to connect with the landscape around them.

Natural Areas

Watershed Context

MDCA is located within the Ausable River watershed, in an area of the watershed referred to as the 'Ausable Headwaters' sub-watershed. MDCA is located approximately fourteen kilometres straight-line distance from where the Ausable River begins.

The surrounding, and upstream land use is dominated by agricultural production. The ABCA Watershed Report Card (2023) identifies forest cover within the Ausable Headwaters sub-watershed to be approximately ten per cent. The MDCA is located near the Town of Exeter, which is the largest community within the rural Ausable Bayfield watershed, with a population of approximately 5,000 people. While the broader watershed is dominated by agricultural land use, MDCA is part of a small natural corridor that exists along the Ausable River, as it flows into, and through the Town of Exeter.

Site Characteristics

MDCA's natural environment characteristics are primarily shaped by its setting within an area of intensive agricultural production and by the presence of a dam that forms a reservoir. The property boundary generally coincides with the boundary of the natural area encompassing the river and reservoir and is identified by the division between natural habitat and forested land.

The forest forms a relatively narrow natural corridor, ranging in width from approximately twenty-five metres up to two hundred metres on either side of the river and reservoir. The corridor is characterized by well-vegetated valley slopes in various stages of succession, and a rolling topography intermixed with occasional steeper slopes and marshy areas. In one location, adjacent forested lands on a privately owned parcel augment the forest, forming a larger forest ecosystem.

The Ausable River has a characteristically low summer flow and provides a habitat for a wide variety of warm water fish (e.g., bass, crappie, northern pike), mammals, and waterfowl. During rain and melt events, the water level is extremely high, but for the remainder of the year, stream flow is often diminished. As a result of low water levels, and surrounding land use practices, aquatic vegetation is abundant in the summer months. Due to these factors, the dam and reservoir may increase water temperatures and affect oxygen levels for the water downstream in the Ausable River.

The ABCA Biologist conducted fisheries monitoring of the MDCA Reservoir in 1986, 2005, 2015 and 2025. The surveys help evaluate changes in the fish community, as well as evaluate aquatic habitat characteristics (e.g., water clarity, dissolved oxygen, and water temperature at various depths). The following outlines key findings from the 2025 survey:

- Through the surveys in 2005, 2015 and 2025, eleven species of fish have been documented that were not detected in the 1986 surveys.
- Since 1986, twenty-two species of fish have been documented through ABCA surveys.

- In 2025, Northern Pike and Iowa Darters were documented, which had not been documented through prior sampling efforts.
- In 2025, some species, including White Crappie, historically a common species in MDCA, were not documented in 2025.
- Common carp, which are potential threat to the aquatic habitat at MDCA, remain undocumented through ABCA survey efforts.

ABCA's *Long-term Fisheries Monitoring of Morrison Dam Reservoir: Summary of 2025 Results* contains a comprehensive summary of the findings.

Adjacent to the dam is an area approximately two acres in size that serves as an emergency spillway. This area is maintained as open space, free of natural or built obstructions.

Environmental Designations and Protections

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

Conservation Authorities Act

Areas of MDCA 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 South Huron Municipal Zoning By-Law establishes and regulates land use by implementing the general policies from the Municipality of South Huron's Official Plan. The zoning regulation applicable to MDCA is Natural Environment Zone 2 (NE2).

Forest Conservation By-Law

The forested areas of MDCA are subject to regulation under the County of Huron's Forests Conservation By-Law. The Forests 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 MDCA extend beyond property boundaries by contributing to overall ecosystem health.

Although some excellent "back-forty" woodlots occur throughout the fragmented landscape of the Ausable Headwaters sub-watershed, few contiguous stretches of habitat or natural corridor exist. The MDCA is a component of a small natural corridor that begins at the easterly limit of MDCA, and is largely present along the Ausable River, until the westerly limit of the Town of Exeter. The corridor exists amongst current, expanding and future residential areas of Exeter,

providing important natural space amongst a growing community. This corridor is described in greater detail in ABCA's *Exeter-Morrison Corridor Master Plan* (1983).

The watershed model recognizes the direct link between land management and aquatic health. The natural areas at MDCA, along with adjacent natural areas, 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, three of which apply to MDCA. 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

Action Item	Status
Manage aquatic and terrestrial resources to provide habitat for species, including species at risk.	**Implemented/ Ongoing.**
Update the aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems inventory and develop a fisheries management plan for the reservoir.	**Implemented/ Ongoing.** Ongoing aquatic and terrestrial monitoring will be complete at return intervals and as resources allow.
Encourage fishing practices that will improve the health of the reservoir fishery.	**Ongoing.** The ABCA supports a temporary public fishing closure to ensure high-quality experiences for youth during community fishing events. The ABCA also encourages the responsible disposal of fishing gear.
Encourage good land use upstream of the reservoir to improve and protect water quality for aquatic species and recreation.	**Implemented/ Ongoing.** ABCA's Healthy Watersheds and Stewardship Teams work to engage with landowners, and connect them with technical and financial support to implement best management practices.
Develop a complete 10km trail system suitable for a competitive run by upgrading the Deer Run loop at the east end of the property and developing a nature trail on the	**Not proceeding.** Visitor and trail use data do not support this recommendation as an investment that will meet the community's needs.

north side of the Ausable River (463970, 4800980 to 464970, 4800700).	
Acquire land or establish an easement agreement for the purposes of trail development (464790, 4800850 to 465000, 4800880).	**Not proceeding.** Visitor and trail use data do not support this recommendation as an investment that will meet the community's needs.
Strengthen the "Friends of MacNaughton and Morrison" including developing a relationship with area Scouting/ Guiding groups.	**Implemented/ Ongoing.**
Demonstrate good forest management and riparian management.	**Implemented/ Ongoing.**
Manage the reservoir levels to augment flow in the Ausable River.	**Not proceeding.** This Action Item does not align with ABCA's Dam Operation Manual.
Expand the Commemorative Woods site west of Morrison Line.	**Implemented.**

Management Statements

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

- To preserve and protect the unique natural resources for the benefit of present and future generations.
- To foster appreciation through experience by providing opportunities for low-impact, passive recreational activities and educational programs.
- To support MDCA as a primary hub for outdoor education through ongoing management and investment.
- To uphold and recognize the community's investment in MDCA through the SHT by preserving barrier-free access to nature and maintaining access without day-use fees.
- 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 and the CLS (2024). The recommendations propose enhancements and operational changes at MDCA, with existing operations assumed to continue unless specifically addressed.

Partnerships

Recommendation 1.1: Use this Master Plan as a supporting document to initiate a collaborative effort within the community to develop a cohesive Master Plan for the South Huron Trail.

Description: This Master Plan guides the management of Morrison Dam Conservation Area, which is a component of the larger, South Huron Trail; a vibrant outdoor recreational asset within the community of Exeter. This plan should be used as a foundational document to guide the development of a cohesive vision for the South Huron Trail, in collaboration with the South Huron Trail's landowners, stakeholders, the community, and the Municipality of South Huron. The cohesive plan must reflect both the current patterns of use and the values that define the trail today, as well as provide a forward-thinking framework that anticipates the needs, opportunities and pressures associated with a growing and evolving community.

Recommendation 1.2: Establish partnerships with local secondary schools to promote youth involvement in the Friends of South Huron Trail volunteer group.

Description: The Friends of South Huron Trail were instrumental in establishing the MacNaughton-Morrison Trail, creating the South Huron Trail that exists today. Their dedicated efforts led to a strong partnership, promoting, shaping and managing the South Huron Trail, including Morrison Dam Conservation Area. Friends of South Huron Trail provides a framework for partnerships with local secondary schools, encouraging youth involvement. This new partnership will bring new perspectives, generate succession opportunities, and offer meaningful opportunities for local youth to engage with their community.

Recommendation 1.3: To collaborate with the Ausable Bayfield Conservation Foundation, Friends of South Huron Trail and other community partners to encourage and diversify the fundraising efforts to maintain and enhance the trail.

Description: The Friends of South Huron Trail, Ausable Bayfield Conservation Foundation and Ausable Bayfield Conservation Authority have a long-standing history of fundraising initiatives to support capital, and operational investment in the South Huron Trail, including Morrison Dam Conservation Area. Fundraising for capital expenditures is often met with excitement from the community, and exemplary success. Fundraising for operational expenditures is often more challenging, but critical to day-to-day operations. As fundraising climates, and the interests that the community has in charitable events pivot, it is fundamental to the success of the trail to encourage and diversify fundraising efforts (e.g., special events, built off the success of the jointly hosted Owl Prowls). Diversifying efforts also provides the opportunity to reach new audiences and offer engaging outdoor experiences.

Visitor Numbers, Activities, and Programming

Recommendation 2.1: Establish a partnership with the County of Huron to support ongoing visitor data collection to guide management decisions and investment.

Description: The South Huron Trail, including Morrison Dam Conservation Area, was known to be one of busier conservation areas. However, the data collected by the County of Huron suggests that it is the busiest conservation area owned and managed by the Ausable Bayfield Conservation Authority. This data was helpful to provide a snapshot of current trail use; the data

could be enhanced through a partnership that continues to collect the data to evaluate trends that help guide management and investment.

Environmental

Recommendation 3.1: Manage existing populations of invasive species within the forested ecosystems (e.g., Norway maple, oriental bittersweet, common buckthorn).

Description: The forested areas at Morrison Dam Conservation Area have several species that are considered invasive, and threaten biodiversity, and overall ecological health of the forest. These invasive species should be managed to promote long-term succession of the forested ecosystems. Management efforts will be prioritized based upon the invasive tendencies of the species; the pressure that the invasive species exhibit on sensitive species (e.g., adjacent or nearby species-at-risk) and the resources available to manage the invasive species.

Invasion of species that are not currently present will be detected and managed accordingly through annual invasive species monitoring (*Recommendation 3.2.*

Recommendation 3.2: Complete annual invasive species monitoring by trained staff to ensure the 'Early Detection and Rapid Response' (EDRR) framework for detecting and 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 their presence, and if invasive species are detected, management will be employed accordingly. Invasive species management may be prioritized at the direction trained staff; species of greater concern for ecological health and risk management (e.g., Dog strangling vine, Giant hogweed, invasive phragmites, oak wilt, oriental bittersweet) will be prioritized.

Recommendation 3.3: Facilitate citizen science opportunities to track biodiversity, and habitat succession.

Description: Citizen science involves public participation and collaboration in scientific research initiatives. Modern tools, such as iNaturalist and photo monitoring stations, provide opportunities to engage visitors in the collection and tracking of ecological data while fostering environmental awareness, and appreciation of Morrison Dam Conservation Area's natural values.

Infrastructure

Recommendation 4.1: Establish an accessible access point to the trail at Morrison Dam Conservation Areas, from the parking lot of the Administration Centre (71108 Morrison Line).

Description: The parking area at the Administration Centre serves as a primary access point to Morrison Dam Conservation Area; however, it offers limited opportunity for accessible access to the trail. An accessible access point may be established by connecting the parking area to the trail through a link parallel to the Morrison Dam spillway, immediately south of the

Administration Centre. This connecting link would enhance accessibility at the primary access point to Morrison Dam Conservation Area.

Recommendation 4.2: To collaborate with the Municipality of South Huron to establish pedestrian crossings where the trail intersects with Morrison Line.

Description: The trail at Morrison Dam Conservation Area connects with the MacNaughton-Morrison Trail to form the South Huron Trail. To form this connection, and to create a loop at Morrison Dam Conservation Area, the trail crosses Morrison Line on the south, and north side of the reservoir. Visitor satisfaction and safety may be enhanced by installing pedestrian crossings at these locations.

Recommendation 4.3: Implement natural playground features to create a linear play space adjacent to the trail, enhancing youth activities and experiences.

Description: The Morrison Dam section of the South Huron Trail features several play structures that are in varying states of repair, with some having been removed due to their deteriorating condition. Since the trail was constructed, natural playgrounds have become increasingly more common and widely accepted, with linear play elements designed to be integrated alongside trails. Linear features (e.g., balancing beams, logs, and stepping stones) could be incorporated to replace the experience provided by the existing equipment while encouraging youth engagement and fostering an all-ages trail experience.

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