

## Conservation Ontario Strategic Directions for 2006 to 2010

### Introduction

Conservation Ontario is the network of 36 Conservation Authorities (CAs) in Ontario. This network is governed by appointed representatives of the member CAs and its operations are largely funded by Conservation Authorities. With a staff of 13, Conservation Ontario maintains an office at 120 Bayview Parkway, Newmarket, Ontario in premises leased from the Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority.

Founded in 1981 as the Association of Conservation Authorities of Ontario (ACAO), the organization has evolved over its quarter century history to become a respected voice for Conservation Authorities that builds relationships, promotes the network and champions issues of importance to its member Conservation Authorities.

In 1994, ACAO completed its first formal Strategic Plan, adopting a Mission Statement, Values and Objectives, guiding the organization through an extremely turbulent period that witnessed a reduction in provincial funding support to Conservation Authorities of more than 70 percent, coupled with legislative changes allowing for their dissolution. That no Conservation Authorities were dissolved is a tribute to the success, strength and wisdom of the watershed-based, community driven model for natural resources management that was conceived and implemented more than sixty years ago.

The change in name from the Association of Conservation Authorities of Ontario (ACAO) to Conservation Ontario in 1995 was also an important outcome of the Strategic Plan.

**Strategic Planning is a dynamic-thinking process undertaken by the collective leadership of an organization. It defines their ideal future vision, creates consistent and meaningful annual operating plans and budgets and drives the measurement and achievement of this future vision.**

Strategic Planning is about:

Clarity  
Meaning  
Focus  
Direction



# Watershed Management in the New Millennium



In the year 2000, Conservation Ontario articulated a collective **Mandate** for Conservation Authorities.

**To ensure the conservation, restoration and responsible management of Ontario's water, land and natural habitats through programs that balance human, environmental and economic needs.**

The mandate is reinforced with a series of **Goals**:

- To ensure that Ontario's rivers, lakes and streams are properly safeguarded;
- To protect, manage and restore Ontario's woodlands, wetlands, and natural habitats;
- To develop and maintain programs that will protect life and property from natural hazards such as flooding and erosion;
- To provide opportunities for the public to enjoy, learn from and respect Ontario's natural environment.

In 2001, new vision and mission statements were adopted by the Conservation Authorities.

## VISION STATEMENT

*Conservation Authorities manage watersheds where human needs are met in balance with the needs of the natural environment.*

## MISSION STATEMENT

*The Conservation Authorities of Ontario provide leadership through coordination of watershed planning, implementation of resource management programs and promotion of conservation awareness, in cooperation with others.*

*Conservation Ontario's mission is to support and enhance an effective, watershed-based conservation network in Ontario.*

## Business of Conservation Ontario

The business of Conservation Ontario can be divided between the collective Business Functions of Conservation Authorities and the Business Functions of Corporate Conservation Ontario.

The business functions of Conservation Authorities are consistent with the previously agreed to collective goals of Conservation Authorities and were approved by Council in June 2002.

### Business Functions of Conservation Authorities

1. Protection from Hazards (Flooding and Erosion);
2. Protecting and Enhancing Sustainable Stream Flow;
3. Protecting and Enhancing Water Quality (wetlands, forest lands, stream corridors, contaminants, ambient and source protection);
4. Preserving and Managing Natural Areas;
5. Providing Recreational Opportunities in Conservation Areas.

### Business Functions of Conservation Ontario

1. Government Relations;
2. Policy and Program Development;
3. Building and Maintaining Partnerships;
4. Corporate Communications;
5. Research and Information Collecting;
6. Evaluation and Reporting; and
7. Education and Training

## Branding Conservation Ontario

In order to position Conservation Ontario and its member Conservation Authorities as the "lead voice for conservation in Ontario" Conservation Ontario adopted a new brand for the collective network in 2003.

Conservation Ontario's brand reflects the characteristics that make Conservation Authorities unique. It symbolizes what is at the heart of Conservation Authorities and conveys our commitment to our partners and the people of Ontario.

The message that our brand conveys is that Conservation Authorities are:

- A credible source of valued, science-based information, insight and intelligence;
- A network of dependable forward-thinking leaders in responsible watershed management in Ontario;
- Facilitators that value and promote stakeholder involvement in decision-making;
- Organizations that balance human, environmental and economic needs in arriving at decisions; and
- Trusted implementers of successful programs and initiatives that gets things done in the field.

# Revising Conservation Ontario's Mission and Goals

In order to deliver on the commitment of its brand, Conservation Ontario embarked upon a new Strategic Planning process in early 2004.

The “Big Audacious Goal” (BAG) and the “Vivid Description of Success” (VDS) are intended to provide short-term strategic direction and to focus the collective organization's actions to the greatest effect. These statements were developed in order to be relevant and challenging for the organization to achieve and were assessed against the current and predicted socio-economic trends and issues impacting on the business of Conservation Ontario and Conservation Authorities to 2010.

Following a series of workshops culminating in September of 2005, Conservation Ontario adopted a strategic planning framework consisting of four elements: Core Purpose, Core Values, Big Audacious Goal and Vivid Description of Success.

## Environmental Scan

To assist in the development of its strategic planning framework, Conservation Ontario conducted an environmental scan in 2004 to identify current and emerging trends and issues that may impact Conservation Ontario and Conservation Authority business. The scan also looked for potential opportunities for partnerships, funding, and promotion of the Conservation Authorities.

Four key messages emerged from the data collected and these included:

1. Take advantage of the current government focus on “sustainability” and the environment.
2. The current demographic make up of Ontario dictates that health care will continue to be a priority for the aging population and that current population patterns towards increasing urbanization will create pressures for both urban and rural communities, impacting delivery and planning of CA programs and services.
3. The public is relying more on government to ensure public health and safety yet there may be rural backlash against initiatives such as water protection because of increased taxes and a requirement that one size does not fit all.
4. There is growing acceptance that a healthy environment has demonstrable economic value.

Concerns identified for Conservation Authorities included the uncertainty around climate change, the lack of currently available sustainable funding, the tension between urban and rural constituents and the growth of new regulations.

Overall, it was felt that an opportune time existed right now for Conservation Authorities to do what they do best — work with local watershed constituents to plan and deliver important watershed-based initiatives that will protect our health and ensure the safety of Ontario residents.

The results of the environmental scan allowed Conservation Authorities to finalize the Core Purpose, Core Values, Big Audacious Goal and the Vivid Description of Success for Conservation Ontario.

## Core Purpose

The “Core Purpose” is the “*fundamental reason for an organization's existence*” and the “Core Values” are “*an organization's essential and enduring commonly held beliefs which are not to be compromised for short term expediency*” — Report to Council, June 2004.

The Core Purpose for the office of Conservation Ontario was updated:

**To promote and continually strengthen a watershed-based conservation coalition in Ontario. (2005)**

## Core Values

Conservation Ontario's Core Values include:

**Action** — establish priorities and undertake initiatives based on desired results, ensuring that actions or decisions are undertaken, individually and collectively in an accountable and timely manner.

**Collaboration** — work together to build consensus and a strong, cohesive voice on collective positions and in partnership with the broader conservation community.

**Innovation** — be a leader in science-based integrated watershed management that accommodates taking new approaches to our business.

**Transparency** — communicate and share information and ideas using appropriate language and outreach techniques to bring about clear understanding.

**Integrity** — ensure that actions or decisions do not compromise fundamental values or principles.

Conservation Ontario promotes and continually strengthens a watershed-based conservation coalition in Ontario. (2005)



# Big Audacious Goal

By 2010, Conservation Ontario will be Ontario's recognized leader in watershed management, working collaboratively with other partners to ensure healthy watersheds and healthy, sustainable communities.

## Vivid Description of Success

By 2010, Conservation Ontario will have achieved its goal if:

- Integrated watershed management is recognized as the cornerstone to sound, environmental decision-making that supports healthy, sustainable communities and healthy great lakes
- Conservation Authorities are supported and resourced so the competency, capacity and consistency exists to deliver the highest quality watershed programs.
- People, corporations, stakeholders and politicians from all levels of government (municipal, provincial and federal) turn to Conservation Ontario, as the leading coalition, for providing solutions and service delivery in watershed management.
- Conservation Authority Watershed Report Cards indicate improved watershed ecosystem health, and the public equates this with better quality of life.
- Conservation and watershed management is viewed as a value-added investment that produces tangible results.
- Conservation Ontario and Conservation Authorities have brand recognition.
- The Conservation Authorities' Boards and Council of CO are "sought after" appointments.
- The leadership of the Conservation Authorities' coalition is visionary, respected and supported.
- Conservation Authorities work collaboratively in order to achieve common goals.

## Developing Strategic Directions and Actions

In February of 2006, Conservation Ontario Council received a report outlining five Strategic Directions; a series of Strategic Actions; and detailed Action Steps that would form the basis of future workplans while providing a framework to enable Conservation Ontario to remain focused on its Goal (BAG).

### Strategic Directions

- Influence Policy Development
- Build Capacity of Conservation Authorities
- Diversify Relationships and Funding Sources
- Promote Value of Watershed Management
- Ensure the Continuing Evolution of Conservation Ontario

### Working Definition of Strategy

*An organized response to the environment, based on a particular set of goals, that seeks optimal benefits to the organization's members and clients by building on strengths and/or building up weaknesses in order to pursue the greatest possible advantage of opportunities and distinguish the organization from others.*

Tecker & O'Neal, 1986

