

October 25, 2024

SENT ELECTRONICALLY

**City of Hamilton
Haldimand County
Regional Municipality of Niagara
Local Area Municipalities**

Report No. FA-51-24 RE: Draft Conservation Area Strategy

At the Board of Directors meeting held on October 18, 2024, the following resolution was passed:

Resolution No. FA-109-2024

Moved by: Stew Beattie

Seconded by: Donna Cridland

THAT Report No. FA-51-24 RE: Draft Conservation Area Strategy **BE RECEIVED**;

AND THAT staff **BE AUTHORIZED** to post the draft Conservation Area Strategy for public comment for three weeks;

AND THAT the draft Conservation Area Strategy be circulated to the NPCA partner municipalities;

AND FURTHER THAT the Conservation Area Strategy be brought forward for Board approval on or before December 13, 2024;

A copy of Report No. FA-51-24 and the draft Conservation Area Strategy are enclosed for reference. Members of Council, staff, and individuals residing in the Niagara Peninsula watershed are invited to learn more and provide feedback through the [Get Involved portal](#).

Sincerely,



Melanie Davis
Manager, Office of the CAO & Board
Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority
905.788.3135 ext. 250

cc: Leilani Lee-Yates, CAO / Secretary – Treasurer
Eric Baldin, Manager, Land Planning
Kerry Royer, Specialist, Conservation Area Land Planning

Report To: Board of Directors

Subject: Draft Conservation Area Strategy

Report No: FA-51-24

Date: October 18, 2024

Recommendation:

THAT Report No. FA-51-24 RE: Draft Conservation Area Strategy BE **RECEIVED**;

AND THAT staff **BE AUTHORIZED** to post the draft Conservation Area Strategy for public comment for three weeks;

AND THAT the draft Conservation Area Strategy be circulated to the NPCA partner municipalities;

AND FURTHER THAT the Conservation Area Strategy be brought forward for Board approval on or before December 13, 2024;

Purpose:

To provide an update to the NPCA Board of Directors regarding the development of the Conservation Area Strategy required under the *Conservation Authorities Act* and recommend the Draft Conservation Area Strategy be made available to the public and municipal partners for a commenting period of three weeks.

Background:

Ontario Regulation (O. Reg.) 686/21: Mandatory Programs and Services requires all conservation authorities to complete a Land Inventory and Conservation Area Strategy by December 31, 2024.

The Land Inventory and Conservation Area Strategy specifically address NPCA land holdings. NPCA has been working with Conservation Ontario and fellow Conservation Authorities to develop a consistent approach to Strategy development based on local customized needs of each conservation authority. O. Reg. 686/21 sets out specific requirements for the Strategy such as:

- Objectives established by the authority that will inform the authority's decision-making related to the lands it owns and controls, including decisions related to policies governing the acquisition and disposition of such lands.
- Identification of the mandatory and non-mandatory programs and services that are provided on land owned and controlled by the authority, including the sources of financing for these programs and services.
- Where the authority considers it advisable to achieve the objectives, an assessment of how the lands owned and controlled by the authority may,
 - Augment any natural heritage located within the authority's area of jurisdiction; and
 - Integrate with other provincially or municipally owned lands or other publicly accessible lands and trails within the authority's area of jurisdiction.
- The establishment of land use categories for the purpose of classifying lands in the NPCA's land inventory based on the types of activities on each parcel of land or other matters of significance related to the parcel.
- A process for the periodic review and updating of the conservation area strategy by the authority, including procedures to ensure stakeholders and the public are consulted during the review and update process.

The regulation also stipulates that the conservation authority shall ensure stakeholders and the public are consulted during the preparation of the Strategy and that the Strategy be made publicly available.

Discussion:

The draft Strategy is designed to provide high level guidance and direction for planning and management of NPCA conservation areas. Specific goals and objectives will provide direction for management and long-term planning for our conservation areas. Details on programs and services and the land use classifications will inform the general purpose for each conservation area. The Strategy explores how NPCA's system of conservation areas augments local or regional natural heritage features and how they connect to local public lands.

The Strategy is not intended to provide specific direction for daily management or planning of conservation areas. Addressing priorities such as invasive species management, greenspace accessibility, or capital development will come through action plans to be developed in conjunction with annual work plans and Board priorities starting in 2025. Budgeting for capital projects will be informed by the Asset Management Plan.

Much of the site-specific priority work will be addressed in management plans that will be developed for each NPCA conservation area. These plans may include projects such as trail development, restoration projects, invasive species removal, and capital development. Examples of other watershed-wide actionable priorities

could include an Invasive Species Strategy, Indigenous Placemaking Strategy, Watershed Trail Strategy, or a Greenspace Accessibility Plan.

Each management plan or watershed-wide strategy or plan will be supported with additional, extensive engagement activities including Board review and approval. Key components of the Conservation Area Strategy are summarized below with the full draft Strategy included as Appendix 1.

Goals and Objectives

The draft Strategy includes a series of five Goals with each one created to support priorities identified in the NPCA Strategic Plan 2021-2031. Each of the Goals are also aligned with NPCA's inventory of Programs and Services such that our focus will be on Category 1 mandatory services while also providing justification and support for potential Category 2 and 3 programs and services at our conservation areas. The five Goals are as follows:

1. Protection and Management
2. Greenspace Access and Connectivity
3. Sustainability and Enhancement
4. Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation
5. Engagement and Collaboration

Supporting objectives are designed to inform an action plan that will identify current and future priorities that are easily actionable and measurable for specific NPCA conservation areas or for watershed-wide performance indicators.

Conservation Area Classification

Through the draft Strategy, NPCA staff have also classified each conservation area into one of four land use categories as informed with expertise from a Conservation Ontario working group. The four categories are:

1. Conservation Area – Active Recreation
2. Conservation Area – Passive Recreation
3. Natural Heritage
4. Administration Area

These broad categories are meant to identify the general purpose of each conservation area, not specific programs or activities for a conservation area. Conservation area management plans will provide opportunities to further refine these classifications to allocate programs and activities to specific zones within the property as well as options to prioritize certain conservation areas over others to focus allocation of staff and budgetary resources.

Four (4) conservation areas are classified as Active; eight (8) as Passive; twenty-seven (27) as Natural Heritage; and two (2) as Administration Area.

Based on these results, NPCA has 1842 hectares or 61% of our conservation areas classified as Natural Heritage. This is a healthy balance between more accessible conservation areas and those that have a greater focus on protection with limited facilities and is consistent with other Conservation Authorities.

Augmenting Natural Heritage

The Strategy assesses how NPCA conservation areas augment natural heritage and integrate with other Provincially or municipally owned lands and other publicly accessible lands and trails in the watershed.

Throughout this section, the NPCA demonstrates how our conservation areas fit within the significant natural heritage features, including the Niagara Escarpment Parks and Open Spaces System (NEPOSS), and local and Provincial natural heritage systems. Further to this, the assessment noted that NPCA conservation areas are important natural areas for residents and visitors that could be better connected to local parks, and other conserved areas through strategic land acquisitions and collaboration. The Strategy assessment indicates that there are many opportunities for connections between NPCA conservation areas and local trails and parks and these opportunities are supported by the goals and objectives of the Strategy, the Land Securement Strategy, and the NPCA's Strategic Plan.

Engagement Summary

NPCA took a comprehensive approach to public engagement for the Strategy, which included using a range of tools and methods for engaging with Indigenous communities, members of the public, local area municipalities, as well as a wide range of residents and interested parties. An engagement plan was presented to the Public Advisory Committee (PAC) in May 2024 which outlined a schedule of engagement milestones and primary goals of the engagement process for the Strategy including: gathering input on goals and objectives for managing conservation areas; identifying priorities for land use and conservation activities; and, ensuring public and stakeholder feedback on the classification and use of conservation lands.

The [Get Involved](#) portal was used as the main landing page for the project which included a survey and Discussion Paper to provide background information about the CA Strategy. NPCA hosted a hybrid Public Information Centre (PIC) on September 24 which was live-streamed and saved on our YouTube channel for individuals that could not attend. A total of 23 people registered for the PIC, with four people attending in person and nine attending online.

Financial Implications:

The development of the Conservation Area Strategy is funded through the Operating Budget.

Links to Policy/Strategic Plan:

- Goal 1.1: Support evidence-based decision-making for climate-resilient watersheds and shorelines.
- Goal 1.3: Restore and enhance natural habitat, water resources, and forest cover.
- Goal 1.4: Manage NPCA lands to increase biodiversity, habitat connectivity, and natural cover.
- Goal 3.1: Create equitable access to greenspace for the health and well-being of people
- Goal 3.2: Lead nature education, environmental stewardship, and volunteerism.
- Goal 3.3: Improve cultural connections and heritage appreciation.
- Goal 4.1: Strengthen government relations toward collective outcomes and impact.
- Goal 4.2: Foster relationships with the community, non-government organizations, businesses, agriculture, industry, and academic institutions for collective outcomes and impact.
- Goal 4.3: Improve engagement with local First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples that supports shared stewardship.
- Goal 5.4 Demonstrate leadership in addressing climate change and sustainable practices through NPCA lands and operations

Related Reports and Appendices:

Appendix 1: Draft Conservation Area Strategy (*distributed separately*)

Authored by:

Original Signed by:

Eric Baldin
Manager, Land Planning

Reviewed by:

Original Signed by:

Lise Gagnon
Director, Corporate Services

Submitted by:

Original Signed by:

Leilani Lee-Yates, BES, MSPL.RPD, MCIP, RPP
Chief Administrative Officer/Secretary-Treasurer
Interim Director, Watershed Strategies and Climate Change