



A Healthy Watershed for Everyone

# 2022 ANNUAL REPORT

## HAMILTON CONSERVATION AUTHORITY





## Our Vision

A healthy watershed for everyone.

## Our Mission

To lead in the conservation of our watershed and connect people to nature.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Message from HCA's CAO and Acting Chair.....	3
Organizational Excellence .....	5
Water Management .....	8
Natural Heritage Conservation.....	10
Conservation Area Experience .....	13
Education and Environmental Awareness .....	16
Message from the Hamilton Conservation Foundation .....	18

## 2022 HCA BOARD OF DIRECTORS

### MUNICIPALITY

City of Hamilton

City of Hamilton

City of Hamilton

City of Hamilton

City of Hamilton

City of Hamilton

City of Hamilton

City of Hamilton

City of Hamilton

City of Hamilton

Township of Puslinch

### MEMBER

Councillor Lloyd Ferguson, Chair

Santina Moccio, Vice-Chair & Acting Chair

November 2022

Dan Bowman

Jim Cimba

Cynthia Janzen

Maria Topalovic

Councillor Brad Clark

Councillor Tom Jackson

Councillor Esther Pauls

Councillor Russ Powers

Susan Fielding

# MESSAGE FROM HCA'S CAO & ACTING CHAIR

We are pleased to present our annual report for 2022. We have so much to celebrate in terms of what we accomplished last year in all of our strategic plan priority areas, even as we adapted to legislative changes at year end and coped with lingering impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic early in the year.

We were very excited to reach a milestone in the development of the new Saltfleet Conservation Area on Hamilton's east mountain with the completion of the first of four wetland areas located in the upper Stoney Creek and Battlefield watersheds. These wetlands will reduce the impacts of flooding and erosion in lower Stoney Creek and further the long-term vision of the entire Saltfleet Conservation Area which will provide increased natural areas, additional trails and recreation opportunities for the public and protect property and residents downstream. The Heritage Green Community Trust has been a key contributor to the Saltfleet Conservation Area and wetlands. A new trail, named the Heritage Green Community Trust (HGCT) Trail, gives visitors a view of the eastern wetland from the top of the berms that surround it, and connects the area to the Dofasco 2000 Trail, an 11.5-kilometre path for both hikers and cyclists.

2022 also saw the advancement of many other projects on HCA conservation area lands including the completion of cabins at Valens Lake available for reservation in 2023, upgrades to the boat launch ramp at Fifty Point, significant internal roadway enhancements, and many improvements to trails and bridges across our conservation areas.

We ceased the long running Christie Antique and Vintage Show following the two-year COVID interruption. Increasing costs to run the show and the unprecedented surge of public interest in enjoying our conservation areas in their natural state made it the logical decision to step away. We were able to welcome the return of the Maple Syrup event at Westfield and outdoor environmental education classes. We were also thrilled to reopen the Wild Waterworks waterpark which we manage for the City of Hamilton, overcoming the challenge of a national lifeguard shortage by holding our first ever in-house training course to help train and certify new lifeguards.

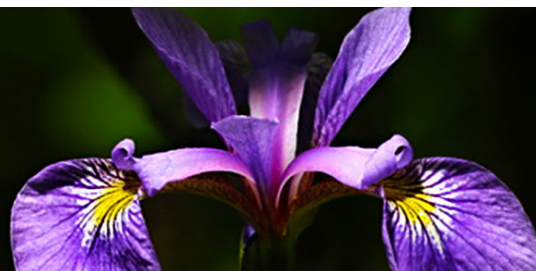
We undertook key watershed restoration projects with significant progress made regarding removal, mapping and management of invasive species. We also acquired additional lands for the Saltfleet Conservation Area. We continued to protect people and property by undertaking natural hazard projects including updated floodplain mapping and enhancements to our dams.

Following the municipal election, we bid farewell to City of Hamilton councillors who were board members: Lloyd Ferguson, Tom Jackson, Esther Pauls and Russ Powers. We thank those City of Hamilton councillors for their dedication and contributions. We also welcomed our new City of Hamilton councillors to our board: Craig Cassar, Matt Francis, Alex Wilson, and Maureen Wilson.

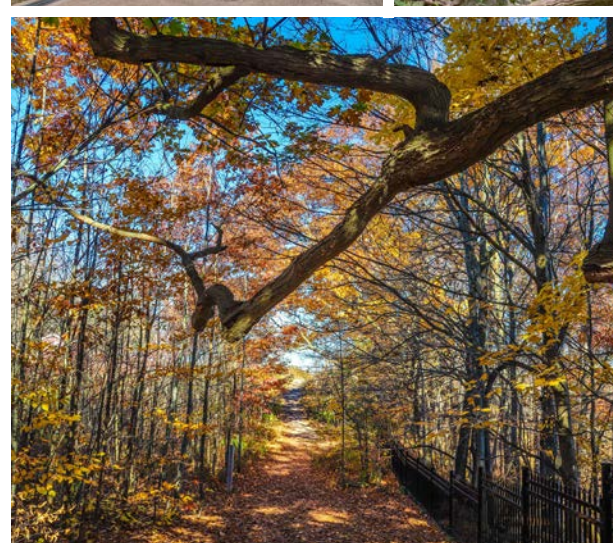
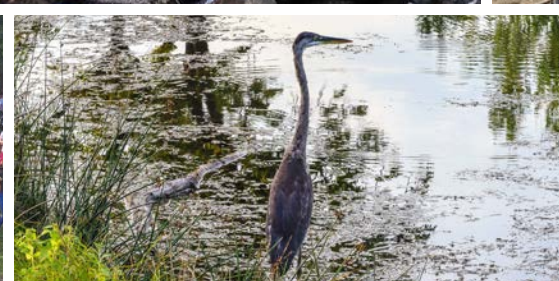
We have received much acknowledgment and appreciation for all we do at HCA and the value and protection it provides to local communities. We are resilient and confident that we can successfully adapt to any changes or challenges that may come our way. Through the efforts of our dedicated board and hard-working staff, we continue to deliver the important programs and services which support our vision of a healthy watershed for everyone.

**Lisa Burnside, CAO**

**Santina Moccio, Acting Chair**











## Organizational Excellence

Organizational Excellence is focused on ensuring corporate and financial viability and the HCA's relevance in the community.

### HCA WEBSITE STATISTICS

- Users: 561,987
- Sessions: 782,691
- Page Views: 1,491,130
- Devices:
- Mobile: 68%
- Desktop: 30%
- Tablet: 2%

There were 17 media releases sent out related to our various programs.

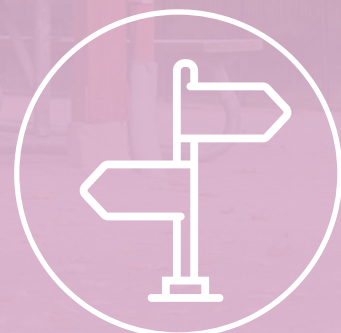
HCA was mentioned in 433 news articles in 2022.

### HCA SOCIAL MEDIA FOLLOWERS

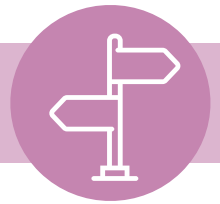
- Facebook – 22,489
- Twitter – 9,080
- Instagram – 12,045
- LinkedIn – 2,615

### HCA FINANCIAL STATISTICS

- 65% of operating revenue is self-generated.
- Top three self-generated revenue sources continue to be gate admission, marina operations and camping fees.





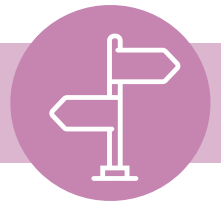


## 2022 Highlights

- Successful grant applications which resulted in \$541,065.13 for projects such as the Saltfleet Conservation Area Wetland Restoration Project, stewardship work, summer student positions and Westfield Heritage Village programs.
- Supported a dynamic work culture, safe working environments, professional development, and effectiveness of staff through:
  - Revising and updating eight existing safe working procedures and creating two new procedures for the safety of staff.
  - Providing health and safety training related to First Aid, Chainsaw use, Brush Chipper operation, Trenching Safety Awareness, Mobile Elevated Work Platform training, Confined Space Entry and Working at Heights training.
  - Creating new employee training videos to help orient all new staff on HCA and our membership pass program.
  - Undertaking a mental health and resiliency workshop for HCA managers and supervisors.
  - Providing a health and wellness lunch and learn session for staff on “Breaking Down Mental Health Barriers and Managing Stress”.
  - Recognizing the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation with Indigenous awareness workshops for all HCA staff at Westfield. HCA staff were provided orange shirts with a design by local Indigenous artist Kyle Joedicke.
  - Initiated discussions in late 2022 regarding the development of a Land Acknowledgment unique to the HCA which is anticipated to be implemented in 2023.
- Held our inaugural HCA Staff Social at the Dundas Trail Centre. It was great for staff to interact and catch up in person as pandemic restrictions eased.
- Participated in the consultation/commenting process regarding proposed legislative changes to the *Conservation Authorities Act*.
- Hosted 26 film shoots at various HCA conservation areas, providing revenue for those areas.
- Refreshed HCA’s Membership Pass program for 2022 with new rewards and a new look.
- Introduced online gift cards that can be used to buy HCA Memberships, or make reservations for camping, pavilions, and events.



# ORGANIZATIONAL EXCELLENCE



- Completed 20 blogs, eight photoshoots and five video shoots to help communicate both internally and externally about what HCA does and why. Photoshoots included the reopening of Saltfleet Conservation Area, special events at Westfield Heritage Village, invasive species work, and stewardship projects. The photoshoots both document the work carried out, and give HCA materials to be able to share that work with the public.
- Increased effective communication and engagement by using Bang the Table, an online stakeholder engagement tool on projects such as our pilot trail app while in the development stages and components of the Saltfleet Conservation Area's Master Plan.
  - Over 1,200 people visited the HCA Bang the Table site, [www.conservationtalkhca.ca](http://www.conservationtalkhca.ca).
  - 196 respondents completed surveys.
  - 370 people were informed, by downloading documents, utilizing site tools like key dates, or visiting multiple project pages.
  - 971 people visited at least one project page.
- Streamlined policies to enhance business service delivery including:
  - Endorsing an Inventory of Programs and Services to guide our compliance with the *Conservation Authority Act* regulations.
  - Implementing Right to Disconnect and Electronic Monitoring policies to guide our compliance with updates to the *Employment Standards Act*.
- Continued our efforts to modernize HCA's records management systems by:
  - Creating new procedures to document the disposition of records according to our policy and industry standards.
  - Initiating development of a file classification scheme for HCA's records. This system will complement and facilitate implementation of HCA's records retention schedule.
- Collaborated and shared services and expertise through numerous forums and working groups with neighbouring conservation authorities and other partners. HCA staff participated, presented and assisted with the organization of events.
- Undertook a network assessment to identify priorities for modernization of our IT infrastructure, which resulted in a number of network upgrades.





# Water Management

Water Management is undertaken to protect the watershed for people, property, flora and fauna, and natural resources through flood and erosion control, water quality programs, low flow augmentation and adaption strategies to adapt to changing climatic conditions.

## SECTION 28 CONSERVATION AUTHORITIES ACT PERMIT PROCESSING

- 87 Total Permits
- 31 Total Major Permits
- 94% of Major Permit applications were processed within the required time period
- 56 Total Minor Permits
- 88% of Minor Permit applications were processed within the required time period (based on the 2010 MNRF standard, per out Client Service Commitment
- 48% of major permits and 50% of minor permits were processed within 2019 CO recommended standards

## NUMBER OF WATERSHED CONDITION STATEMENTS / MESSAGES

- Water Safety: 3
- Flood Outlook: 0
- Flood Watch: 5
- Flood Warning: 1
- Flood Outlook – Lake Ontario Shoreline: 0
- Flood Watch – Lake Ontario Shoreline: 2
- Termination Messages (Return to normal watershed conditions): 7
- Low Water Level 1: Summer
- Low Water Level 2: Fall

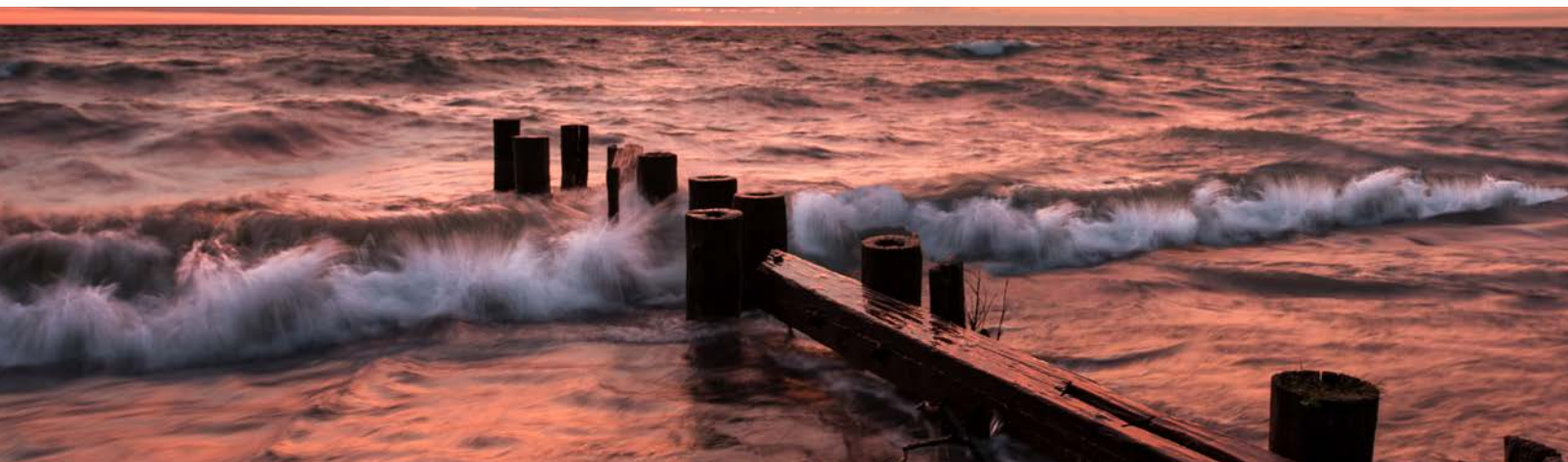






## 2022 Highlights

- Worked with consultants on floodplain mapping for: Red Hill Creek, Stoney Creek and Battlefield Creek. Floodplain mapping is key in HCA's review of planning and permit applications to direct development outside of hazardous areas. The eastern end of the watershed will now have completed and updated floodplain mapping.
- Worked with consultants to undertake a Lake Ontario and Hamilton Harbour Shoreline Plan. This work will:
  - Identify hazards associated with lake related flooding and erosion.
  - Provide information regarding existing shoreline protection measures and near shore characteristics, allowing for a better understanding of how the shoreline functions.
  - Assist with reviewing shoreline development proposals, shoreline protection measures, and will assist in directing development to safe location, away from hazardous areas.
- Enhanced flood control infrastructure with projects at Christie Lake and Valens Lake related to:
  - Installation and operation of a new safety boom for the dam at Christie Lake.
  - Installation of new fencing and signage at both Christie Lake and Valens Lake for public safety enhancement.
- The water quality monitoring program continues to assess our long-term watershed health as it relates to water quality for surface water and groundwater with the following program work undertaken:
  - Monitoring for the provincial surface water and groundwater quality monitoring network.
  - Surface water quality monitoring for the Cootes Paradise contributing watercourses.
  - The above program work feeds into the provincial water quality monitoring network and the HCA's work with the Hamilton Harbour Remedial Action Plan.
  - Working with the City of Hamilton, staff completed erosion monitoring of local watercourses to determine the impacts of erosion and potential restoration areas.
- Continued to invest in monitoring programs and networks including assessing impacts of nutrient and sediment loading through:
  - Provincial water quality and groundwater quality monitoring completed for seven surface water sites and nine groundwater sites.
  - Annual City of Hamilton water monitoring projects including groundwater well inspections and groundwater well water quality sampling at 72 wells (33 sampled in year one, 39 sampled in year two) and erosion monitoring at 15 sites.







## Natural Heritage Conservation

Natural Heritage Conservation is the conservation, restoration and enhancement of watershed natural areas and ecology.

Forestry staff removed over 870 hazard trees and pruned an additional 60 with the majority of hazards continuing to be ash trees affected by the Emerald Ash Borer beetle.

### INVASIVE SPECIES MANAGEMENT ON HCA PROPERTIES

- Managed 23 species over 13 Conservation Areas.
- Controlled 11,215 invasive trees and shrub mechanically and chemically.
- Controlled 2.9 hectares of invasive herbaceous plants mechanically and chemically.
- Removed 102 industrial sized garbage bags of invasive herbaceous plants.
- Treated 2.2 hectares of non-native phragmites.
- Removed approximately 3389 Spongy Moth (LDD) egg masses and 1648 caterpillars from five conservation areas.
- Held five invasive removal events on HCA land.
- Hosted our Hamilton invasive species workshop which brings together all organizations that work with invasive species within the City of Hamilton.







## 2022 Highlights

- Implemented and invested in the further development of the Saltfleet Conservation Area Wetland Restoration Project to offset the impacts of climate change:
  - Completed a milestone with the construction of the first of four wetlands and the opening of the area to the public.
  - Secured an additional 50 acres of land key to the project.
  - Initiated design work for the second and third wetlands.
- Carried out invasive species control and removal strategies in our watershed including:
  - Undertook monitoring and removal for Spongy Moth (formerly LDD moth).
  - 64 plots and 26 trails were surveyed at Felker's Falls, Dundas Valley, Iroquoia Heights, Borer's Falls, Westfield Heritage Village, and Valens Lake Conservation Areas.
  - Egg masses were scraped by staff and volunteers from trees of concern at Valens Lake, Christie Lake, Dundas Valley and Westfield and burlap was also put up on trees as a preventative measure.
  - Finished photo monitoring with a significant difference in defoliation compared to 2021.
  - Piloted an independent volunteer effort scraping egg masses along the Dundas Valley trails, and scraped over 2,330 egg masses.
- Mapping of phragmites completed with 22 new populations mapped.
- Sprayed 5.4 acres of phragmites from 58 different populations across eight conservation areas. Began cutting to drown phragmites at Valens Lake and Fletcher Creek where we are unable to chemically treat.
- Specific invasive species removals were completed as follows:
  - Dog strangling vine was treated at five locations across HCA, and three bags of pods were removed from where we were unable to chemically treat.
  - Six populations of Japanese Knotweed were treated chemically and mechanically. 61 bags of knotweed were removed in the process.
  - Dug out a small population of over 70 stems of Wild Parsnip at Fifty Point.
  - Treated 513 Tree of Heavens within Dundas Valley and Spencer Gorge.
- Stewardship work on Invasive Species:
  - Four Water Quality and Habitat Improvement Programs (WQHIP) projects on private lands, controlling phragmites and Japanese Knotweed.
  - Worked with 26 private landowners related to invasive species on their properties.
  - Held 11 invasive removal events at nine different properties.
  - Managed 14 species, removing over 4200 plants and nine garbage bags of herbaceous plant material.
  - Hosted a virtual invasive species workshop for the public focusing on the identification and control of species.
- A volunteer invasive removal event was held in the spring, focusing on hundreds of buckthorns and roses on private landowners' agricultural property in the headwaters of Sulphur Creek.
- Continued and expanded aquatic and terrestrial monitoring programs to assess watershed health and assist with HCA land management:
  - Conducted winter hawk and owl surveys as well as spring bird and waterfowl surveys at the Hamilton Mountain Conservation Areas. The spring surveys revealed 2,888 individuals and 30 species of birds (ten species of waterfowl) observed. Highlights included Cackling Goose, Blue-winged Teal, and Wilson's Snipe.





- Conducted forest regeneration and deer browse surveys in Dundas Valley.
- Monitored the beaver dams and beaver activity at Fifty Point, Lower Spencer Creek, Spring Creek, Ancaster Creek, and Crooks' Hollow.
- Completed frog surveys at Christie Lake, Windermere Basin and East Mountain in addition to benthic sampling for annual and year 1 sites for the Aquatic Resources Monitoring Program (ARMP).
- Conducted ecological land classification (ELC) surveys on Hamilton Mountain Conservation Area properties in support of master plan projects.
- Initiated engineering related monitoring and ecological photo monitoring at the Saltfleet Conservation Area Wetlands Project to assess function and document changes over time.
- Completed monitoring at ten forest health monitoring plots across the watershed.
- Enhanced natural heritage features with plantings across our watershed including:
  - Installed 225 live stakes made from cut down dogwoods into Spencer Creek, where phragmites control have taken place over the last two years.
  - At least ten different types of native plant seeds have been collected by Ecology staff across the watershed and redistributed to areas where invasive species removals have occurred to encourage regeneration.
  - Planted over 1,700 trees, shrubs, and herbaceous plants with volunteers on four separate projects, in two sub-watersheds (Spring and Sulphur Creek). All were directly or indirectly adjacent to HCA conservation lands.
  - Delivered "Soil Safari", an interactive workshop, on the importance of soil to students at the Dundas Valley Trail Centre. This event was hosted by the Compost Council of Canada.
  - Seven Ecocise events were held by our Stewardship staff, with volunteers learning about common invasive species in the watershed and how to effectively remove them.





## Conservation Area Experience

Conservation Area Experience is the provision of high quality, diverse conservation areas that promote outdoor recreation, health and well-being and strengthen public awareness of the importance of being in or near our conservation areas.

### HCA welcomed over 1.7 million visitors to our conservation areas in 2022

- 50 acres of land acquired to expand our landholdings for the Saltfleet Conservation Area and contribute towards the Saltfleet Wetland Restoration Project.
- Westfield's first Christmas event since the pandemic "Christmas in the Woods" sold out all 858 reservations.
- Fifty Point was awarded a Diamond rating by the Clean Marine Eco-Rating Program. Marinas voluntarily join the program to participate in a 220-point assessment.
- Valens Lake cabins were completed. Eight cabins will be available for reservation in 2023.







## 2022 Highlights

- Completed and adopted the Fifty Point Conservation Area Master Plan with the work being done in house by HCA staff.
- Spencer Gorge Conservation Area reservation service successfully continued to manage visitations, bringing visitors to Dundas Peak, Tew Falls and Webster Falls. 7,435 reservations were made on weekends and holidays throughout the spring and summer, and daily through the fall colour season.
- Invested in projects to enhance and expand recreation experiences including:
  - Installed new fencing at Webster Falls and Devil's Punchbowl Conservation Areas.
  - Upgraded the Crooks' Hollow trail system with gravel, a new more accessible entrance, and culverts to divert water in areas where the trail would rut regularly.
  - Created and installed new interpretive signage at the Dundas Valley Trail Center which are featured throughout the building. These signs inform patrons of the trails, as well as providing information on wildlife in the Valley.
  - Installed a new bridge at Tiffany Falls as well as trail and parking lot upgrades.
  - Installed a Mobi-Matt at the Christie Lake beach, providing accessible wheelchair access to the water.
  - Installed new kayak launcher at Christie Lake.
  - Added a second seasonal side entrance to Fifty Point Conservation Area on Kelson Road for HCA Members as part of a pilot project. The entrance was used at peak times to alleviate long lines and traffic congestion at the main entrance.
  - Completed dredging of the Fifty Point marina channel to ensure clear and safe passage for boaters.
  - Newly constructed boat ramp at Fifty Point was completed, upgrading the marina's original interlock ramp from 1984.
  - Initiated planning work for the west campground expansion at Valens Lake.
  - Enhanced 1.8km of existing trails at Westfield, along with finalizing designs on 2.4km of new trails, including three bridges over water crossings which will be completed in 2023.
  - Improved over 175m of the Dofasco 2000 Trail boardwalk with new material, with the remaining 200m of the boardwalk replacement work currently underway and nearing completion.
  - Created and installed new interpretive signage for the Hermitage Ruins in Dundas Valley, detailing the history and restoration of the site.
  - Renovated several area offices including for the Hamilton Mountain, Confederation Beach Park, and Westfield Heritage Village. A new storage yard was also completed for the Hamilton Mountain Conservation Areas.
  - Christie Lake entrance road was rebuilt, ensuring a smoother entrance for visitors.
  - Wild Waterworks reopened with an upgraded point of sale system following a two-year pause caused by the pandemic.





# CONSERVATION AREA EXPERIENCE



- Deer harvest agreement with the Haudenosaunee Wildlife and Habitat Authority was renewed for a further three years.
- Rolled out online bookings for pavilions at Christie Lake and Valens Lake Conservation Areas.
- With the eased COVID restrictions many large-scale events returned to the conservation areas throughout the year, including trail races, fundraisers, “learn to fish” activity, school cross-country meets, and more.
- HCA held six bird hikes in the spring and fall, and also saw the return of Films in the Forest at Fifty Point, with screenings of Luca in July and Jurassic World Dominion in September.
- Westfield Heritage Village introduced a new reservation system to manage visitor numbers and ensure an enjoyable experience for those attending their events. 2022 weekly Sunday programs and large events returned, including Maple Syrup, Fairies in the Forest, Halloween Pumpkin Party, and Christmas in the Woods.
- The 2022-2023 winter camping program at Valens Lake was sold out shortly after it opened for registration with 60 campers participating.







## Education & Environmental Awareness

Education and Environmental Awareness is the opportunity to provide outdoor learning experiences for students, teachers, and the community, increasing knowledge and awareness of the value of our environment and heritage.

### TOP STUDENT QUESTIONS POSED TO OUR OUTDOOR EDUCATORS REFLECTING THEIR CURIOSITY AND INTEREST IN THE ENVIRONMENT:

- Other than squirrels, what animals hide food for the winter?
- What is the top predator in the Dundas Valley?
- How often do evergreen trees drop their needles?

### CUMULATIVE TOTAL OF ALL HCA VOLUNTEER EVENTS:

- A total of 30 volunteer events were hosted, with organizations such as Mohawk College, Guest Plumbing, Carmen's, Rotary Club, MTE Consulting, Nature Canada, and Kin Canada
- 547 volunteers participated for a total of 1,318.5 hours
- Approximately 291 lbs of garbage was collected and removed at clean-up events
- Volunteers helped our ecology team plant 2,071 native species and remove 2.54 hectares of invasive species

### WESTFIELD HERITAGE VILLAGE VOLUNTEERS:

- 102 volunteers provided over 6,400 volunteer hours towards programs and upkeep of the historical buildings





# EDUCATION AND ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS



## 2022 Highlights

- HCA Outdoor Education staff offered a series of teacher training sessions, along with the regular scheduled virtual bookings. Teachers who wanted to utilize their own school yards for outdoor education were assisted with curriculum programs such as: Plants and Animals, Habitats and Communities, Biodiversity, Seed Saving, and Climate Impacts.
- A new HCA-HWDSB contract was negotiated for another five years of programming. The agreement included three key programming options for the teachers when booking with the HCA. These included in person programming in the Dundas Valley, and options for online and mobile session with HCA staff attending the schools.
- In September, schools could once again book their Environmental Education field trips with HCA. 63 classes and approximately 1,500 students came out by year end and students were eager to be on field trips for the first time in two years! Grade 8 students from Lake Avenue Public School were enthralled by the sighting of a young four point buck along the trail edge in the Dundas Valley.
- Westfield Heritage Village was able to restart their education programs. Teachers were eager to bring their students for the refreshed 'Down on the Farm' program. In total, 136 bookings were made for the program in 2022.
- Promoted the connection between environmental health and human wellness through the Healthy Hikes campaign to encourage residents to step into nature at our conservation areas.
- Stewardship staff worked with a student teacher studying at the University of Windsor and a local high school to produce bat boxes, turtle nest protectors and swallow boxes for Valens Lake.
- Provided stewardship programs for both urban and rural areas to help private landowners learn about how they can protect, enhance and restore natural areas and waterways on their properties:
  - One well decommissioned.
  - Two low impact development projects funded through stewardship program grants to support a permeable driveway and a rain garden which diverts 123,250 litres of stormwater annually.
  - Nine projects funded through the Water Quality and Habitat Improvement Program.
  - Over 670 metres of riparian area improved.
  - Undertook habitat creation and enhancement for species at risk (Barn Swallow and Bobolink).





# MESSAGE FROM HAMILTON CONSERVATION FOUNDATION

## WHO WE ARE

The Hamilton Conservation Foundation protects and enhances natural and cultural legacies by raising and stewarding funds for the Hamilton Conservation Authority.

The Foundation raises funds in three key areas:

- Acquiring and Protecting Environmentally Sensitive Land.
- Teaching Children About Nature.
- Celebrating Cultural Heritage.

## 2022 AT A GLANCE

The Foundation raised a total of \$762,446 in our 2021-2022 fiscal year. The first installment on a \$2 million pledge from Heritage Green Community Trust contributed greatly to the Foundation's fundraising success this year.

The return of the Environmental Education Program to the outdoors also resulted in increased donations to the program which, together with generous support of our Unrestricted (Highest Priority) Fund, allowed us to continue to meet our commitment to fully fund HCA's Outdoor Environmental Education Program.

Because of our generous donors, the Foundation was able to contribute \$525,000 toward the construction of the first wetland at Saltfleet Conservation Area.

In addition, the Foundation was also able to contribute to improvements in several conservation areas, including trail upgrades at Crooks Hollow, the addition of horse hitching posts and an accessible fountain in Dundas Valley, bridge work at Tiffany Falls, accessible beach mats at Christie Lake, and interpretive signage at the Hermitage to highlight the restoration work done and funded in previous years. We were also able to fund a scope of work study for the restoration of the locomotive tender at Westfield Heritage Village.











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Conservation  
Authority**

A Healthy Watershed for Everyone

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