



2023 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.

Land Acknowledgment

The HCA joins in stewardship of lands and waters with Indigenous Peoples who have cared for them since time before memory. We acknowledge that the land on which we gather, and the HCA watershed, is part of the Treaty Lands and Territory of the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation and traditional territory of the Haudenosaunee.

As an organization, we are committed to learning about the shared history and experiences of Indigenous Peoples in Canada and creating relationships based on respect, trust and friendship. In our shared gratitude for every aspect of the natural world, may we create a lasting legacy now and for future generations.

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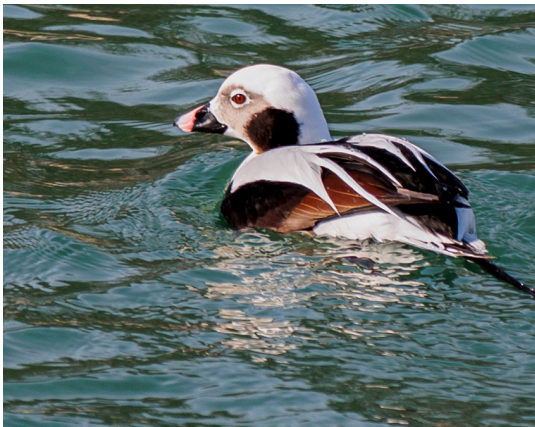
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2023 HCA Board of Directors

January to July

- Dan Bowman
- Councillor Craig Cassar
- Jim Cimba
- Councillor Brad Clark
- Susan Fielding
- Councillor Matt Francis
- Cynthia Janzen
- Santina Moccio – Acting Chair
- Maria Topalovic
- Councillor Alex Wilson
- Councillor Maureen Wilson

August to December

- Councillor Jeff Beattie
- Councillor Craig Cassar
- Councillor Brad Clark – Chair
- Lisa DiCesare
- Susan Fielding – Vice Chair
- Councillor Matt Francis
- Brian McHattie
- Councillor Mike Spadafora
- Wayne Terryberry
- Councillor Alex Wilson
- Councillor Maureen Wilson

MESSAGE FROM HCA CAO & CHAIR

We are pleased to present our annual report for 2023. As we reflect on the past year, we share with great pride and enthusiasm the remarkable achievements and progress we have made in our ongoing commitment to environmental stewardship and community well-being.

A key focal point of our watershed management and natural heritage goals is the Saltfleet Conservation Area Wetland Restoration Program, and we were thrilled to acquire the last parcel of land required to finalize the project, which will ultimately see four wetlands built. These wetlands will reduce the impacts of flooding in lower urban Stoney Creek, provide larger natural areas for future generations and add trails for the public while protecting properties and residents downstream. The project received significant funding of \$1.25 million in 2023 from Environment and Climate Change Canada through the Canada Nature Fund and has also been supported by key donors, including the Heritage Green Community Trust. This project is a testament to our dedication to preserving and rehabilitating vital ecosystems and ensuring a sustainable future for generations to come.

Another standout accomplishment of the year has been the substantial expansion of our trail system at Westfield Heritage Village Conservation Area, adding a further 2.4 km of trail. The expanded trails provide a unique opportunity for the community to connect with nature, fostering a sense of appreciation for our cultural heritage and the natural environment.

The last year also saw all Conservation Authorities navigating the complexities of changes to the *Conservation Authorities Act* and Bill 23. The Hamilton Conservation Authority (HCA) adapted to Provincial direction restricting Conservation Authorities' role in providing technical advice on natural heritage matters for development proposals. HCA diligently focused on developing and executing Agreements with our two-member municipalities, the City of Hamilton and Township of Puslinch. This allows programs and services to continue that are now categorized as non-mandatory and demonstrates our commitment to work collaboratively with local government for the betterment of our watershed.

As we celebrate these accomplishments, we also bid farewell to citizen board members, Santina Moccio, Dan Bowman, Maria Topalovic, Jim Cimba and Cynthia Janzen. We thank those citizens for their dedication and contributions. We also welcomed new City of Hamilton councillors to our board; Mike Spadafora and Jeff Beattie, and citizens Lisa DiCesare, Brian McHattie and Wayne Terryberry.

HCA also tragically lost long-time staff member Bruce Harschnitz. Bruce's career spanned over 40 years starting as a summer student and culminating as Manager, Conservation Area Services. He worked at most of our conservation areas during his tenure and left an indelible mark on the organization.

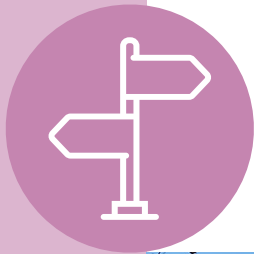
We extend our sincere gratitude to our dedicated staff, board, volunteers, and partners who have played a pivotal role in making the achievements of 2023 possible. Together, we are shaping a future where the natural areas of our watershed are cherished, protected, and enjoyed by all. We will continue to navigate the challenges and opportunities that come our way, with a focus on our vision; a healthy watershed for everyone.

Brad Clark
Chair



Lisa Burnside
Chief Administrative Officer



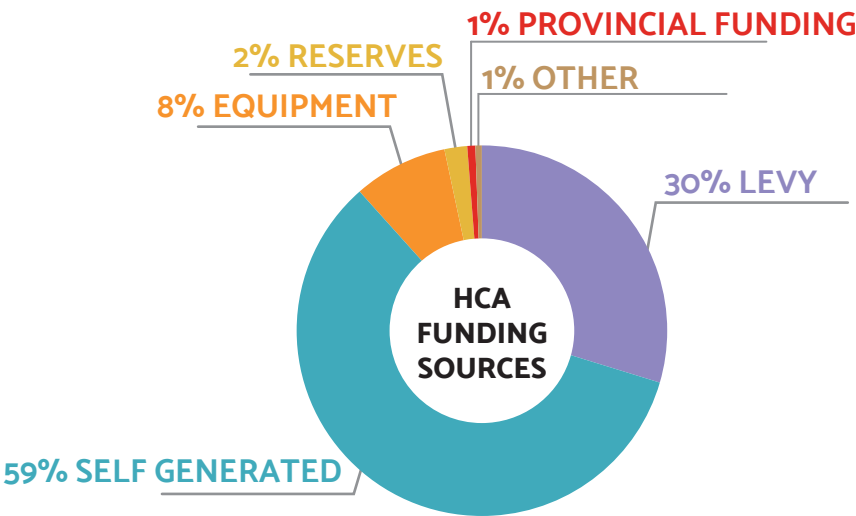


ORGANIZATIONAL EXCELLENCE

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



Saltfleet Conservation Area



HCA FINANCIAL BREAKDOWN

Top **3** self generated revenue sources continue to be **gate admission, marina operations and camping fees.**

WEBSITE STATISTICS

- **1,368,000+** Page Views
- **780,000+** Sessions
- **532,000+** Users

MEDIA RELATIONS

- **22** media releases
- **337** news mentions

HCA E-NEWSLETTER

- **21** circulated
- **20,257** subscribers - **up 78%** from 2022

HCA SOCIAL MEDIA FOLLOWERS



23,000
Facebook



12,700
Instagram

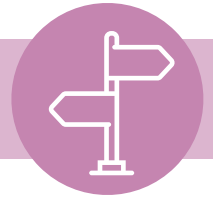


9,135
X (Twitter)



3,410
LinkedIn

ORGANIZATIONAL EXCELLENCE

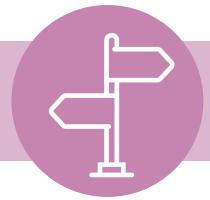


2023 Highlights

- A Land Acknowledgement statement was developed for HCA. The Acknowledgement highlights HCA's commitment to learning about the shared history and experiences of Indigenous Peoples in Canada, and creating relationships based on respect, trust and friendship.
- An IT modernization strategy was created for HCA with the key goals to:
 - Enhance network security.
 - Review and refresh server infrastructure.
 - Establish best practice policies and procedures.
 - Refresh and replace desktop workstations.
 - Plan for business continuity and disaster recovery.
- Advancing the IT plan in 2023, HCA undertook network infrastructure upgrades and implemented equipment standardization and lifecycle management practices at all HCA offices which have bolstered security, performance and resiliency in our corporate systems.
- Funding relationships and application efforts resulted in over \$1,787,000 dollars in grants, for projects such as Saltfleet Conservation Area Wetland Program, summer student positions, Fifty Point Conservation Area Wetland Restoration Project, facility and equipment upgrades, environmental education, and litter clean-ups, among others.
- Formalized an internal archive to ensure preservation and access to legacy records that document the history of HCA. A significant volume of legacy records were reviewed and select records included in the archive. This project will continue in 2024.
- A comprehensive records retention schedule and file classification scheme was developed and approved. Implementation of the schedule and filing scheme will operationalize best practices for HCA.



ORGANIZATIONAL EXCELLENCE



- HCA's Corporate Climate Change Strategy was developed and approved. The strategy was advanced in 2023 through:
 - Purchase of a fully electric vehicle (EV) to add to HCA's fleet, and installation of four EV charging stations at the Main Administration Office.
 - Completion of an energy audit for HCA's Main Administration Office to identify priority retrofits to reduce green house gas emissions.
 - Designation of 10% of annual membership pass sales to be set aside in a Climate Change Reserve to fund climate change initiatives, beginning in 2024.
- Supported a dynamic work culture, safe working environments, professional development, and effectiveness of staff through:
 - Revising and updating 25 safe working procedures, and creating six new procedures and programs for the protection of staff.
 - Provided training and certification in First Aid, traffic control, chainsaw operations, working at heights, confined space entry, Joint Health and Safety Committee certification, and self-contained breathing apparatus use.
 - HCA offered its second annual learning opportunity for all staff and the Board of Directors in support of the National Day of Truth and Reconciliation. Darin Wybenga, the Traditional Knowledge and Land Use Coordinator with the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation, shared his knowledge and experiences with HCA so we may continue to learn as we work to build relationships with our Indigenous communities.
- Held the second annual HCA Staff Social at Fifty Point Conservation Area for staff to learn about the upcoming wetland construction, which will provide additional natural area and help reduce flooding on nearby residential properties associated with the watercourses in the area.
- Collaborated with our two member municipalities, the City of Hamilton and Township of Puslinch, to secure Agreements for non-mandatory programs and services for changes to the Conservation Authorities Act, and implemented other transparency and accountability initiatives on our website for legislative compliance.
- Continued to increase effective communication and engagement by using Bang the Table, an online stakeholder engagement tool for our community engagement on projects.
 - 901 people visited HCA's Bang the Table site, www.conservationtalkhca.ca.
 - 158 people completed surveys.
 - 251 were informed, by downloading documents, utilizing site tools like key dates, or visiting multiple project pages.
 - 651 visited at least one project page.
- Collaborated and shared expertise through numerous forums and working groups with neighbouring conservation authorities and other partners, including the Latornell Conservation Symposium and Conservation Areas Workshop. HCA staff participated, presented, and assisted with the organization of the events.



WATER MANAGEMENT

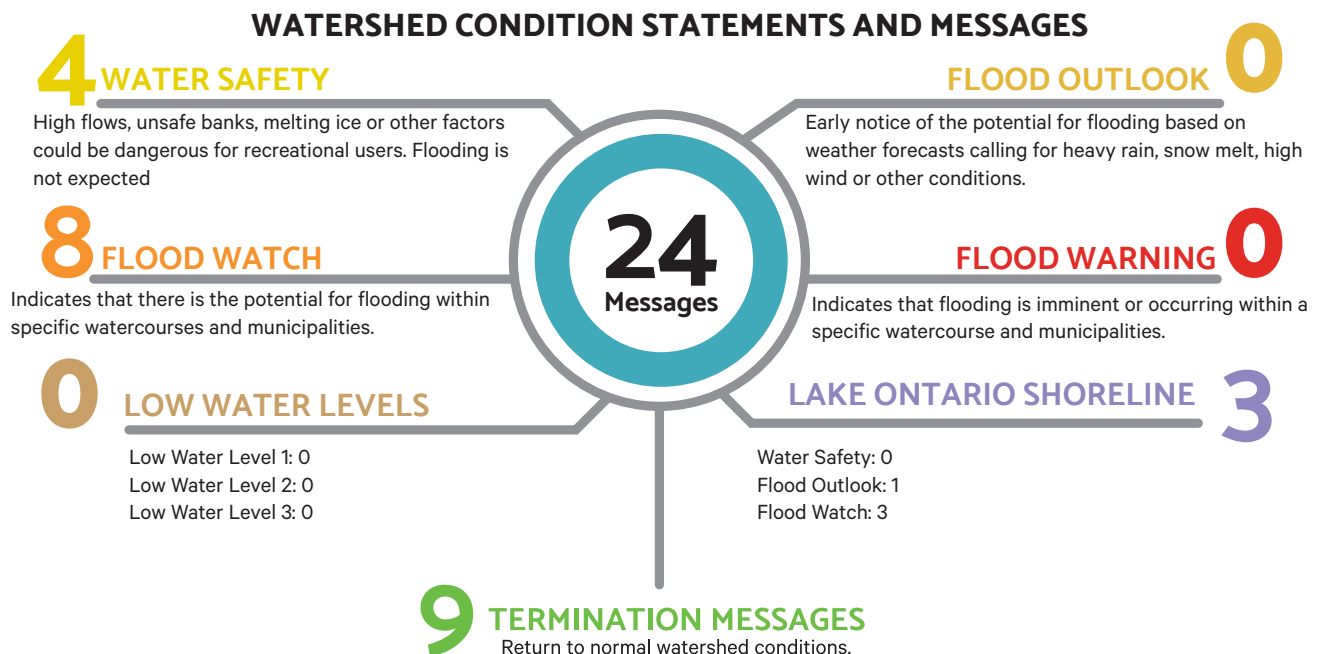
Water Management is undertaken to protect the watershed for people, property, flora and fauna, and natural resources through flood and erosion control, water quality programs, low flow augmentation and adaption strategies to adapt to changing climatic conditions.



Christie Lake Conservation Area

SECTION 28 CONSERVATION AUTHORITIES ACT PERMIT PROCESSING

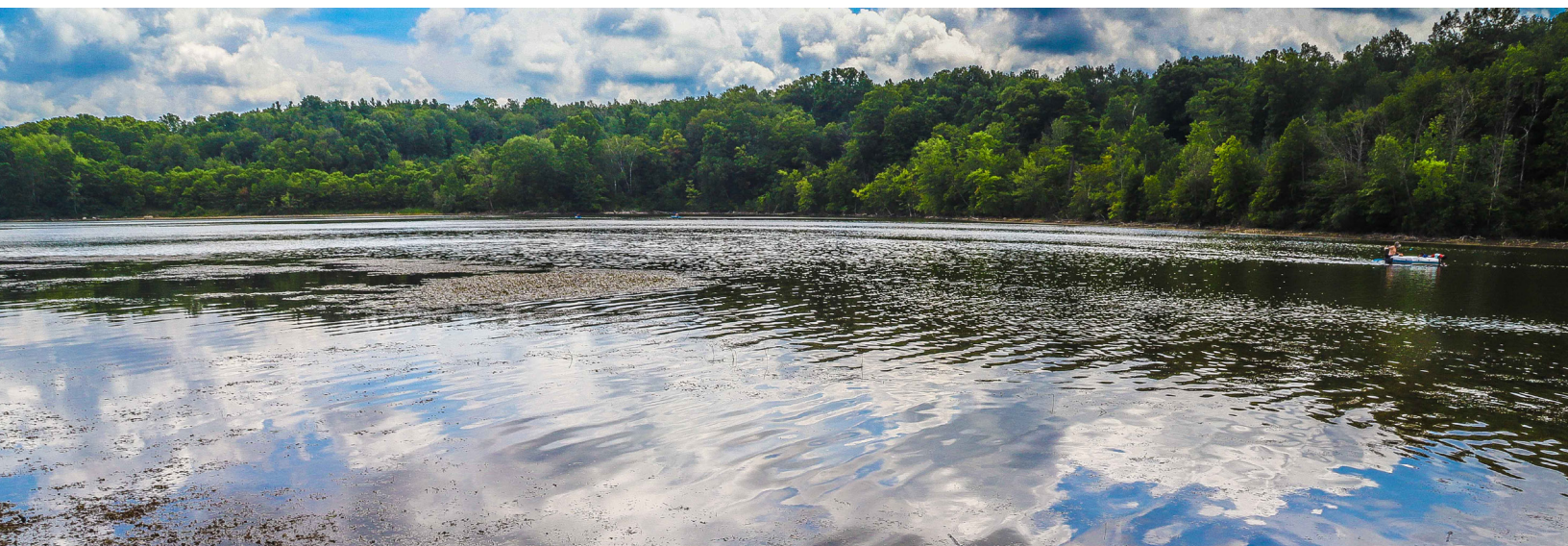
- **93** Total Permits Issued
- **27** Total Major Permits; **89%** were processed within the Provincial time period of 90 days
- **66** Total Minor Permits; **91%** were processed within the Provincial time period of 30 days





2023 Highlights

- HCA prepared its third watershed report card, a report on the state of some of our watershed's most essential resources: surface & groundwater quality, forest conditions and wetland cover. The report, produced every five years, reflects watershed conditions impacted by various stressors, such as rapid urbanization, changing land uses and climate change.
- HCA's Lake Ontario and Hamilton Harbour shoreline management plan study was completed and will be put forward for public consultation in 2024. In support of planning and regulation activities, this project will provide:
 - Valuable existing shoreline protection information.
 - Future design guidance.
 - Shoreline flood hazard information.
- Flood Plain Mapping projects were completed for Stoney Creek numbered watercourses, Stoney Creek, Battlefield Creek, and Red Hill Creek systems, and will be put forward for public consultation in 2024. These projects provide necessary flood hazard information to support planning and regulation activities.
- To ensure maintenance and safe operation of HCA dams, a Christie Lake Dam Safety Review, as well as OMSS & EPP Studies for Valens Lake and Christie Lake dams were undertaken (OMSS relates to the operation, maintenance and surveillance of a dam, while EPP are emergency preparedness plans).
- 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 six surface water sites and seven groundwater sites.
 - Annual City of Hamilton water monitoring projects, including groundwater well inspections at 86 wells, groundwater well water quality sampling at 40 wells, and erosion monitoring at 21 sites.





NATURAL HERITAGE CONSERVATION

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



ECOLOGY SURVEYS AND MONITORING



- 25** plant surveys in support of HCA Master Plans
- 20** frog call survey stations
- 5** frog species counted
- 10** forest health monitoring plots visited
- 21** fish sites monitored
- 24** benthic invertebrate sites monitored



63% ASH TREES
AFFECTED BY THE EMERALD ASH BORER

FORESTRY





2023 Highlights

- HCA acquired the final parcel of land required, through the generosity of our donors and grants, to complete the Saltfleet Conservation Area Wetland Restoration Program. The 95.38-acre parcel brings the total land at Saltfleet to 411 acres, and 11,500 acres of land preserved by HCA for environmental conservation and recreation opportunities.
- Carried out invasive species control and removal strategies in our watershed including:
 - Targeted 14 different invasive species including; English ivy, Common and Glossy buckthorn, Multiflora rose, Periwinkle, Phragmites, Dog-strangling vine, Garlic mustard, Privet, Autumn olive, Honeysuckles, Cut-leaved teasel, Giant hogweed and Burning bush.
 - Invasive species were addressed at 11 different areas including; Fletcher Creek, Valens Lake, Dundas Valley, Fifty Point, Felker's Falls, Lower Spencer Creek and others. There were over 25 specific sites treated within these areas.
 - 55 garbage bags of invasive plants were removed, and a total of 3,200 stems of invasive trees and shrubs were pulled.
- Enhanced natural heritage features with restoration projects across our watershed, including:
 - Collection of just under six dozen Christmas trees from the Dundas Waste Transfer Station and were utilized for aquatic restoration projects.
 - Completion of wetland restoration project in Middle Spencer Creek in conjunction with Ducks Unlimited Canada, including two excavated wetland cells and two impounded wetland ponds. The project will expand habitat and improve water quality adjacent to Christie Lake Conservation Area.
 - Restoration planting which took place at Mount Albion Conservation Area, with 2,000 native plants making their way into the ground.
 - Tree and shrub planting took place at the Lower Spencer Creek, with three volunteer events and over 600 plants in the ground and 16 kg of seed spread.
- HCA partnered with the Royal Botanical Gardens to install wildlife barrier fencing along Cootes Drive in Dundas. Providing a stable barrier will help reduce vehicle strikes on Cootes Drive, where wildlife such as snakes, frogs and



NATURAL HERITAGE CONSERVATION



turtles migrate.

- HCA's Water Quality and Habitat Improvement Program (WQHIP) assisted landowners within HCA's watershed to undertake conservation projects and improve wildlife habitat and water quality, including:
 - Worked with 75 landowners through site visits, project development, invasive species removal and general inquiries.
 - Funding native species planting and seeding around wetland restoration site to support adjacent species at risk populations.
 - Funding 6.26-acre memorial meadow seeding in the headwaters of Upper Spencer Creek.
- Aquatic and terrestrial monitoring programs continued and were expanded to assess watershed health:
 - Monthly photo monitoring continued of both the restoration at Saltfleet Conservation Area, and of beaver activity and dams at Fifty Point Conservation Area.
 - Temperature loggers were installed on several private properties in the Spencer Creek upper watershed to better understand potential impediments to water quality, and identify future restoration opportunities.
 - Monitored the Salmon Run on Lower Spencer Creek; the salmon returned this fall after a two-year hiatus!
- HCA approved working in partnership with the City of Hamilton and Hamilton Naturalist Club to undertake the fourth edition of the Natural Areas Inventory (NAI). The NAI is an inventory of significant natural areas in the City of Hamilton, created so that current information on plant and wildlife species, vegetation communities and site boundaries is available for agencies which are responsible for protecting and enhancing natural features.





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.

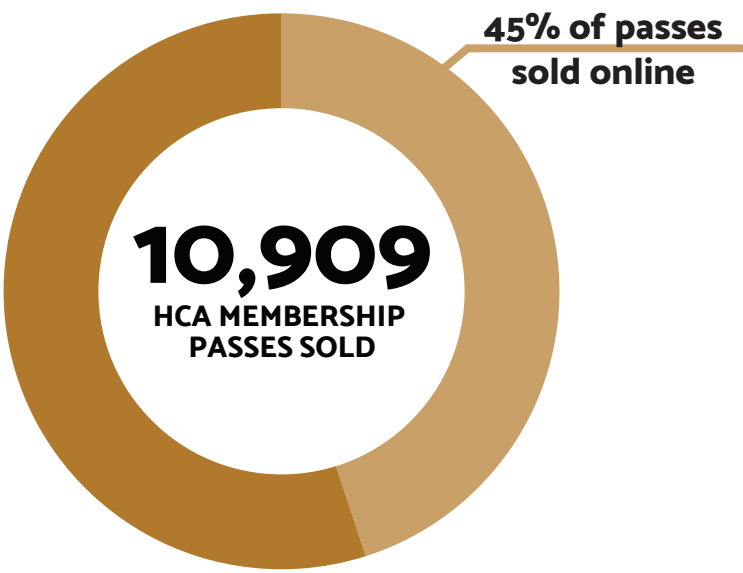
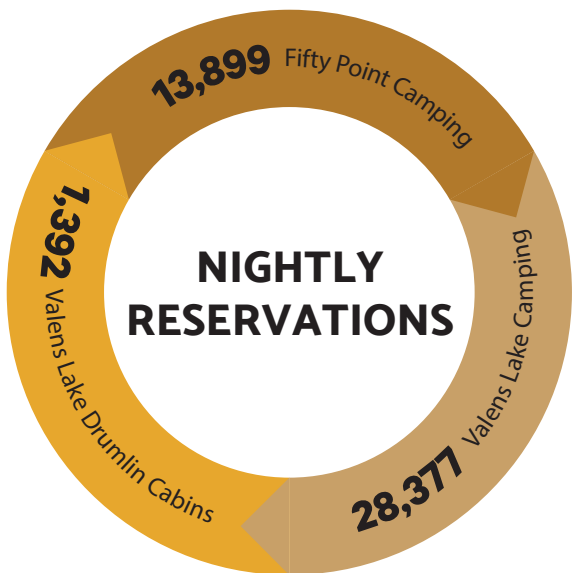


Westfield Heritage Village Conservation Area



2023 ATTENDANCE

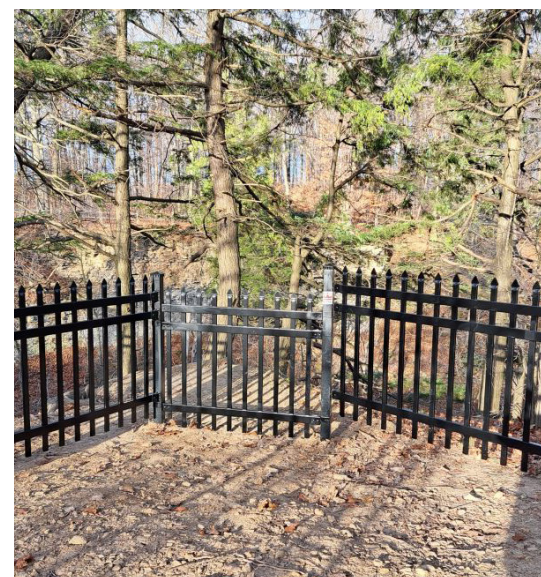
HCA welcomed over **950,000** visitors to its Conservation Areas in 2023, and over **600,000** people to Confederation Beach Park. **81,779** visitors enjoyed Wild Waterworks during the summer operating season.





2023 Highlights

- In February, HCA opened reservations for eight brand-new all-season cabins at Valens Lake Conservation Area and were an instant success. The Drumlin Cabins are the first of their kind at HCA, and their opening wrapped up a long-term vision for HCA from concept to construction.
- Online advanced day passes were launched in early summer for four HCA conservation areas to offer a quick and easy entry to HCA conservation areas. 1,520 people purchased a day pass in 2023.
- Westfield Heritage Village Conservation Area unveiled a major expansion to their trail network, with an official opening held in November. 2.4 km of trails were added, bringing the total amount of trails to 6.7 km. The trail is fully accessible, with flat packed gravel, and features three new bridges crossing wetlands and streams.
- Invested in projects to enhance and expand recreation experiences as follows:
 - New gatehouses were installed at Fifty Point and Spencer Gorge Conservation Areas. Additionally, new autogates, were installed at the Webster Falls parking lot in the Spencer Gorge Conservation Area.
 - Fifty Point Conservation Area underwent a trail reroute and shoreline restoration work. 90 m of trail was rerouted and improved, and 930 sq. m of shoreline restored.
 - Main entrance signs were replaced at Christie Lake, Valens Lake, and Fifty Point Conservation Areas.
 - Lakeland splash pad at Confederation Beach Park was refreshed with rubber resurfacing and new paint on the water features.
 - Valens Lake Conservation Area's fishing bridge guardrail was fully replaced. Numerous other bridge and platform guardrail system replacements were also completed throughout HCA areas.
 - Felker's Falls Conservation Area added 100 m of protective fencing to steep escarpment areas.
 - Christie Lake and Fifty Point Conservation Areas received a total of 2 km of road resurfacing throughout their areas.



CONSERVATION AREA EXPERIENCE



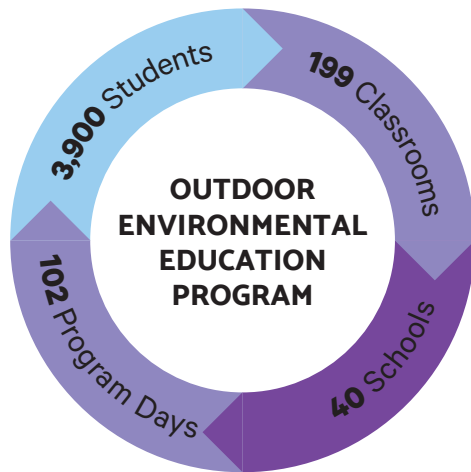
- Westfield Heritage Village Conservation Area had building renovations at the Ironwood Teahouse and Costume Building. These improvements were much needed for staff, volunteers, and visitors.
- The Dofasco 2000 Trail's 1.6 km boardwalk is now fully restored. After over five years of challenging work, the remaining 55 m reconstruction work was completed in 2023.
- A total of eight HCA Master & Management Plans are currently in progress. These multi-year plans provide a long-term vision for our areas, including direction for management and improvements within the properties and are completed in-house by HCA staff. The areas currently under review include:
 - Saltfleet, Devil's Punchbowl, Vinemount & Winona, Eramosa Karst, Mount Albion, and Felker's Falls Conservation Areas, as well as;
 - The Chippawa Rail Trail and the Dofasco 2000 Trail.
- Forest Bathing Walks were introduced to the Dundas Valley Conservation Area where participants had the opportunity to deepen their connection with nature. Four sessions were offered and well received.
- New Trail Map & Wayfinding Signage System was developed for HCA. Eramosa Karst Conservation Area was used as the first pilot site. Signage concepts were sent out for public comment and will be installed in the Spring of 2024. Other HCA conservation areas will follow in the coming years.





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.



HCA VOLUNTEERS



29 events



471 volunteers



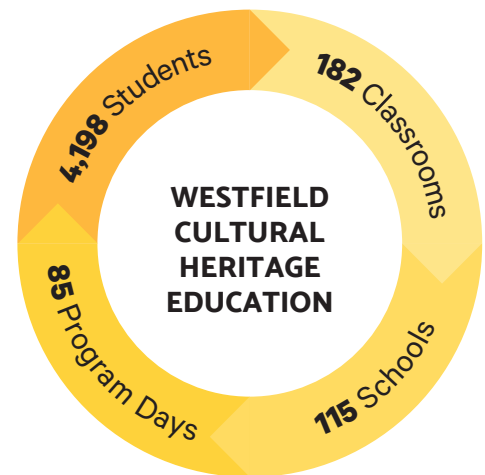
1,106 hours



\$22,120 in-kind value



224 bags of litter removed



WESTFIELD VOLUNTEERS



192 volunteers



9,214 hours

OUTREACH



6 stewardship workshops held



12 educational and outreach events attended

EDUCATION AND ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS



2023 Highlights

- Summer day camps returned to the Dundas Valley Conservation Area for the first time since 2019. The camps were designed to be both educational and fun, covering topics like local wildlife, ecosystem dynamics, and sustainable practices to help engage young minds in the importance of conservation and environmental stewardship.
- Piloted several new programs for the Hamilton Wentworth District School Board (HWDSB), to reach students from kindergarten to high school.
 - Kindergarten program: newly developed to engage students at a younger age than we have traditionally delivered programming to.
 - Grade 9 program specifically targeted for Geography students.
 - French Immersion program, offering outdoor education in both French and English.
 - Grade 4 in-school program to deliver HCA education programs to accommodate schools who are unable to visit in person.
- Worked with the HWDSB Consultant of Reconciliation and Indigenous Educational Wellness to host a program that included Indigenous learning.
- Supported the Hamilton Children's Water Festival in the spring, working alongside high school volunteers to teach hundreds of grade 4 students about protecting aquatic ecosystems during the three-day festival.
- Partnered with Niagara College's Ecosystem Restoration Program for a second year, to help students develop a restoration strategy document for a local agricultural property in the Spring Creek subwatershed.



EDUCATION AND ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS



- Partnered and work with local community residents to facilitate the supply of nesting boxes/structures and to produce bat boxes, turtle nest protectors and swallow boxes for use at various conservation areas.
- In collaboration with McMaster University, hosted an Ancaster Creek open house to 43 members of the public, learning about the current state of the creek, stewardship and restoration efforts, and being engaged with upcoming volunteer events.
- A joint HCA and McMaster walk was conducted through 13 interconnected landowner properties in Ancaster Creek, making observations and providing landowners with summaries on how to address impediments.
- Niagara College students participated in a fieldwork session in April, revegetating a pond in Spring Creek using Dogwood and Willow live stakes.
- Watershed Steward's Appreciation Day was held for the first time since 2019 after a three-year hiatus due to the pandemic. Eight landowners within HCA's watershed were recognized and presented with a Watershed Stewardship Award.
- Enhanced Stewardship programs for both urban and rural areas through the Hamilton Watershed Stewardship Program including:
 - One well decommissioned.
 - \$30,512 in funding provided through WQHIP, Great Lakes Protection Initiative, Hamilton Conservation Foundation, and City of Hamilton's Well Decommissioning Program.
 - 13 projects were funded for 12 different landowners.
- In September, Westfield Heritage Village Conservation Area recognized four of their volunteers for their combined 100 years of volunteer service at Westfield. Each were presented with the Ontario Volunteer Service Award.



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.

2023 at a Glance

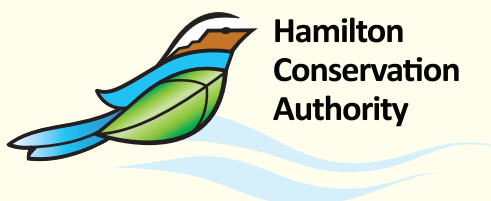
The Foundation raised a total of \$946,680 in our 2022-2023 fiscal year. The second \$500,000 installment on a \$2 million pledge from Heritage Green Community Trust, as well as a \$100,000 donation toward the Dobson-McKee Environmental Education Endowment Fund, contributed greatly to the Foundation's fundraising success this year.

As a result of our fundraising efforts and the generosity of our donors, the Foundation contributed approximately \$870,000 toward various HCA priority projects, including the Saltfleet Conservation Area Wetland construction, the Outdoor Environmental Education program, trail improvements at Westfield Heritage Village Conservation Area and Dundas Valley Conservation Area, interpretive signage, and plantings coordinated through the Stewardship department.



Donations to the Foundation's Step Into Nature Education Fund, and to the Dobson-McKee Environmental Education Endowment Fund ensure that HCA's Environmental Education Program is accessible to students from across Hamilton.





**Hamilton
Conservation
Authority**

A Healthy Watershed for Everyone

838 MINERAL SPRINGS ROAD
P.O. BOX 81067
ANCASTER, ONTARIO L9G 4X1
P: 905-525-2181
WWW.CONSERVATIONHAMILTON.CA

Cover photo taken by James Lees

