



Hamilton Conservation Authority Conservation Area Strategy - DRAFT

June 2024

This page intentionally left blank.

Table of Contents

1.0	Introduction	5
1.1	Purpose and Regulatory Framework	5
1.2	About the Hamilton Conservation Authority.....	6
2.0	Strategic Direction	6
2.1	HCA's Strategic Plan	6
2.2	Conservation Area Strategy Objectives	8
2.3	HCA Land Securement Strategy.....	9
2.4	HCA's Annual Budget	10
3.0	Programs and Services	10
4.0	Conservation Area Assessment	11
4.1	Augment Natural Heritage within HCA Watershed	12
4.2	Integrate with Provincial and Municipal Lands/Other Publicly accessible Lands and Trails	19
4.2.1	Provincial Lands	19
4.2.2	City of Hamilton Lands.....	21
4.2.3	Royal Botanical Gardens Lands.....	21
4.2.4	McMaster Forest.....	21
4.2.5	Trail System.....	22
4.2.6	Cootes to Escarpment EcoPark System	22
4.2.7	HCA Trails.....	24
5.0	Conservation Land Use Categories	24
6.0	Public Engagement	27
7.0	Periodic Review	27
8.0	Future Considerations	27
9.0	Resources	30

This page intentionally left blank.

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Purpose and Regulatory Framework

The Conservation Area Strategy identifies broad objectives for the Hamilton Conservation Authority's (HCA) Conservation Areas and related programs and services. The strategy was undertaken by the HCA to meet requirements as outlined in the [Conservation Authorities Act](#) (CA Act) and [Ontario Regulation 686/21](#) (Regulation) and is intended to provide guidance for the management and operation of the HCA's conservation areas.

Section 21.1 of the CA Act sets out Mandatory Programs and Services that all conservation authorities must deliver within their watershed, with these requirements outlined in greater detail in the Regulation. Section 21.1.1 of the CA Act details Municipal Programs and Services that conservation authorities are permitted to provide under agreement to their municipal partners while Section 21.1.2 provides direction related to Other Programs and Services conservation authorities may deliver. The Regulation, specifically, subsection 9(1), paragraph 1 outlines that all conservation authorities must complete a Conservation Area Strategy. The main requirements of a Conservation Area Strategy per Section 10 of the Regulation are outlined in Figure 1.

1. 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.
2. 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.
3. Where the authority considers it advisable to achieve the objectives referred to in paragraph 1, an assessment of how the lands owned and controlled by the authority may,
 - i. augment any natural heritage located within the authority's area of jurisdiction, and
 - ii. integrate with other provincially or municipally owned lands or other publicly accessible lands and trails within the authority's area of jurisdiction.
4. The establishment of land use categories for the purpose of classifying lands in the land inventory described in Section 11 based on the types of activities that are engaged in on each parcel of land or other matters of significance related to the parcel.
5. 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.

Figure 1 – Conservation Area Strategy - Main Requirements

1.2 About the Hamilton Conservation Authority

The Spencer Creek Conservation Authority, the forerunner of the HCA, was created in 1958. Subsequently, Red Hill Creek, Stoney Creek, Battlefield Creek and the Numbered watercourse in the former City of Stoney Creek and City of Hamilton were added and the HCA was formed in 1966 pursuant to the CA Act. The HCA is located at the western end of Lake Ontario and has a watershed area of 479km². The HCA watershed is located in the Treaty Lands and Territory of the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation and traditional territory of the Haudenosaunee. As shown on Map 1, the majority of the HCA's watershed is included within the City of Hamilton with the headwaters of Spencer Creek and Fletcher Creek located in the Township of Puslinch. A small portion of the Town of Grimsby is located at the east end of the HCA's watershed.

The HCA operates under the requirements of the CA Act. Section 0.1 of the CA Act states that:

“The purpose of this Act is to provide for the organization and delivery of programs and services that further the conservation, restoration, development and management of natural resources in watersheds in Ontario.”

The Board of Directors of the HCA is comprised of 11 Directors representing 2 municipalities. Seven Councillors and 3 citizen appointees represent the City of Hamilton while 1 appointee represents the Township of Puslinch. The HCA works closely with our municipal partners as well as local groups and agencies and both the Federal and Provincial governments.

The HCA owns or manages 4,732 ha (11,695 acres) of land within our watershed jurisdiction. This includes the Westfield Heritage Village Conservation Area and portions of the Chippawa Rail Trail and the Toronto Hamilton & Brantford (TH&B) Rail Trail that are located outside of the HCA's watershed.

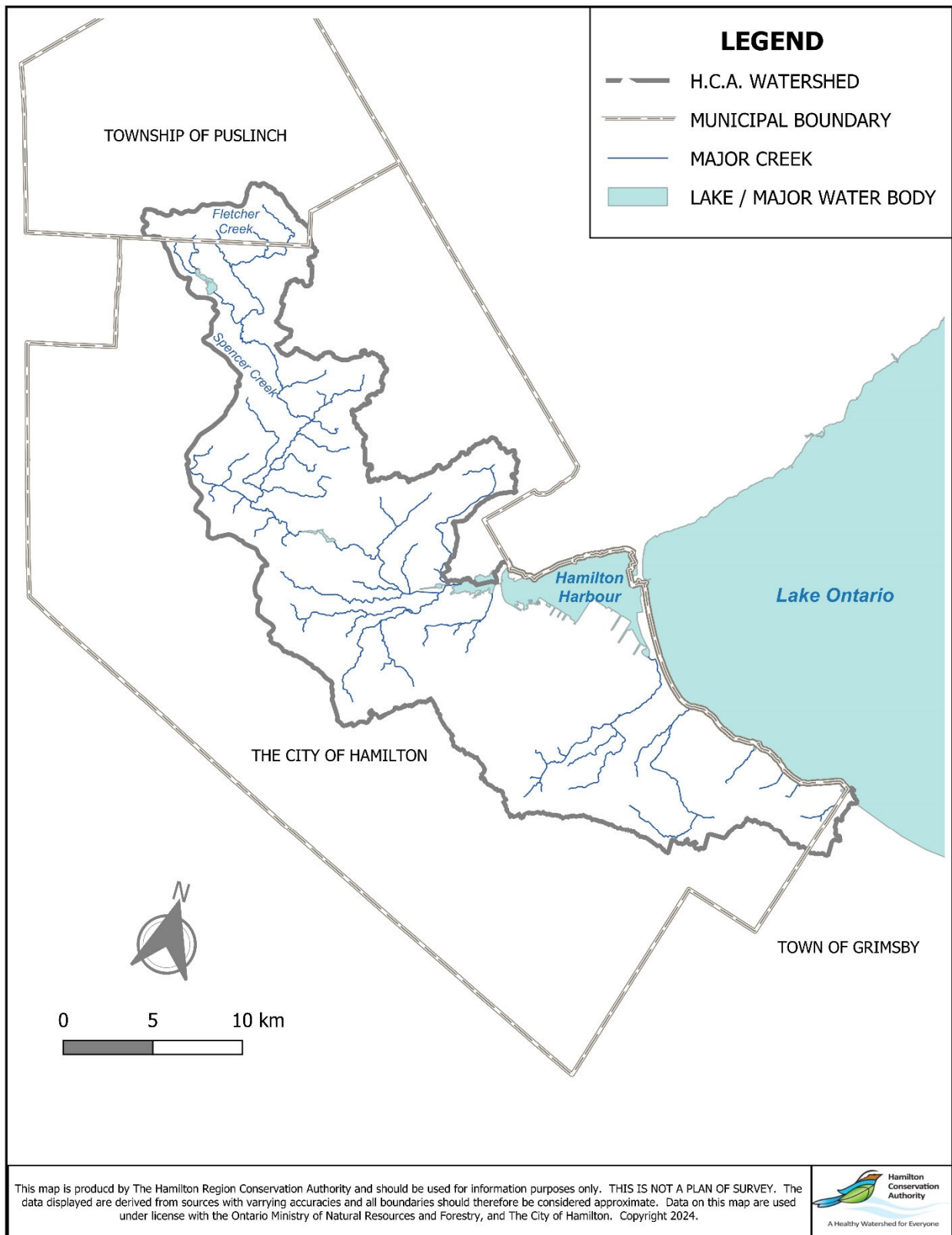
2.0 Strategic Direction

2.1 HCA's Strategic Plan **Note: The HCA is currently undertaking the development of a Strategic Plan for 2025-2029. This is expected to be completed by the end of June 2024. This section will be updated pending completion of the 2025-2029 Strategic Plan.**

HCA's [Strategic Plan 2019-2023](#) details the HCA's vision, mission, commitment and corporate values as well as our strategic priorities.

HCA's vision, where we want to be is “A healthy watershed for everyone”.

HCA's mission, what we do is “To lead in the conservation of our watershed and connect people to nature.”



Map 1 – HCA Watershed

The Strategic Plan highlights the HCA's commitment and corporate values as follows:

- Provide excellent customer service and a solution-oriented approach
- Be accountable, transparent and responsible in the use of resources
- Embrace new technologies to help develop new ways of doing business and foster innovation
- Promote teamwork internally and externally to achieve common goals, support existing relationships and build new partnerships
- Maintain trust, act with integrity and treat others with respect
- Value knowledge to continually learn and improve, in an effort to achieve best solutions

The HCA's Strategic Plan highlighted 5 Strategic Priority Areas.

- Organizational Excellence
- Water Management
- Natural Heritage Conservation
- Conservation Area Experience
- Education and Environmental Awareness

For each Strategic Priority Area, several initiatives are included and these priority areas and associated initiatives guide programs and services and the development of department work plans, budgets and approaches.

2.2 Conservation Area Strategy Objectives

Section 10(1) of Ontario Regulation 686/21 notes that a Conservation Area Strategy shall include "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". For reference, Section 21.1 of the CA Act states the following:

"An authority shall provide the following programs or services within its area of jurisdiction:

1. Programs or services that meet any of the following descriptions and that have been prescribed by the regulations:
 - i. Programs and services related to the risk of natural hazards.
 - ii. Programs and services related to the conservation and management of lands owned or controlled by the authority, including any interests in land registered on title.
 - iii. Programs and services related to the authority's duties, functions and responsibilities as a source protection authority under the Clean Water Act, 2006.

- iv. Programs and services related to the authority's duties, functions and responsibilities under an Act prescribed by the regulations."

Based on this direction, Section 21.1 ii) of the CA Act, staff input, a review of background documentation and input through the consultation process, the following objectives have been developed to meet the requirements of the CA Act and Ontario Regulation 686/21.

- a. To ensure that all present and future HCA land holdings contribute to the vision and mandate of the HCA, and support an integrated watershed management approach;*
- b. To pursue an active land securement program to increase the size of the HCA conservation lands and linkages to these lands;*
- c. To protect and enhance the ecological integrity of the lands within the HCA's watershed and maintain and enhance a connected natural heritage system*
- d. To undertake research, monitoring and evaluation of the natural heritage system, and organize current information to identify information gaps and strengthen knowledge of the HCA's watershed natural heritage system;*
- e. To provide environmentally sustainable passive and active recreation opportunities, as appropriate, within the HCA's conservation areas;*
- f. To determine the current public uses occurring on these lands, identify user groups and principle uses, and identify actions to meet future needs for these lands;*
- g. To ensure that future management of the CA lands will be informed by stakeholder and public input.*
- h. To maintain, enhance and build new partnerships to enhance connectivity of natural heritage lands and trail networks where possible.*

2.3 HCA Land Securement Strategy

At the December 19, 2019 Board of Directors meeting, the 2020 HCA Land Securement Strategy (LSS) was endorsed. The goal of the Land Securement Strategy is to focus on natural areas, linkages, infilling and creating larger core area conservation areas. Given the vast area of land within the HCA watershed, it is inconceivable that all potential lands would be secured by public agencies or land trusts. With existing funding levels and the ability to locate willing parties, the HCA will approach land acquisition based on a willing buyer-willing seller philosophy. Acquisition will be completed based on available opportunities to acquire targeted properties and will be considered on a case-by-case basis and subject to funding. Land disposition is not envisioned by the HCA. In the unlikely event that a property does not have existing or potential ecological significance, does not meet the noted securement criteria as

detailed in the LSS and has no pre-existing agreement to honour regarding disposal, the parcel may be considered for disposition from which proceeds would be directed towards the HCA's land acquisition account to be used to secure additional lands.

2.4 HCA's Annual Budget

The HCA undertakes an annual budget process with the Board of Directors approving the final budget. The budget is based on the approved HCA Strategic Plan, departmental work plans, master and management plans for HCA conservation areas as well as prioritized action items. To meet the requirements of the CA Act and associated regulations, the budget details programs and services as Mandatory (Category 1), Municipal (Category 2) and Other (Category 3).

3.0 Programs and Services

Section 10 (1) 2. of Ontario Regulation 686/21 outlines that the Conservation Area Strategy shall provide the "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." The following tables highlight the mandatory and non-mandatory programs and services undertaken on land owned and controlled by the HCA. It is noted that this information has been obtained from the approved HCA Inventory of Programs and Services dated March 2, 2023. The Inventory of Programs and Services was utilized as part of the required municipal agreements with the City of Hamilton and the Township of Puslinch.

Mandatory (Category 1)

Program/Service	Sources of Funding
Section 29 Minister's regulation Rules for Conduct in Conservation Areas (O. Reg. 688/21)	Municipal Levy and Self-Generated
Conservation Area Strategy – As required by O. Reg. 688/21	Municipal Levy
Land Inventory – As required by O. Reg. 688/21	Municipal Levy
Management, operation and Maintenance of CA owned lands – This includes Management and Maintenance of HCA owned lands Includes: Stewardship and restoration, Master and management plans, hazard tree	Municipal Block Funding and Self-Generated

and invasive species management and, Ecological monitoring	
Programs and services to maintain any facilities, trails or other amenities that support public access and recreational activities in conservation areas and that can be provided without the direct support or supervision of staff employed by the authority or by another person or body	

Municipal (Category 2)

Program/Service	Sources of Funding
Dofasco 200 Trail and LaFarge 2000 Trail	Municipal Block Funding and Self-Generated
Cultural Heritage Education and Experiences	Municipal Levy
Land Lease and Agreement Management	Mgmt. fee cost as per agreement with City of Hamilton for Confederation Beach Park

Other (Category 3)

Program/Service	Sources of Funding
Management, operation and maintenance of CA owned lands for active recreation	Self-Generated and Municipal Block Funding
Outdoor Environmental Education	Self-Generated
Land Lease and Agreement Management	Self-Generated
Land Acquisition Program	Self-Generated
Partnership Building and Volunteer Support	Self-Generated

The HCA implements a broad and successful range of programs and services related to the HCA's owned and managed conservation lands. Future considerations flowing from the Conservation Area Strategy is outlined in Section 8 of this strategy.

4.0 Conservation Area Assessment

Ontario Regulation 686/21 outlines that when an authority considers it advisable to achieve the objectives as required under Section 10(1) 1. of the Regulation and further detailed in Section 2.2 of this Conservation Area Strategy, an assessment of how the lands owned and controlled by the authority may be undertaken to show how the authority's lands; i) augment any natural heritage located within the authority's area of jurisdiction, and ; ii) integrate with

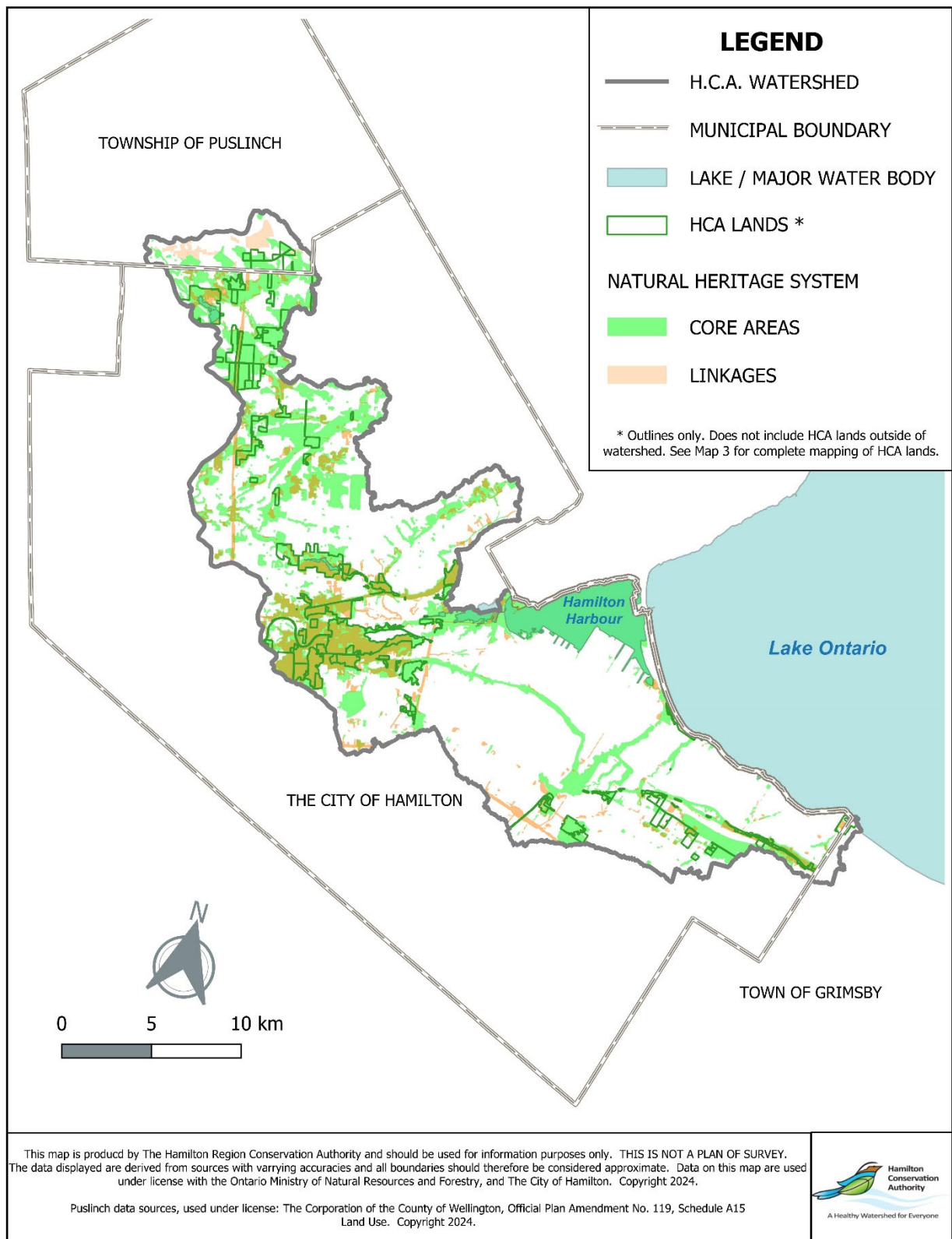
other provincially or municipally owned lands or other publicly accessible lands and trails within the authority's area of jurisdiction. Sections 4.1 and 4.2 outline the role of HCA lands within the watersheds natural heritage system as well as how HCA lands are connected and integrate with provincial and municipal lands and other publicly accessible lands and trails. It is noted that the HCA's watershed and ecological lands and the watersheds natural heritage system connects more broadly with adjoining Conservation Authority watersheds.

4.1 Augment Natural Heritage within HCA Watershed

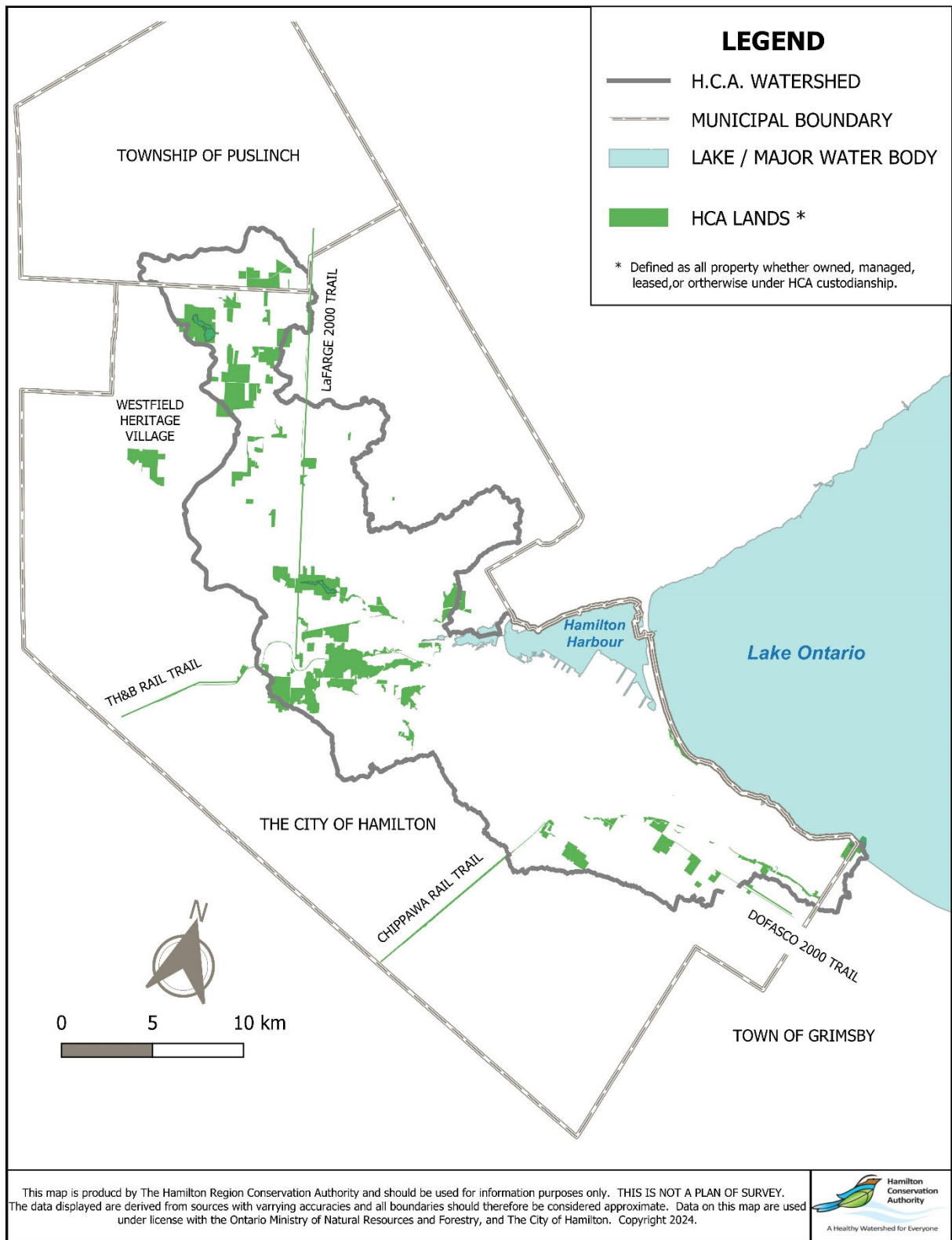
Starting in 1993, the HCA, City of Hamilton, the Hamilton Naturalists and other partners have undertaken a natural areas inventory (NAI) for the area of the City of Hamilton. There have been three editions of the NAI in total with the latest NAI being completed in 2014. The City of Hamilton has used the completed NAI information as part of the development of their Official Plan (Section C.2.0, City of Hamilton Rural Official Plan). Using this data and mapping, the City has designated in their Official Plan Core Areas and Linkages. The Core Areas serve to identify and protect the natural heritage lands identified in the NAI as well as the linkages that serve to connect these core areas. These Core Areas and Linkages serve as the City's identified natural heritage system. Map 2 illustrates the Natural Heritage System for the City of Hamilton and the Township of Puslinch as shown in the respective Official Plans

As noted in Section 1.2, the HCA own or manages 4,732 ha (11,695 acres) of land within our watershed jurisdiction. This includes the Westfield Heritage Village Conservation Area and portions of the Chippawa Rail Trail and TH&B Rail Trail that are located outside of the HCA's watershed. HCA lands as noted are illustrated on Map 3.

The vast majority of HCA lands as illustrated in Map 3 comprise major components of the City's natural heritage system and are integral to the features, function and biodiversity of the natural heritage system. When considering the mapping highlighted in this section, it is evident that HCA lands play a critical role in the watershed natural heritage system as well as providing passive and active recreation lands within the watershed. HCA lands certainly augment natural heritage features within the HCA's watershed and secure these lands for current and future generations. Further, these lands play a critical role in providing critical habitat in an increasing urban area, provides a natural land area to maintain and increase biodiversity while also mitigating the effects of climate change.



Map 2 – Natural Heritage System City of Hamilton and County of Wellington

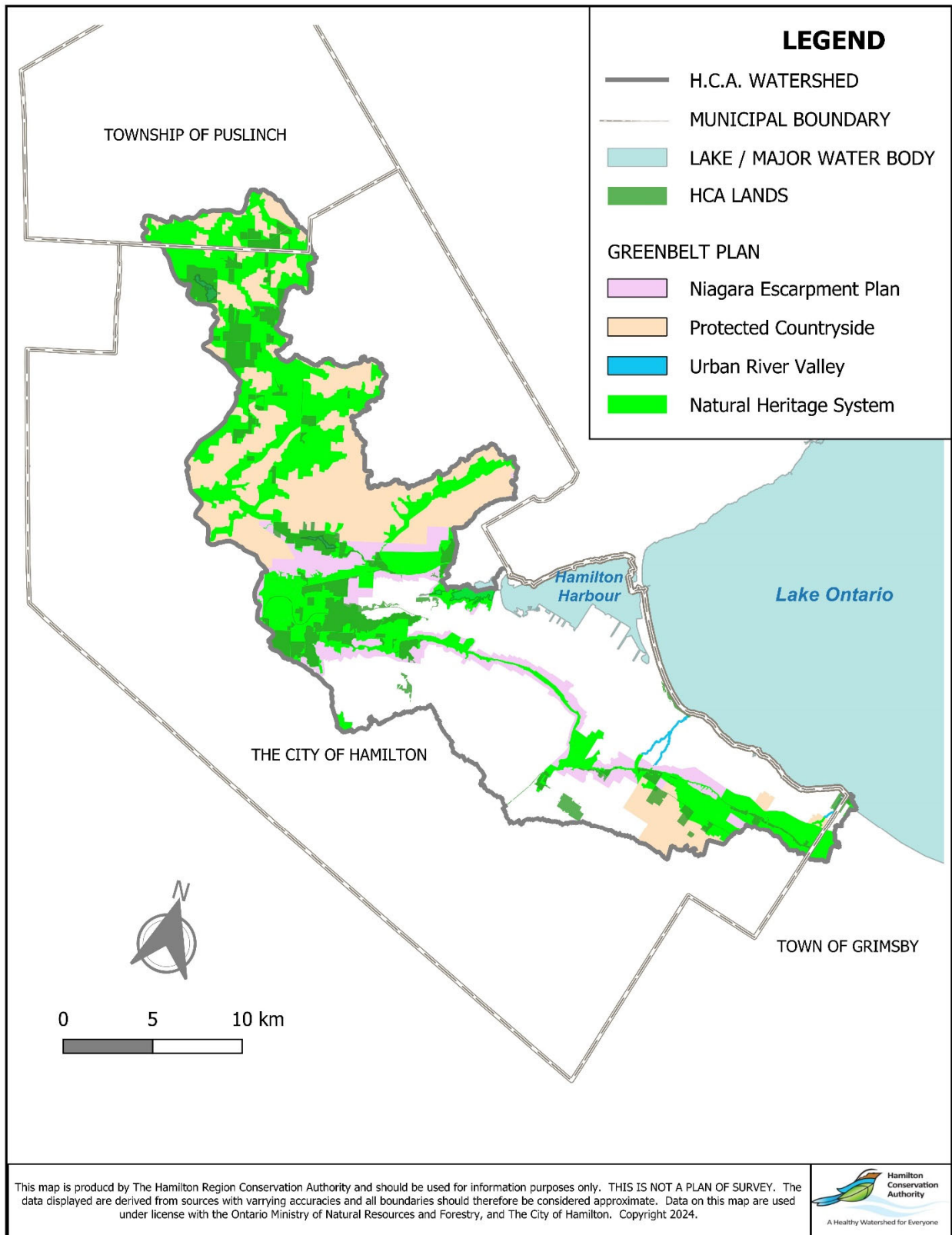


Map 3 – HCA Owned and Managed Lands

The Niagara Escarpment, portions of which are located in the HCA's watershed, is a significant topographic feature that extends from Queenston in the Niagara Region to Tobermory on the Bruce Peninsula. The Niagara Escarpment Plan which was established through the Niagara Escarpment Planning and Development Act "serves as a framework of objectives and policies to strike a balance between development, protection and the enjoyment of this important landform feature and the resources it supports." In addition to the policy framework for the broader Niagara Escarpment Plan area, "The Niagara Escarpment Plan has a system of parks and open spaces which are connected by the Bruce Trail. The system is identified as the Niagara Escarpment Parks and Open Space System (NEPOSS). NEPOSS provides opportunities for recreation, tourism, and play a fundamental role in the protection of cultural heritage resources and the Escarpment's natural heritage. Natural areas in the NEPOSS also help to mitigate and improve resilience to climate change by providing green infrastructure, capturing and storing carbon, recharging aquifers and protecting biodiversity and sensitive areas across the Escarpment." HCA master plans and projects within the NEPOSS system must comply with the requirements of the Niagara Escarpment Plan. The Niagara Escarpment Plan through the NEPOSS policies identifies the following HCA properties as being included in the NEPOSS system. In this regard, these lands augment natural heritage features at the HCA watershed scale as well as at a provincial landscape scale.

1. Spencer Gorge – Webster's Falls Conservation Area
2. Crooks Hollow Conservation Area
3. Christie Lake Conservation Area
4. Summit Bog Muskeg Preserve
5. Dundas Valley Conservation Area (A Nodal park within NEPOSS)
6. Tiffany Falls Conservation Area
7. Iroquoia Heights Conservation Area
8. Mount Albion Conservation Area
9. Felker's Falls Conservation Area
10. Devil's Punch Bowl Conservation Area
11. Vinemount Conservation Area
12. Winona Conservation Area

The Greenbelt Plan is a provincial plan with "an overarching strategy that provides clarity and certainty about urban structure, where and how future growth should be accommodated and what must be protected for current and future generations." "The Greenbelt Plan includes lands within, and builds upon the ecological protections provided by, the Niagara Escarpment Plan (NEP) and the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan (ORMCP)."

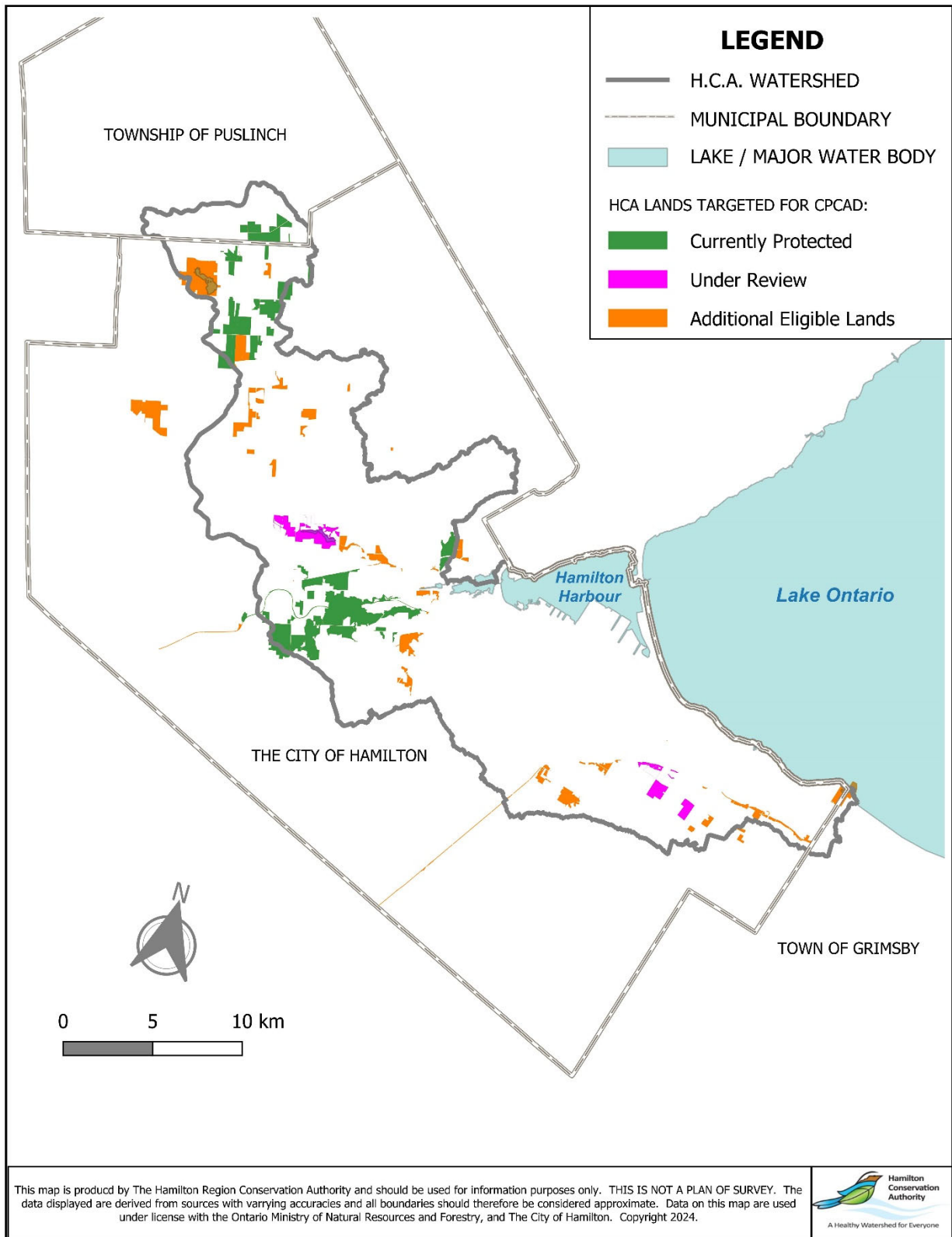


Map 4 – HCA Owned and Managed Lands in context with Niagara Escarpment Plan and Greenbelt Plan

The Greenbelt Plan provides for a Protected Countryside with the purpose to “enhance the spatial extent of agriculturally and environmentally protected lands covered by the NEP and the ORMCP while at the same time improving linkages between these areas and the surrounding major lake systems and watersheds. The Protected Countryside is made up of an Agricultural System and a Natural System, together with a series of settlement areas.” Specific policies are included in the Greenbelt Plan that provide protection for natural heritage in the Greenbelt plan area. Map 4 illustrates the boundaries of the Greenbelt Plan and the Niagara Escarpment Plan in addition to HCA lands within this area. As shown of Map 4, most of the lands owned by the HCA are located within this plan area and augment the Natural System on a Provincial scale.

At the 2022 UN Biodiversity Conference, Target 3 from the Kunming-Montreal Biodiversity Framework outlined “that by 2030 at least 30 per cent of terrestrial, inland water, and of coastal and marine areas, especially areas of particular importance for biodiversity and ecosystem functions and services, are effectively conserved and managed.” Canada has committed to meeting this target and through a database maintained by the Federal Department of Environment and Climate Change Canada tracks Canada’s progress to meeting this target. Working with the Ontario Ministry of Environment, Conservation and Parks and Ontario Nature, the HCA has submitted the required documentation and mapping for these lands to count towards meeting this target. Map 5 identifies HCA lands that have met the required criteria for these lands to be counted as protected lands or are under consideration to be counted. This speaks to the importance of these lands from a watershed, provincial, federal and international level as it relates to biodiversity conservation and how HCA lands augment natural heritage.

Historically, the HCA has completed and implemented master plans for the HCA’s conservation lands. These plans date to the 1970’s, 1980’s and 1990’s. More recently, the HCA has commenced a process for updating the conservation area master and management plans to reflect current conditions and guide the development and management of these conservation lands. These plans provide direction regarding both passive and active recreation, development opportunities to enhance the visitors experience as well as management and enhancement of the natural features found on site. The plans also identify opportunities for restoration of land to increase the natural heritage features of the conservation area. In this regard, the Westfield Heritage Village Conservation Area, the Valens Conservation Area, the Fifty Point Conservation Area, Fletcher Creek, Beverly Swamp, Dofasco 2000, Saltfleet, Winona and Vinemount plans have been completed and the recommendations of these plans are being implemented through the HCA’s annual budget and work plan processes. The Devil’s Punch Bowl Conservation Areas Master Plan is nearing completion as of 2024 with the Felker’s Falls, Mount Albion, Eramosa Karst, Chippewa Trail underway. The Dundas Valley Conservation Area and Christie Conservation Area master plans are scheduled to be completed in the next 3 to 4 years.



Map 5 – HCA Owned and Managed Lands – Target 3 Lands

The HCA also undertakes management and restoration work on HCA lands per the completed master plans and management plans, the HCA's Invasive Species Strategy (2016) and invasive species mapping as well as the result of the HCA's natural heritage monitoring program.

The above noted programs support the implementation of the objectives noted in Section 2.2, specifically the following objectives:

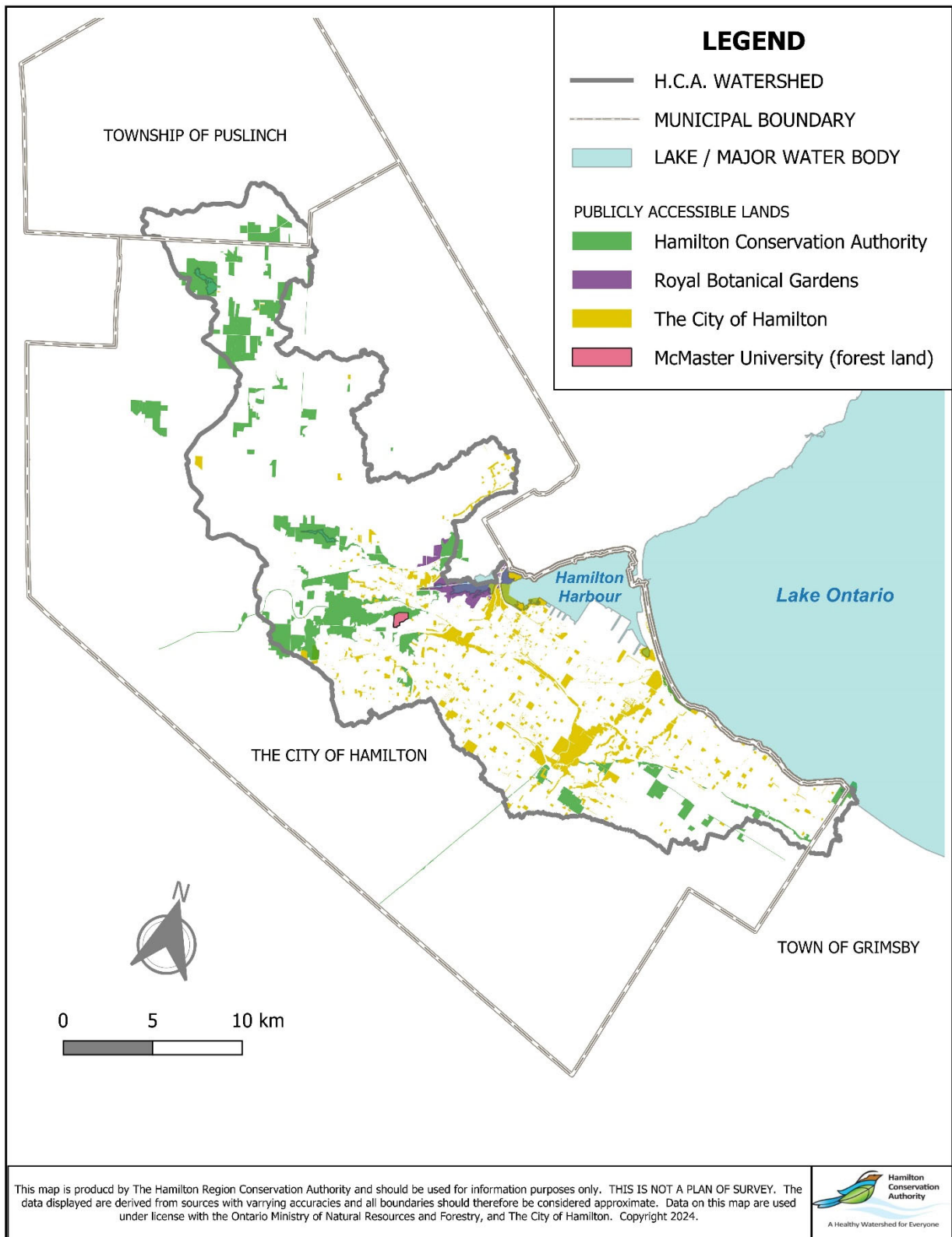
- a. To ensure that all present and future HCA land holdings contribute to the vision and mandate of the HCA, and support an integrated watershed management approach;*
- b. To protect and enhance the ecological integrity of the lands within the HCA's watershed and maintain and enhance a connected natural heritage system*
- c. To undertake research, monitoring and evaluation of the natural heritage system, and organize current information to identify information gaps and strengthen knowledge of the HCA's watershed natural heritage system;*
- d. To provide environmentally sustainable passive and active recreation opportunities, as appropriate, within the HCA's conservation areas;*
- e. To determine the current public uses occurring on these lands, identify user groups and principle uses, and identify actions to meet future needs for these lands*

4.2 Integrate with Provincial and Municipal Lands/Other Publicly accessible Lands and Trails

Map 6 provides an overview of provincial, municipal, and other publicly accessible lands located within the HCA's watershed and how they integrate with HCA lands.

4.2.1 Provincial Lands

Within the HCA's watershed, there are no provincial lands, Provincial Parks or Provincial Conservation Reserves and as such, the Conservation Area Strategy does not take this type of lands into consideration. The Province of Ontario does own the "feeder lands" that form part of the Eramosa Karst Conservation Area. These lands are managed by the HCA through an agreement with the province.



Map 6 – HCA Owned and Managed Lands in Context with City of Hamilton and Royal Botanical Garden Lands

4.2.2 City of Hamilton Lands

The City of Hamilton does own significant lands within the HCA watershed. These lands include local and city-wide parks that serve to provide both passive and recreation opportunities. Generally, these lands do not contain natural heritage features and are not part of the City's natural heritage system, however, they do provide open space for watershed residents and in some cases linkages to the broader parkland and open space system within the City of Hamilton, including HCA lands, and into adjacent communities.

The City of Hamilton does own lands located along the Niagara Escarpment as well as ravine lands within the Red Hill Creek watershed, Battlefield Creek and Stoney Creek as well as the Windermere Basin and Chedoke Creek. These lands do contain natural heritage features and are Core Areas and Linkages as identified in the City of Hamilton's Official Plan. These lands are also part of the City's Natural Heritage System.

4.2.3 Royal Botanical Gardens Lands

Royal Botanical Gardens (RBG) is located on lands around Cootes Paradise and is within both the watershed jurisdictions of the HCA and Conservation Halton. RBG owns and manages 2,700 acres of land including 2,400 acres of nature sanctuaries, 300 acres cultivated gardens and an arboretum. These lands include Cootes Paradise which is a provincially significant coastal wetland, ravine lands and forest. These features are part of the City of Hamilton's Natural Heritage System and are located adjacent to the Dundas Valley Conservation Area and the Borer's Falls Conservation Area with the resulting large natural heritage area which contains trails and passive recreation opportunities. This area is also part of the Cootes to Escarpment EcoPark System (Section 4.2.6) which is a group of nine land owning agencies that have agreed to establish the EcoPark System as a voluntary collaboration. Collectively, the aim is to effectively manage the lands through restoration and naturalization projects, increasing landholdings and passive use of the area and its trail network.

4.2.4 McMaster Forest

McMaster Forest is a 127-acre parcel of lands owned and maintained by McMaster University. It is located on Lower Lions Club Road and is located immediately adjacent to HCA lands that comprise the Dundas valley Conservation Area. McMaster Forest is an environmental significant area that is used for ecological teaching and research and for recreation purposes. "McMaster Forest Nature Preserve is an incredibly biodiverse area of mixed forests, old growth forests, wetlands, meadows, creeks, and prairie. The proximity to campus, combined with the incredible diversity of animal and plant species thriving on the property, make the McMaster Forest Nature Preserve an ideal research, recreation, and teaching facility. Many undergraduate courses make use of the property as well as undergraduate and graduate research projects. The public is welcome to explore the area, but is asked to please adhere to posted signage, stay on trail, and not disturb ongoing research."

4.2.5 Trail System

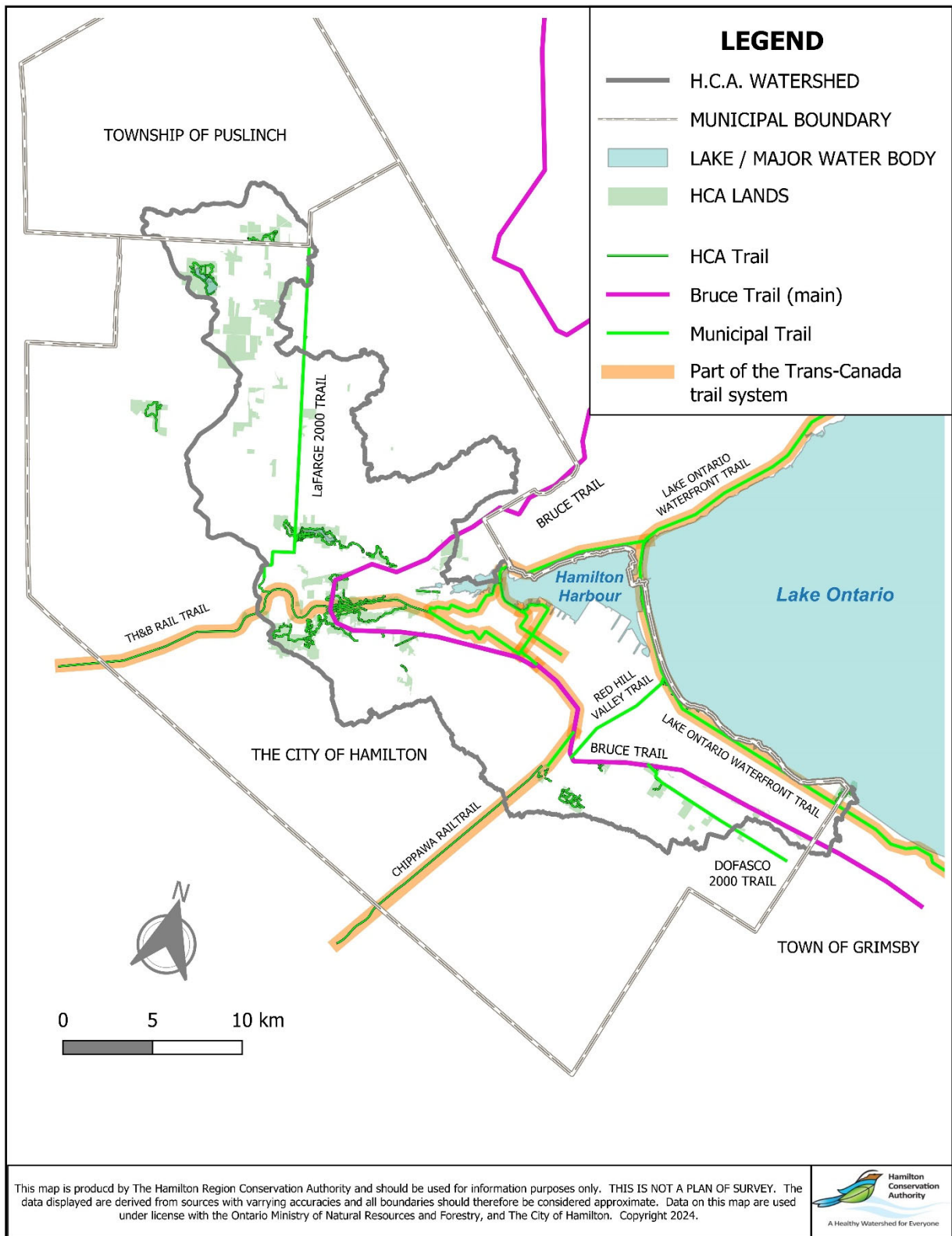
There is a significant trail system within the HCA's watershed as well as the broader municipal community. At the provincial level, the Bruce Trail, which is administered by the Bruce Trail Conservancy is a 725 km trail that connects Queenston in the Niagara Region to Tobermory on the Bruce Peninsula. The Bruce Trail follows the Niagara Escarpment along its length and in the HCA's watershed, the trail is located on private and public lands with sections of the trail located on HCA lands. Further, the Bruce Trail does connect via side trails to other trail systems within the HCA's watershed including HCA trails, specifically in the Dundas Valley Conservation Area.

The Great Lakes Waterfront Trail is a provincial scale trail network that also encompasses portions of the Trans-Canada Trail. The trail system generally follows the shorelines of the St. Lawrence River, Lake Ontario, the Niagara River, Lake Erie, Lake St. Clair, the Detroit River and the St. Clair River, Lake Huron and Georgian Bay. Within the HCA's watershed, the Great Lakes Waterfront Trail is located along the Lake Ontario Shoreline connecting the Niagara Region to the Greater Toronto Area to the north and east. The trail passes the Fifty Point Conservation Area which is owned by the HCA as well as Confederation Beach Park which is owned by the City of Hamilton and managed by the HCA.

The City of Hamilton owns and maintains an extensive trail system within their boundaries. These trails range from local neighbourhood trails to a more city scale trail network which in certain areas, connects the City's trail network to the above noted Great Lakes Waterfront Trail and the Bruce Trail. Examples of these trail connections are the Hamilton Harbour Waterfront Trail, the Escarpment Rail Trail and the Red Hill Valley Recreational Trail. The above noted trails also form part of the Greenbelt Route.

4.2.6 Cootes to Escarpment EcoPark System

Cootes to Escarpment EcoPark System (C2E) is a collaborative partnership that works to preserve and enhance the natural lands owned by the partner agencies with a vision to permanently protect lands connecting Cootes Paradise with Hamilton Harbour and the Niagara Escarpment. The C2E mission is "as partners is to collaborate to preserve and enhance the natural lands we own and steward by using sustainable approaches to protect biodiversity, highlight ecosystem services, and enable responsible human connection to nature." The partners that form C2E are Royal Botanical Gardens, City of Hamilton, Bruce Trail Conservancy, City of Burlington, Halton Region, Conservation Halton, Hamilton Naturalists Club, McMaster University and the HCA.



Map 7 – HCA Watershed Trail System

4.2.7 HCA Trails

The HCA owns and maintains approximately 147 km's of trails. Most of this trail network is located in HCA conservation areas providing opportunities for people to connect with nature and experience the watersheds natural landscapes. The HCA has four linear trails that connect the HCA's conservation areas to the broader City and Provincial trail network. The TH&B Rail Trail connects west Hamilton to Jerseyville through the Dundas Valley Conservation Area. This trail ultimately continues from Jerseyville to Brantford under the ownership of the Grand River Conservation Authority. The Chippawa Rail Trail connects the upper Red Hill Creek Valley to Caledonia. Both the TH&B Rail Trail and the Chippawa Rail Trail are part of the Trans Canada Trail network. Lastly, the LaFarge 2000 Trail and the Dofasco 2000 Trail are located on City of Hamilton road allowances but are managed by the HCA. The LaFarge 2000 Trail connects the Dundas Valley Conservation Area to Puslinch along the Middletown Road right of way while the Dofasco 2000 Trail connects the Devil's Punch Bowl and Saltfleet Conservation Areas to the 11th Road East.

Map 7 provides an overview of the trail system as noted above located within and beyond the HCA's watershed and how they integrate with HCA lands.

The above noted programs support the implementation of the objectives noted in Section 2.2, specifically the following objectives:

- a. To ensure that all present and future HCA land holdings contribute to the vision and mandate of the HCA, and support an integrated watershed management approach;*
- b. To protect and enhance the ecological integrity of the lands within the HCA's watershed and maintain and enhance a connected natural heritage system*
- c. To provide environmentally sustainable passive and active recreation opportunities, as appropriate, within the HCA's conservation areas;*
- d. To maintain, enhance and build new partnerships to enhance connectivity of natural heritage lands and trail networks where possible.*

5.0 Conservation Land Use Categories

Section 10 (1) 4. of Ontario Regulation 686/21 requires "The establishment of land use categories for the purpose of classifying lands in the land inventory described in Section 11 based on the types of activities that are engaged in on each parcel of land or other matters of significance related to the parcel." In this regard, the Conservation Area Strategy will identify land use categories and these categories will be used to classify HCA lands in the Land Inventory as required in Section 11 of Ontario Regulation 686/21.

Through Conservation Ontario's document titled "Guidance on the Conservation Authority Mandatory Conservation Area Strategy", dated January 9, 2022, four high-level land use

categories were proposed for use by all conservation authorities. The guidance document “recognizes that CAs lands may host a variety of activities which warrant different classifications for a single parcel (e.g., a conservation area which hosts passive recreation trails as well as protected management areas).” The guidance document recommends that “CAs are encouraged to apply one of the following four primary land use categories, and where necessary, apply subsequent secondary and/or tertiary categories as appropriate.”

1. Conservation Areas (Active Recreation, Accessible to the Public)
2. Conservation Areas (Passive Recreation, Accessible to the Public)
3. Management Areas (Public Accessibility Varies) (e.g., Natural Heritage Lands, Natural Hazard Lands, Water Management Areas, Forest Management Lands, Environmentally Sensitive Lands, etc.)
4. Conservation Authority Administration Areas

The HCA has considered this recommended approach and the Conservation Area Strategy will implement this land use classification, however, the Conservation Authority Administration Areas classification will not be used as the HCA’s main office area is part of the larger Dundas Valley Conservation Area and the primary use of those lands is conservation. The following provides an overview of the HCA land use classifications and how they will be applied to the Land Inventory.

In implementing the Land Use Categories, it is highlighted that the overarching intent for management of the lands owned and managed by the HCA is to ensure the conservation of the natural heritage and natural hazard features and functions found on these lands. Other uses should ultimately be complimentary to this overarching purpose and not negatively impact on these features.

1. Conservation Areas (Active Recreation, Accessible to the Public)

In addition to the natural heritage and natural hazard features and functions in these areas, this land use category would also include such uses as camping, roofed accommodation, marina, picnic pavilions, active day use areas such as beaches, trails and open space areas. This land use category would apply to the following HCA owned and managed lands – Fifty Point Conservation Area, Confederation Beach Park, Christie Lake Conservation Area, Valens Lake Conservation Area and Westfield Heritage Village Conservation Area. As it relates to Valens Lake and Christie Lake Conservation Areas, this would include operation and maintenance of the dam structures located on site.

2. Conservation Areas (Passive Recreation, Accessible to the Public)

In addition to the natural heritage and natural hazard features and functions in these areas, this land use category would also include such uses as walking, hiking, cycling, nature interpretation and outdoor education and hunting on designated lands per

Provincial Regulations. These lands contain significant natural heritage and physical landforms, and in some cases cultural heritage features. The intent with this land use category is to conserve the natural heritage and natural hazard features found on site while connecting people to nature and to instill a conservation ethic in conservation area visitors and the broader public. This land use category would apply to the following HCA owned and managed lands – Devil’s Punch Bowl Conservation Area, Saltfleet Conservation Area, Eramosa Karst Conservation Area, Felker’s Falls Conservation Area, Mount Albion Conservation Area, Iroquoia Heights Conservation Area, Meadowlands Conservation Area, Dundas Valley Conservation Area, Borer’s falls Conservation Area, Spencer Gorge Conservation Area and Crooks Hollow Conservation Area.

3. Conservation Areas (Management Lands)

The primary land use on these lands is natural heritage and natural hazard conservation. These lands are larger or more isolated parcels that have limited facilities and access and, in most cases, do not experience large visitation numbers. There may be HCA maintained trails, limited trails or a through trail such as the Bruce Trail that is not part of an existing HCA trail located on these lands. This land use category would apply to the following HCA owned and managed lands – Vinemount Swamp Conservation Area, Winona Conservation Area, Beverly Swamp Conservation Area and Fletcher Creek Ecological Preserve.

It is noted that while the above noted land use classifications will be applied to the conservation areas as noted, in some cases, the Conservation Areas (Management Lands) may be applied to certain isolated lands within the conservation areas that have no or limited public access. This would be applicable to certain lands within the Christie Lake Conservation Area, Dundas Valley Conservation Area and the Borer’s Falls Conservation Area.

As noted in Section 4.1, the HCA has historically undertaken master plans for HCA conservation areas. More recently, the HCA has undertaken a program to update conservation area master plans and management plans with Fifty Point Conservation Area, Valens Lake Conservation Area, Westfield Heritage Village Conservation Area, Fletcher Creek, Beverly Swamp, Dofasco 2000, Saltfleet, Winona and Vinemount plans completed. Work on the remaining plans is underway. As part of the development of the plans, the HCA has approached this process with the mind-set that a conservation area in the HCA portfolio requiring Master Plans or updates to Master Plans will follow a consistent methodology. Although not all conservation areas are located within the jurisdiction of the Niagara Escarpment Commission, the policies of the Niagara Escarpment Plan and guidelines of the Niagara Escarpment Parks and Open Space System are utilized in the preparation of master plans and management plans. Through this process, the land uses as envisioned within this Conservation Area Strategy will be further refined using the park zoning approach including permitted uses within each zone. Existing current master plans and management plans can be

viewed [here](#) and opportunities will be available for public and stakeholder engagement as future plans are developed.

6.0 Public Engagement

Public engagement for the Conservation Area Strategy was undertaken in two phases. The first phase involved posting information regarding the development of the strategy and the associated regulatory requirements of Ontario Regulation 686/21 on the HCA's dedicated website for the Conservation Area Strategy and the public consultation webpage "Bang the Table". Further, the process and intent of the Conservation Area Strategy was reviewed at a high level in meetings with the Mississauga of the Credit First Nation and the Six Nations of the Grand River First Nation.

The second phase of the consultation process involved the circulation of the draft Conservation Area Strategy. At this stage the strategy was reviewed by the HCA's Conservation Advisory Board and the HCA's Board of Directors prior to the strategy being made available for broader consultation. The intent of the circulation of the draft strategy was to provide an overview of the regulatory requirements and how HCA staff had completed the document to incorporate these requirements. At this stage, the document will benefit from a broader review and will incorporate comments received through the consultation in order to complete a final strategy.

7.0 Periodic Review

Ontario Regulation 686/21 requires a process for the periodic review and updating of the Conservation Area Strategy including procedures to ensure stakeholders and the public are consulted during the review and update process. In this regard, the Conservation Area Strategy should be reviewed within a year after the appointment of a new Board of Directors for the HCA. This timing allows for consideration of environmental, social and economic impacts while also aligning with the municipal election cycle in Ontario. A review can also be undertaken within the four-year period noted to address significant issues if they arise.

Stakeholder and public consultation will be undertaken during the above noted review periods to ensure awareness and transparency regarding the Conservation Area Strategy.

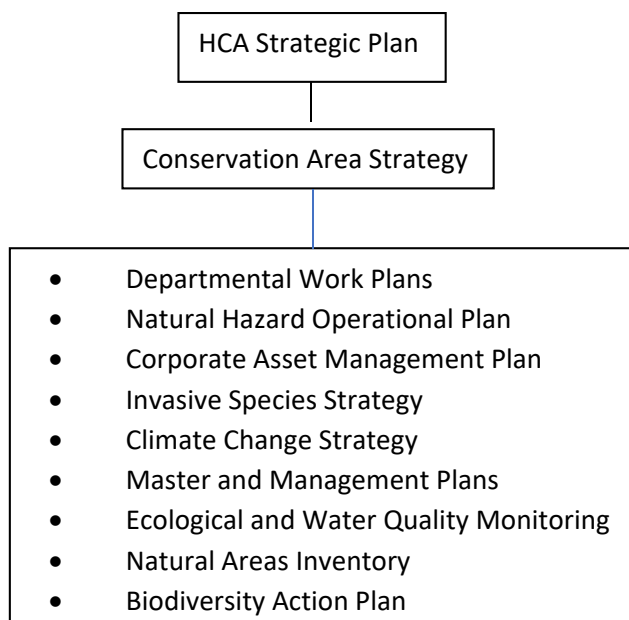
8.0 Future Considerations

The HCA is the area's largest environmental management agency and is dedicated to the conservation and enjoyment of watershed lands and natural resources. The HCA is well known for the lands under its care and stewardship. As noted, the HCA own or manages 4,732 ha (11,695 acres) of land within our watershed jurisdiction. These lands provide critical open

space and habitat for a wide range of species while providing opportunities for people to connect with nature.

Through the development and approval of the HCA's Inventory of Programs and Services, Agreement for Services with the City of Hamilton and Township of Puslinch and the development of Conservation Area Strategy, specific programs and services related to the HCA's conservation lands are highlighted with source of funding noted. The HCA's programs and services and the Conservation Area Strategy comply with regulatory requirements and provide value and experiences for the City of Hamilton, Township of Puslinch, watershed residents and landowners and people from outside the watershed.

Times change, issues evolve, and new issues arise, and these changes will result in pressures related to the HCA's conservation lands as well as broader natural heritage lands. There will be opportunities as well for further land acquisition, restoration and stewardship works to enhance these HCA conservation lands and work with agencies and groups in and outside of the watershed to enhance these features. Ultimately, the HCA's Strategic Plan will provide overall guidance regarding programs and services. The Conservation Area Strategy will provide a finer level of guidance for the management and operation of HCA lands and will be updated based on HCA's overall strategic priorities to address these changes, opportunities and effectiveness of programs as required. Lastly, issue specific strategies and plans will be maintained based on the HCA Strategic Plan and Conservation Area Strategy to provide a greater level of direction and guidance related to these specific issues. The following highlights the hierarchy of this approach.



HCA's successes since 1958 are the result of diligent Board of Director and staff commitment to conserving and restoring the HCA watershed. These efforts have included effective partnerships with governments and agencies at the federal, provincial and municipal level, local businesses, residents and landowners, conservation area visitors and groups like Friends of Eramosa Karst and Friends of Westfield. Moving forward, these relationships and partnerships will need to continue and be enhanced with a focus on greater consultation and engagement with the Mississauga of the Credit First Nation and Six Nations of the Grand River First Nation.

9.0 Resources

Conservation Authorities Act - <https://www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/90c27>

Ontario Regulation 686/21 - <https://www.ontario.ca/laws/regulation/210686>

HCA Strategic Plan 2019-2023 - https://conservationhamilton.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/HCA_StrategicPlan_Final_LR.pdf

HCA Inventory of Programs & Services - https://conservationhamilton.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/HCA-Inventory-of-Programs-and-Services_Board-Approved-Amendment_23Mar2.pdf

Section C.2.0, City of Hamilton Rural Official Plan - <https://www.hamilton.ca/sites/default/files/2022-07/rhop-volume1-chapterc-citywidesystemsanddesignations-nov2021.pdf>

Niagara Escarpment Plan - https://files.ontario.ca/appendix_-_niagara_escarpment_plan_2017_-_oc-10262017.pdf

Greenbelt Plan - <https://files.ontario.ca/greenbelt-plan-2017-en.pdf>

Canadian Protected and Conserved Areas Database - <https://www.canada.ca/en/environment-climate-change/services/national-wildlife-areas/protected-conserved-areas-database.html>

HCA Master and Management Plans - <https://conservationhamilton.ca/hca-master-plans/>

City of Hamilton Trail Listing - <https://www.hamilton.ca/things-do/parks-green-space/parks-trails/trails-listing>

Royal Botanical Gardens - <https://www.rbg.ca/gardens-trails/by-attraction/trails/>

Bruce Trail Conservancy - <https://brucetrail.org/>

Great Lakes Waterfront Trail - <https://waterfronttrail.org/>

Mississauga of the Credit First Nation - <https://mncfn.ca/>

Six Nations of the Grand River First Nation - <https://www.sixnations.ca/>

McMaster Forest - <https://nature.mcmaster.ca/mcmaster-forest/about/>

Cootes to Escarpment EcoPark System - <https://cootestoescarpmentpark.ca/>