

## Backgrounder:

# The Saltfleet Conservation Area Wetland Restoration Project



## The realities of climate change and the role of Ontario's Conservation Authorities:

The impacts of climate change are being felt in every city and town. In Hamilton, as across Ontario, there is increased flooding and erosion because we are experiencing growing numbers of severe rainstorms.

Ontario's conservation authorities have mandates that are directly related to addressing and adapting to climate change, including managing local watersheds. We are environmental leaders in our communities with the goals of protecting people and property from flooding, and other natural hazards, and conserving natural resources for economic, social and environmental benefits.

Our work includes:

- ✓ Flood forecasting and warning
- ✓ Dam operations
- ✓ Land use planning and regulations
- ✓ Land and water monitoring
- ✓ Land stewardship
- ✓ Operation of conservation areas and education

Conservation Authorities are legislated under the [Conservation Authorities Act](#).

## Hamilton Conservation Authority's climate change goals

HCA has been working together with the City of Hamilton and other community partners to address climate change challenges. In March of 2019, the City of Hamilton declared a Climate Change Emergency, and [set a goal of achieving net-zero carbon emissions by 2050](#). The HCA recently updated our own [Climate Change Strategy: Toward a Net-Zero Future](#). The Authority is working to reduce the impacts of climate change for the natural environment, the community, visitors and staff.

The Saltfleet project is a key focal point for the HCA as part of our commitment to better mitigate and adapt to the impacts of climate change. It aligns with our strategy in the following ways:

- ✓ Make it easier for ecosystems to adapt to climate change
- ✓ Investigate opportunities to enhance, reclaim, or create wetlands
- ✓ Prevent loss of wetlands

## The evolution of the Saltfleet project

Rain and water from spring thaws flow down from the Niagara Escarpment into the lower Battlefield Creek and Stoney Creek areas, in the eastern part of the city of Hamilton. For decades, these water flows have been causing significant flooding and erosion, which has been of major concern to residents and business owners.

The majority of the local population in Stoney Creek lives below the escarpment. Further, these neighbourhoods were built without land use planning from a natural hazard and natural heritage perspective. The rear lot lines of many properties are the creek banks themselves, and during development, the waterways were manipulated to steer straight, instead of allowing room for the natural twists and turns that waterways need. Over time, the creekbanks have become unstable, resulting in backyard and basement flooding, property damage and erosion.

Following numerous complaints and concerns, in 2011, the HCA and the City initiated an Environmental Assessment study to look at possible solutions below the Niagara Escarpment. The recommended options focused on adding built infrastructure, such as creek realignment, flood protection berm and bank stabilization- known as grey infrastructure. This work would have impacted private lands. Plus, these options were costly and challenging to implement.

The Authority then completed a second Environmental Assessment in 2018, which proposed four wetlands in different locations. The wetlands would reduce the risk of flooding and erosion below the Niagara Escarpment while at the same time enhancing natural heritage features in the area. This nature-based – green infrastructure – solution is also a cheaper option to the grey infrastructure proposed in 2011.

When considering the current natural landscape on the escarpment, along with the costs, impacts and potential benefits to the community, the HCA Board approved the proposed Conservation Area and Wetland Restoration project in March 2015. The full project includes the creation of the four new wetlands, plus establishing a new conservation area in east Hamilton.

It is the ideal solution for many reasons. It is more cost effective. It preserves and enhances natural features already in place to collect water and reduce flooding. It restores and creates new rich habitats for diverse plants and wildlife, and provides new parkland and outdoor recreation opportunities that will improve the quality of life for a growing population in the Hamilton area.

## Acquiring land

While the HCA already owned 119 acres of land in the area, to complete the project, we needed to acquire additional property. Taking a “willing seller, willing buyer” approach, the HCA worked with local property owners and gradually acquired the full 411 acres needed to achieve the project’s vision. The targeted lands included mostly rural with a mix of agricultural and former agricultural lands.

By 2023, the HCA had acquired all the land we need to complete the project.

## Project timeline

