



2024 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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2024 HCA Board of Directors

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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

It is with great pride that we present the 2024 Annual Report, reflecting on a year of progress, collaboration, and commitment to conservation. This past year, we continued to build on our mission of protecting and enhancing our watershed while connecting people to nature in meaningful ways.

A significant milestone was the release of our 2025-2029 Strategic Plan, setting a strong foundation for the next five years. In the coming years, we will focus on capacity building, adapting to climate change, responding to provincial regulatory updates, and addressing emerging conservation needs. We are also enhancing visitor engagement to strengthen connections with our watershed communities and partners. Additionally, we will advance our IT modernization strategy to improve operational efficiency and effectiveness.

Among our many achievements in 2024, we continued to advance the Saltfleet Conservation Area Wetland Project. This initiative will create four wetlands to mitigate flooding and erosion in lower urban Stoney Creek, safeguard downstream properties and residents, create and enhance natural habitat for flora and fauna, and provide public access to these natural areas and trails. We successfully secured additional federal funding from Environment and Climate Change Canada through the Canada Nature Fund, which provided financial resources to help advance the project. We also released a new video and hosted a variety of tours to expand awareness and showcase the project's vital role and benefits in protecting both people and nature.

We also celebrated the completion of the Fifty Point Wetland Restoration Project, which will help mitigate flooding and support aquatic life. Additionally, we made great progress in climate action, adding electric vehicles to our fleet and participating in key sustainability leadership initiatives.

2024 was also a year of expanding experiences for our visitors. From launching new trails and wayfinding signage to reintroducing boat rentals and improving accessibility, we are committed to ensuring that our conservation areas remain welcoming and inspiring spaces for all.

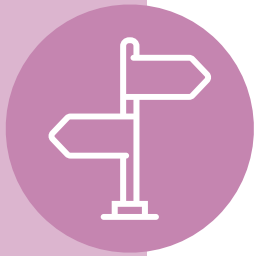
None of these accomplishments would be possible without the dedication of our Board, volunteers, staff, and valued partners. Their tireless efforts, passion, and expertise continue to drive our success and strengthen our ability to protect and enhance the natural spaces that define our region. Thank you for your continued support as we move forward together, building a healthier, more resilient watershed for generations to come.

Brad Clark
Chair



Lisa Burnside
Chief Administrative Officer



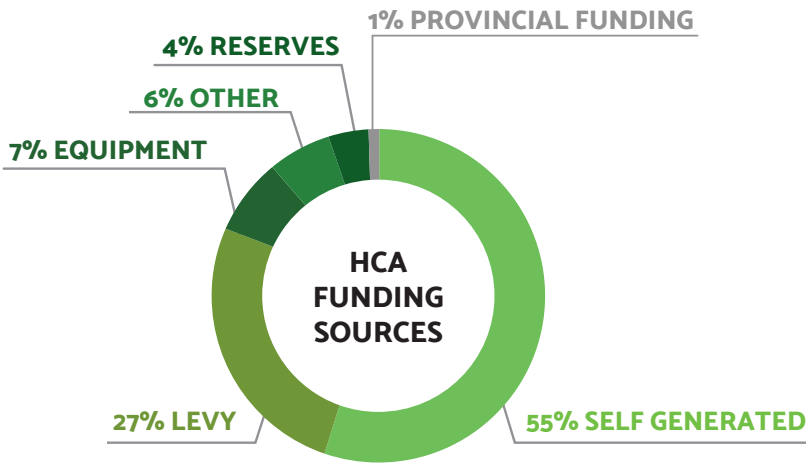


ORGANIZATIONAL EXCELLENCE

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 admissions, camping fees, and marina operations.**

WEBSITE STATISTICS

1,500,000+ Page Views
847,000+ Sessions
558,000+ Users

MEDIA RELATIONS

15 media releases
242 news mentions

HCA E-NEWSLETTER

32 circulated
26,820 subscribers,
32% increase

HCA SOCIAL MEDIA FOLLOWERS



22,331

Facebook



13,374

Instagram



8,980

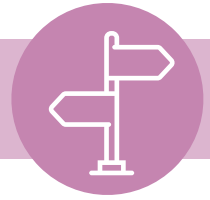
X (Twitter)



4,775

LinkedIn

ORGANIZATIONAL EXCELLENCE

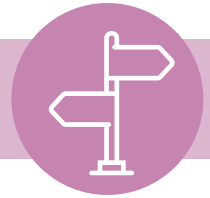


2024 Highlights

- HCA's 2025-2029 Strategic Plan was released, setting the path forward for the next five years to help achieve HCA's mission and vision. The new Strategic Plan includes four strategic priority areas: Water Resources Management, Organizational Excellence, Natural Heritage Conservation, and Connecting People to Nature. Several year-one initiatives were identified across all the strategic priority areas to launch the new plan.
- HCA's corporate Climate Change Strategy was advanced in 2024:
 - Two fully electric vehicles were added to HCA's fleet.
 - HCA became a member of Green Economy Canada's Lead Track Program and the Sustainability Leadership Program.
 - Completed ASHRAE Level II Energy Audits at the Dundas Valley Conservation Area. These reports are used to guide improvements to energy efficiency and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.
- Over \$471,868 in grants were raised for projects such as summer student positions, electric vehicle charging stations, Indigenous trail signage, environmental education, land purchases, flood plain mapping, and invasive species removal.
- Successfully completed all required provincial strategies for conservation authorities, including the Natural Hazard Infrastructure Asset Management Plan, Natural Hazard Infrastructure Operational Plan, Watershed-based Resource Management Strategy, Conservation Area Strategy, and Land Inventory, demonstrating our commitment to effective resource management and environmental stewardship.



ORGANIZATIONAL EXCELLENCE



- Supported a dynamic work culture, safe working environments, professional development, and staff effectiveness:
 - Revised and updated four safe working procedures and created four new procedures and programs for the safety of staff.
 - Provided First Aid, chainsaw operations, working at heights, confined space entry, Joint Health and Safety Committee certification, Provincial Offences Officer, and self-contained breathing apparatus training and certification. Mental health awareness and threat de-escalation, managing people, and leadership training were also provided.
 - HCA offered its third annual learning opportunity for all staff in support of the National Day of Truth and Reconciliation at Westfield Heritage Village Conservation Area. Hiliary Monteith and Rohini Patel, two postdoctoral fellows from McMaster University, introduced the topic of Traditional Ecological Knowledge based on the Traditional Ecological Knowledge Summit, which McMaster University held at Six Nations. Indigenous Elder Wilamina McGrimmond joined and shared a traditional song and drumming, reflecting beliefs about the environment and her own experiences. It provided an opportunity for reflection, learning, and discussion on Indigenous knowledge and traditions.
- Continued to increase effective communication and engagement by using the HCA Community Engagement website, www.conservationtalkhca.ca, an online stakeholder engagement tool for our community engagement on projects.
 - 3,083 people visited the HCA Community Engagement site.
 - 184 people completed surveys.
 - 384 were informed, by downloading documents, utilizing site tools like key dates, or visiting multiple project pages.
 - 1,459 visited at least one project page.
- Hosted 43 film shoots at various HCA conservation areas, providing a consistent source of self-generated revenue.
- Continued to advance HCA's due diligence in the management of its corporate records through departmental training on the Records Retention Schedule and File Classification Scheme.
- Expanded upon HCA's existing Information Technology (IT) policy, introducing a series of new IT policies to establish best practices and procedures that securely and effectively support the organization's activities.
- Collaborated and shared expertise with other conservation authorities through Conservation Ontario at numerous forums and working groups. These included the Latornell Conservation Symposium and Conservation Areas Workshop, in which HCA staff participated, presented, and assisted in 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.

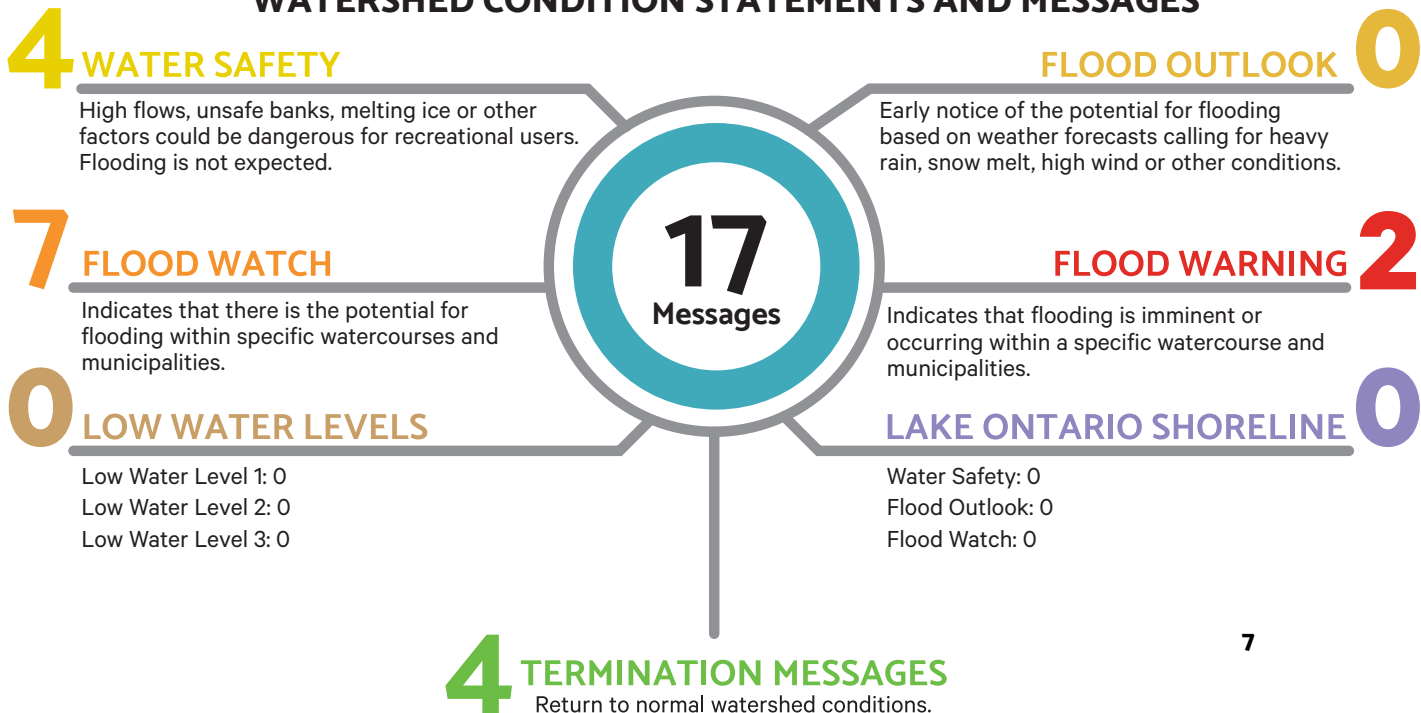


Christie Lake Conservation Area

SECTION 28 CONSERVATION AUTHORITIES ACT PERMIT PROCESSING

- **72** Total Permits Issued
- **17** Total Major Permits; **94%** were processed within the Provincial time period of 90 days
- **55** Total Minor Permits; **76%** were processed within the Provincial time period of 30 days

WATERSHED CONDITION STATEMENTS AND MESSAGES





2024 Highlights

- Continued to promote the Saltfleet Conservation Area Wetland Restoration Project, a key focal point for HCA as part of our commitment to better mitigate and adapt to the impacts of climate change. The newly constructed wetlands will reduce flood and erosion risks, support natural heritage and wildlife, and provide local green space. We launched a new video, fact sheets and hosted a variety of tours for local politicians, City of Hamilton staff, and members of the public for a first-hand look at how it benefits our community.
- HCA Shoreline Management Plan was put forward for public consultation. In support of planning and regulation activities, this project will provide:
 - Valuable information about existing shoreline conditions.
 - Recommendations for shoreline management and protection.
 - Shoreline flood and erosion hazard information.
- Public consultation for three Floodplain Mapping projects were put forward in 2024. These projects cover the Stoney Creek numbered watercourses, Stoney Creek, Battlefield Creek, and Red Hill Creek systems. These projects provide necessary flood hazard information to support planning and regulation activities.
- Continued to invest in monitoring programs and networks, including assessing impacts of nutrient and sediment loading:
 - 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 364 inspections of 91 groundwater wells, 33 groundwater well water quality sampling, and erosion monitoring at 21 sites.





NATURAL HERITAGE CONSERVATION

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



Fifty Point Conservation Area Wetland

ECOLOGY SURVEYS AND MONITORING



20 plant surveys in support of HCA master plans



153 bird species counted during master plan surveys



34 frog call survey stations



8 frog species counted



10 forest health monitoring plots visited



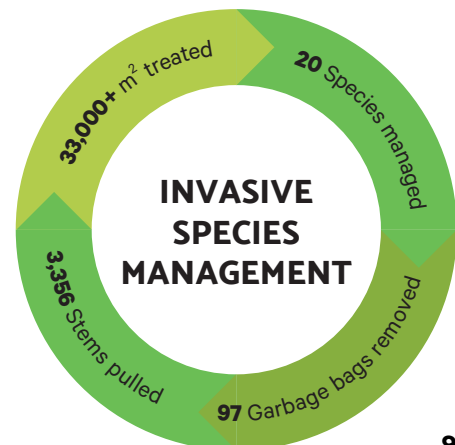
36 fish sites monitored



28 benthic invertebrate sites monitored



20 steam temperature sites monitored



NATURAL HERITAGE CONSERVATION



2024 Highlights

- Completed construction of a new wetland at Fifty Point Conservation Area in the spring of 2024. The wetland will help reduce flooding on nearby residential properties associated with Watercourse 11 and promote the establishment of a self-sustaining fishery in the pond, providing visitors with additional fishing opportunities. The wetland features provide additional natural areas and habitat diversity within the conservation area.
- Improved ecosystem health by removing thousands of invasive plants, restoring over 33,000 square metres of natural habitat, and protecting biodiversity within the watershed:
 - Managed 20 different invasive species including Phragmites, common buckthorn, Dog-strangling Vine, Japanese knotweed, Multiflora rose, Tree of heaven, common teasel, cutleaf teasel, autumn olive, invasive honeysuckles, garlic mustard, and Chinese privet.
 - Treated over 38 specific sites in the following areas: Beverly Swamp, Christie Lake, Copetown Bog, Devil's Punchbowl, Dundas Valley, Eramosa Karst, Felker's Falls, Fifty Point, Fletcher Creek, Spencer Gorge, Saltfleet, Valens Lake, Westfield Heritage Village, and more.
 - 97 garbage bags of invasive plants were removed, and a total of 3,356 stems of invasive trees and shrubs were pulled.
 - 27,471 square metres of invasive species were treated, and another 5,816 square metres of invasives were brush cut.



NATURAL HERITAGE CONSERVATION



- Enhanced natural heritage features with restoration projects across our watershed:
 - Five truckloads of Christmas trees were collected from the Dundas waste transfer station and utilized for aquatic restoration projects in Ancaster Creek.
 - 164 trees and shrubs and 10lbs of seeds were planted in the Lower Spencer Creek.
 - An additional 712 trees and shrubs were planted in additional stewardship projects.
- Partnered with the Royal Botanical Gardens to replace over 1.3-kilometres of wildlife barrier fencing along Cootes Drive in Dundas. Providing a stable barrier helps reduce vehicle strikes on Cootes Drive, where wildlife such as snakes, frogs, and turtles migrate.
- Stewardship staff completed 32 projects involving 26 landowners, with a total value of \$29,500. 12 of these projects were completed through the Water Quality Habitat Improvement Program (WQHIP). These projects helped improve wildlife habitat and water quality in our watershed through project development, invasive species removal, and general inquires.
- Mitigated hazards by removing 628 hazard trees from HCA areas. 59% of these trees were affected by the invasive Emerald Ash Borer. An additional 138 trees were pruned.





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.



Eramosa Karst Conservation Area



2024 ATTENDANCE

HCA welcomed over **923,000** visitors to its Conservation Areas in 2024, and over **615,000** people to Confederation Beach Park, and over **84,000** visitors enjoyed Wild Waterworks during the summer operating season.



10,445
HCA MEMBERSHIP
PASSES SOLD
47% SOLD ONLINE

CONSERVATION AREA EXPERIENCE



2024 Highlights

- Launched the new trail map and wayfinding signage system at Eramosa Karst Conservation Area, setting a new standard for visitor information and safety. The comprehensive system features trailhead welcome signs that include maps, area, and trail information, and rules and safety tips; secondary entrance signage; and directional signposts at trail intersections. Trail maps now feature trail surfaces, estimated hike times, and trail ratings, from accessible to difficult. QR codes linking to trail maps and area information are also posted throughout the trail system. This implementation at Eramosa Karst marks the first in a series of signage upgrades planned for other HCA conservation areas in the coming years.
- Achieved a Diamond Elite rating under the Clean Marine Program through Boating Ontario at the Fifty Point Conservation Area marina. This is the highest award given for protecting waterways and was achieved by implementing environmental initiatives such as a new shrink wrap recycling program, educating and increasing boaters' awareness, proper disposal of materials, energy consumption, and maintaining high operational standards.
- Resumed boat rentals at Christie Lake and Valens Lake Conservation Areas in the summer of 2024, following a pandemic-induced hiatus. Visitors welcomed canoe rentals at both locations, while Valens Lake expanded its offerings to include kayaks and rowboats.
- Opened the new West Wetlands Trail at Saltfleet Conservation Area, providing further access and opportunities to enjoy the conservation area.
- Celebrated Westfield Heritage Village Conservation Area's 60th anniversary in June. To mark the occasion, a new logo was unveiled highlighting the area's cultural and natural heritage. A new interactive and accessible garden was also installed.



CONSERVATION AREA EXPERIENCE



- Expanded online advanced day passes to two additional HCA conservation areas, Saltfleet and Eramosa Karst. Day passes offer quick and easy entry to HCA areas and provided swift entry for the 1,919 people who purchased in 2024, up 26% from 2023.
- Restored Valens Lake Conservation Area's beloved fishing bridge after it caught fire in October. Though the flames were quickly extinguished, the bridge suffered severe damage. An outpouring of support from the local community and work from our dedicated staff, ensured the bridge was repaired in record time and was reopened for Thanksgiving weekend.
- Invested in projects to enhance and expand recreation experiences including:
 - Fifty Point Conservation Area entranceway was rebuilt to improve pedestrian safety and streamline the flow of traffic into the area.
 - Main entrance signs were replaced at Dundas Valley and Westfield Heritage Village Conservation Areas.
 - Dundas Valley, Fifty Point, and Hamilton Mountain Conservation Areas, and Confederation Beach Park received a total of 14,500 square metres of road and parking area improvements throughout their areas.
 - Over 120-metres of boardwalk was replaced on the Lafarge 2000 Trail.
 - Confederation Beach Park lookout platform at Lakeland Centre was replaced.
 - Accessible beach trail was rebuilt at Christie Lake Conservation Area, and five pads for accessible picnic tables were also installed.
- Completed several Master and Management Plans to provide HCA with a long-term vision, guiding the effective management, restoration, and improvement for the following conservation areas:
 - Saltfleet Masterplan, Devil's Punchbowl Masterplan, Winona and Vinemount Management Plans, and Dofasco 2000 Trail Management Plans were finalized and approved by HCA's Board of Directors.



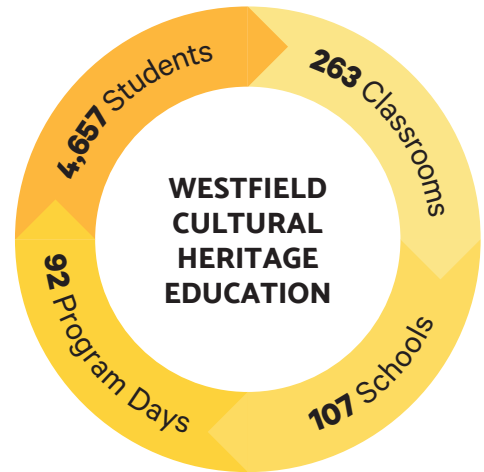
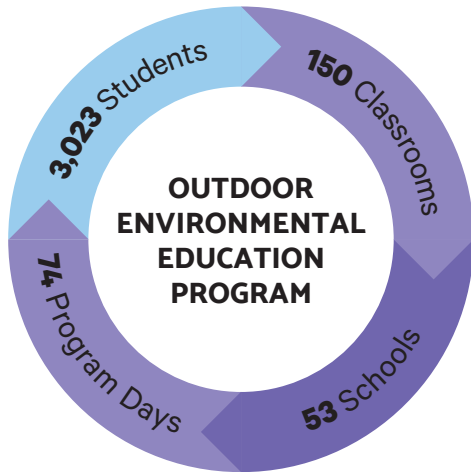


EDUCATION & ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS

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.



Dundas Valley Conservation Area



HCA VOLUNTEERS



20 events



303 volunteers



811 hours



\$16,220 in-kind value



196 bags of litter removed

WESTFIELD VOLUNTEERS



157 volunteers



10,658 hours

OUTREACH



5 stewardship workshops held



9 educational and outreach events attended



2024 Highlights

- March Break camps returned to the Dundas Valley Conservation Area for the first time since 2019, offering flexible single-day and full-week registration options. These engaging camps successfully blended education 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.
- Engaged youth in environmental education through interactive activities at the Hamilton Children's Water Festival. HCA staff ran two different activities, highlighting invasive species and salmon life cycles to foster awareness and appreciation for aquatic ecosystems.
- Hosted the Watershed Steward's Appreciation Day at Fifty Point Conservation Area in October. Two landowners within HCA's watershed were recognized and presented with a Watershed Stewardship Award. The day also celebrated the 30th anniversary of the Hamilton Watershed Stewardship Program and featured a tour of the new Fifty Point wetland.
- Enhanced stewardship programs for both urban and rural areas through the Hamilton Watershed Stewardship Program including:
 - Three wells decommissioned.
 - \$19,785 in funding provided.



EDUCATION & ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS



- Co-hosted the annual Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area Invasive Species Working Group field tour with Credit Valley Conservation and Royal Botanical Gardens. The tour provided a day of site visits and fruitful discussions around monitoring and management techniques. The group contains over 30 members from conservation authorities, municipalities, and other environmental organizations.
- Increased awareness and education of local invasive species through:
 - Eight blogs published highlighting invasive species, how they are spread, common ones in the area, HCA staff, reporting, and more.
 - Invasive species signage about Jumping worms was installed in the Dundas Valley Conservation Area.
- Began offering a free turtle nest protector rental program, where turtle nest protectors were available to landowners in the HCA watershed who encounter nesting turtles on their property. This free rental program allowed landowners to use a turtle protector for the duration of the nesting season, and the protectors returned after the hatchlings emerged.



MESSAGE FROM HAMILTON CONSERVATION FOUNDATION

The Hamilton Conservation Foundation is proud to partner with HCA to safeguard and enhance our region’s natural and cultural heritage. Through our fundraising efforts and responsible stewardship, we help support HCA’s vital work, which contributes to the long-term preservation of the area’s ecological health and community well-being.

2024 at a Glance

In the 2023-2024 fiscal year, the Foundation raised nearly \$900,000. Thanks to the generosity of our donors, we contributed approximately \$878,000 toward several key HCA priority projects.

These initiatives include the continued construction of the Saltfleet Conservation Area Wetland Restoration Project, the Outdoor Environmental Education program, and improvements to trails and interpretive signage in the Dundas Valley Conservation Area. Additionally, new wayfinding signage was installed at Eramosa Karst to enhance the visitor experience and promote responsible outdoor exploration.

We were also deeply moved by the swift and generous response from our community following the unexpected Valens Lake Bridge fire in the week leading up to the Thanksgiving long weekend. In a remarkable display of support, funds were raised quickly to cover the repair costs, allowing HCA to make the necessary repairs and reopen the bridge in time for the holiday weekend.

This year’s achievements reflect the collective impact of our donors, volunteers, and community partners. We are deeply grateful for their continued support and commitment to preserving Hamilton’s natural spaces for future generations.







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