



Hamilton
Conservation
Authority

A Healthy Watershed for Everyone

20 25

ANNUAL
REPORT



Our Vision

A healthy watershed for everyone.

Our Mission

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

Our Values

Collaboration

Customer Service

Integrity

Respect

Innovation

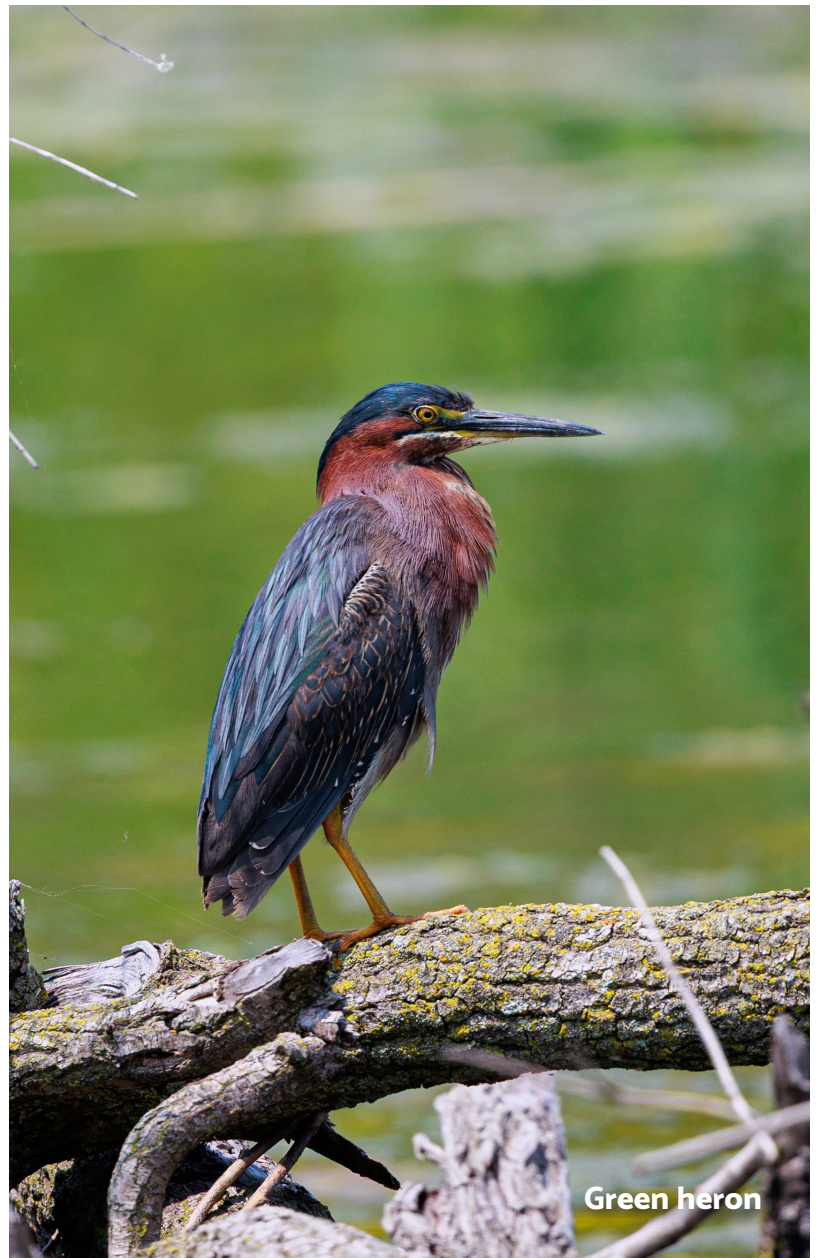
2025 HCA Board of Directors

Councillor Jeff Beattie
Councillor Craig Cassar
Councillor Brad Clark – Chair
Elise Copps (November – December)
Lisa DiCesare
Susan Fielding – Vice Chair
Councillor Matt Francis
Brian McHattie (January – August)
Councillor Mike Spadafora
Wayne Terryberry
Councillor Alex Wilson
Councillor Maureen Wilson

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.



Green heron

WHO WE ARE

Hamilton Conservation Authority (HCA) is one of 36 conservation authorities in Ontario and the largest environmental management agency in the watershed. Located at the western end of Lake Ontario, HCA is dedicated to the conservation and enjoyment of watershed lands and water resources.

Established in 1958, the organization became the Hamilton Conservation Authority in 1966. HCA's watershed spans from the headwaters, over the Niagara Escarpment to Cootes Paradise, Hamilton Harbour and Lake Ontario, following the land and flow of water across the landscape.

HCA's work includes protecting people and property from flooding and erosion, managing conservation and recreational lands, and delivering environmental education and stewardship programs.

HCA WATERSHED



4,732 hectares of HCA lands
22 conservation areas
180 km of HCA trails

10% of watershed owned and managed by HCA
2 participating municipalities
650,000 population

MESSAGE FROM HCA CAO & CHAIR

It is with pride that we present the 2025 Annual Report, reflecting a year of progress, collaboration, and commitment to the watershed's health.

In 2025, HCA advanced key work across our four strategic plan priority areas. We continued the Saltfleet Conservation Area Wetland Restoration Project, completing the second of four planned wetlands to reduce flooding, protect downstream properties, and boost local biodiversity. Early monitoring already shows more frogs, birds, and native plants thriving.

Watershed Resources Management remained a priority. We updated floodplain mapping and reviewed monitoring networks to better forecast floods, manage low water, and support permit decisions and planning recommendations. For Natural Heritage, we acquired 18.17 hectares of Fletcher Creek swamp forest to strengthen ecological corridors between Valens Lake Conservation Area and Fletcher Creek Ecological Preserve.

HCA continued to modernize systems as an Organizational Excellence priority, to support transparency, sound decision-making, and public access to information. A new online Open Data Hub was launched, which expands public access to watershed maps and environmental data.

Under Connecting People to Nature, we launched the Basadinaa Experience in Dundas Valley Conservation Area, featuring 13 Indigenous-led interpretive signs along the Main Loop Trail. This project shares teachings from the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation and Six Nations of the Grand River, bringing conservation, education, and reconciliation together.

At year's end, the province released a proposal for potential regional consolidation of conservation authorities. While we don't support the Province's approach, we are actively participating in the consultation process, providing informed feedback, and working constructively to identify alternatives that maintain effective watershed-based conservation and strong local governance. Throughout this work, we remain focused on our mandate and the services our communities rely on.

None of these accomplishments would be possible without the dedication of our Board of Directors, staff, volunteers, and partners. Their commitment and expertise continue to advance our mission and ensure that our watershed remains healthy, resilient, and protected for generations to come.

Brad Clark
Chair



Lisa Burnside
Chief Administrative Officer





HCA staff at Confederation Beach Park

ORGANIZATIONAL EXCELLENCE



Focused on our organizational resources to ensure efficient and responsive operations are available to meet the needs of the future.



Key Measures



54% of operating revenue was self-generated through park operations, fees, and other earned income, supporting financial resilience and reducing reliance on external funding.



19 media releases contributed to **286** news stories, showing strong public and media interest in watershed protection and HCA initiatives.



HCA's website recorded more than **1.4 million** page views, demonstrating high public demand for information about conservation, recreation, and environmental stewardship.



Social media engagement included **131,089** engagements on Facebook, **13,732** on Instagram, **2,809** on X, and **13,286** on LinkedIn, extending HCA's reach across diverse audiences.



HCA circulated **48** e-newsletters to **27,920** subscribers, keeping residents, partners, and stakeholders informed and engaged throughout the year.



HCA staff presenting at Conservation Areas Workshop

PROGRESS AND PRIORITIES

HCA focused on building a stronger organization to protect the watershed and serve our communities for the long term. Investments in people, technology, and partnerships supported financial sustainability, inclusive workplaces, and responsive services across the watershed. Together, these efforts support a skilled, informed, and resilient workforce prepared to respond to environmental challenges while serving the public with professionalism and care.

A resilient workforce delivering conservation results

- Secured more than \$569,570 in grant funding to advance priority work across the watershed, including Saltfleet Conservation Area Wetland Restoration Project, Natural Areas Inventory Project, Basadinaa Experience, environmental education, invasive species management, and trail maintenance.
- Strengthened our workplace culture through updated policies, focused training, and a renewed emphasis on inclusion and learning. The launch of HCA's Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging (DEIB) Framework confirmed our commitment to a respectful, inclusive, and innovative workplace where staff feel valued and able to contribute their skills.
- Supported staff with comprehensive training for readiness and safety across many roles, including first aid, field and operational safety, report writing, Indigenous learning, mental health awareness, communications, and media relations. Organization-wide learning in support of the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation furthered HCA's ongoing journey toward reconciliation and helped deepen understanding, relationships, and respect with First Nations partners and communities.

Modern systems that improve transparency and decision making

- Launched a new online Open Data Hub, which expanded public access to watershed maps and environmental data, including boundaries, stream networks, land cover, and elevation information. This platform supports planning, research, and collaboration.

- Refreshed HCA’s website with a modern, accessible design, clearer navigation, and updated photos and branding, making it easier for residents, partners, and visitors to find information about conservation areas, programs, and environmental initiatives.
- Improved corporate records and archives, including staff training, updated retention schedules, and better organization of archival records. This strengthened governance, improved access to information, and supported long-term stewardship of institutional knowledge.
- Expanded digital tools such as TreePlotter and field tablets across conservation areas and watershed management services, allowing staff to assess hazard trees and collect ecological data more efficiently and consistently. These tools improve the quality of data used to guide conservation and management decisions.



Lake Ontario Coastal Resilience Pilot Project

Facilities and partnerships that extend our impact

- Invested in facilities, which improved both day-to-day operations and collaboration with partners. Improvements at HCA’s main office included new automated gates and lighting, a reconfigured parking lot and walking path, and interior renovations. This expanded workspace capacity and created more functional meeting areas.



Office renovations



HCA staff Truth and Reconciliation workshop

- Hosted local Members of Parliament at HCA conservation areas across the watershed, to highlight our role in land conservation, climate resilience, and public access to nature. These site visits helped build an understanding of HCA's impact and the importance of ongoing investment in watershed protection.
- Actively participated in Conservation Ontario forums and workshops, including the Latornell Conservation Symposium and Conservation Areas Workshop, enabling HCA to share expertise, contribute to sector-wide learning, and advance best practices across the province.
- Hosted 24 film productions at HCA conservation areas, generating self-sustaining revenue while showcasing the watershed's natural landscapes to wider audiences.



New autogates



Basadinaa tree planting




Newly installed bridge




Saltfleet Conservation Area


WATER RESOURCES MANAGEMENT


 Focused on safeguarding the health of the watershed and protecting people and property from natural hazards.



Key Measures

 **92** development permits were issued under Section 28 of the Conservation Authorities Act. **85** permits, or **92%**, were issued within the legislated 90-day timeline.

 **33** watershed condition messages were issued, including Water Safety, Flood Outlook, and Flood Watch notices, along with Termination Messages to signal a return to normal conditions.

 These results reflect consistent, timely permitting and active watershed monitoring that supported public safety and kept municipalities and residents informed during changing weather and water conditions.



Temperature logger installation

PROGRESS AND PRIORITIES

HCA strengthened our ability to protect people and property from flooding and other water-related risks. The focus was on building climate-resilient wetlands, improving data and mapping to support permit decisions and planning recommendations, and monitoring water quality to support a healthier watershed.

Building climate resilient wetlands and waterways

- Advanced the Saltfleet Conservation Area Wetland Restoration Project, where early monitoring is already showing encouraging signs of frogs and waterfowl using the new habitat. Construction of the second wetland was completed, and archaeological work for a third wetland moved forward, adding future flood storage and habitat that will help protect downstream communities. Long-term monitoring of these wetlands will help HCA track how they change over time and ensure the habitat remains healthy and resilient.
- Completed a Riparian Buffer Analysis, mapping and measuring vegetated areas along watercourses to identify where more trees and plants can improve water quality. As part of this work, the Building Better Buffers workshop brought landowners together on a restoration site to learn about the value of watercourse buffers, and 187 native plants were installed. These efforts support healthier creeks and are an important step toward improving conditions in Hamilton Harbour.

Improving data for flood safety and planning

- Updated HCA's Planning and Regulation Policies to reflect recent changes to the Conservation Authorities Act and to support HCA's new Shoreline Management Plan. This ensures that decisions about where and how development occurs better account for natural hazards and shoreline risks. The updates help keep people and property out of harm's way while supporting responsible growth.

- Completed a system review of HCA’s Water Resources Engineering Monitoring Network, covering rain gauges, streamflow gauges, reservoir water level gauges, and snow survey sites across the watershed. The review identified upgrades to increase the quantity and quality of data, expand the number of monitoring locations, and improve network reliability. This information supports flood forecasting and warning, low-water management, and dam operations at Christie Lake and Valens Lake Conservation Areas.
- Finalized new floodplain mapping, including public consultation, for Stoney Creek Numbered Watercourses, Battlefield and Stoney Creeks, and Redhill Creek. Work also began on mapping for Borer’s, Logie’s, and Sydenham Creeks, as well as watercourses within Dundas Valley. Up-to-date floodplain maps provide the detailed flood hazard information needed to support planning, permitting, and emergency preparedness.



Stream mapping

Monitoring water quality and supporting Hamilton Harbour

- Continued to invest in watershed monitoring programs that track nutrients, sediment, and other factors that affect watershed health. Provincial water and groundwater quality monitoring was conducted at six surface water sites and six groundwater sites, producing long-term data sets that support trend analysis and adaptive restoration and management plans.
- Delivered monitoring in support of City of Hamilton projects and the Hamilton Harbour Remedial Action Plan, including E. coli. monitoring at multiple creek locations, erosion monitoring at several sites, and regular water quality monitoring at 11 creek sites flowing into Hamilton Harbour. This work supports shared goals to reduce pollution, improve habitat, and move closer to delisting Hamilton Harbour as an Area of Concern.




Building Better Buffers workshop



Christmas tree creek restoration

NATURAL HERITAGE CONSERVATION

 Focused on the management and conservation of natural areas, which include the forests, wetlands, meadows, and watercourses within the watershed.



Key Measures



Ecology teams conducted **1,343** plant surveys in support of master plans and recorded **53** bird species during these surveys.



Monitoring included **32** frog call survey stations with **7** frog species counted, **10** forest health plots, **28** fish monitoring sites, **24** benthic invertebrate sites, and **16** stream temperature sites.



Planting efforts through stewardship and ecology programs included **2,360** lbs of seed, **4,545** trees and shrubs, and **1,428** perennial plugs, supporting long-term habitat restoration across the watershed.

PROGRESS AND PRIORITIES

HCA protected more natural lands, restored key habitats, and strengthened the science needed to respond to climate and biodiversity pressures in the watershed. The focus was on securing priority lands, restoring forests and wetlands, managing invasive species, and working with partners, landowners, and students to care for local ecosystems.

Protecting priority lands and contributing to 30x30

- Acquired 18.17 hectares of the Fletcher Creek swamp forest, protecting a significant wetland and strengthening the natural corridor between Valens Lake Conservation Area and Fletcher Creek Ecological Preserve. This addition helps maintain habitat in a sensitive part of the watershed.
- Created a new funding stream to support land acquisition priorities in HCA's Land Securement Strategy, directing 10% of annual membership pass sales to help protect more natural areas in future years.
- Contributed nearly 4,000 hectares of protected lands officially to Canada's 30x30 conservation target, reflecting decades of community-supported land acquisition, restoration, and stewardship.

Restoring habitats and managing invasive species

- Continued restoration work on HCA owned and managed lands across the watershed. More than 3,000 trees were planted at Eramosa Karst Conservation Area in the first mechanical tree planting in many years. Additional tree and shrub plantings took place at multiple conservation areas and restoration sites, supporting healthier forests, wetlands, and stream corridors.
- Completed 26 projects with 18 landowners through HCA's stewardship program. These included native plant installations, low-impact development projects, litter clean-up, habitat feature installations, invasive species removals, temperature logger installations, bank stabilization events, and watercourse surveys.



HCA staff and volunteer planting

- Staff and partners worked on invasive species control at 32 sites, managing 13 different invasive species. Thousands of stems were removed, and tens of thousands of square metres were treated or brush cut to give native vegetation a better chance to recover. Boot brush stations were installed at popular trailheads to reduce the spread of invasive species.

Supporting species at risk, landowners, and community partners

- Supported turtle conservation through hands-on projects at conservation areas. At Christie Lake Conservation Area, students from Mohawk College helped revitalize turtle nesting beds and build a new nesting area. At Valens Lake Conservation Area, 15 turtle nest protectors were installed over snapping turtle nests, and staff helped safely release more than 50 hatchlings into the lake.
- Installed nesting structures in support of Purple Martin colonies at Fifty Point and Saltfleet Conservation Areas in partnership with the Hamilton Naturalists' Club.



Fish sampling



FREED program workshop



HCA staff with Northern hogsucker

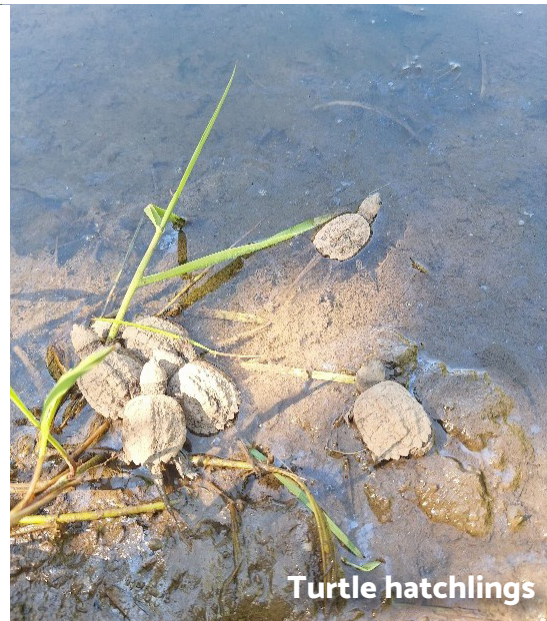
- Through the Hamilton Watershed Stewardship Program, HCA provided funding and technical support to 11 landowners, helping them complete projects that improve wildlife habitat and water quality on their properties. HCA also partnered with groups such as Hamilton Naturalists' Club, Nature@McMaster, City of Hamilton, and Royal Botanical Gardens on stream restoration and invasive species removal projects.

Advancing monitoring and field learning

- Developed a comprehensive plan to better understand how climate change and other pressures are affecting the watershed, bringing together aquatic, terrestrial, and water quality monitoring programs. The plan links these programs to HCA's Climate Change Strategy, helping identify gaps, share data more easily, and guide future adaptation and mitigation actions.
- Hosted students and staff from several colleges and universities, offering field-based learning in restoration, monitoring, and ecological sampling. Activities included ecosystem restoration tours, electrofishing skills sharing, and hands-on workshops, such as the FREED program, which provides field experience to BIPOC students who may not otherwise have access to these opportunities.



Naturalized lawn



Turtle hatchlings



Tree and shrub planting



Fish seining workshop



Fifty Point Conservation Area

CONNECTING PEOPLE TO NATURE



Focused on the conservation of HCA lands and connecting communities to natural areas.



Key Measures



HCA welcomed over **904,300** visitors to its conservation areas, **650,000** visitors to Confederation Beach Park, and **90,400** visitors to Wild Waterworks.



10,411 HCA Membership Passes were sold, reflecting strong community interest in regular access to conservation areas.



Environmental and cultural heritage education programs at Dundas Valley and Westfield Heritage Village engaged **9,326** students from **305** classrooms, and over **201** program days.



HCA hosted **40** volunteer events with **567** volunteers contributing **1,465** hours, including clean-up efforts that removed more than **550** lbs of litter. Westfield volunteers contributed **10,176** hours of service, supporting events, programs, and site operations.

PROGRESS AND PRIORITIES

HCA conservation areas remained as popular destinations for visitors seeking recreation, learning, and connection to nature. HCA focused on making these experiences more inclusive, engaging, and accessible through investments in trails, facilities, and education programs that help visitors enjoy and care for the watershed.

Creating meaningful, inclusive experiences

- Opened the Basadinaa Experience, a new Indigenous-led trail signage journey featuring 13 interpretive signs in the Dundas Valley Conservation Area. “Basadinaa,” meaning “in the valley” in Anishinaabemowin, shares teachings, stories, and perspectives from the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation and Six Nations of the Grand River. Basadinaa is more than a trail; it is an invitation to experience the land through Indigenous knowledge and shared stories. The project launched during National Indigenous History Month and reflects HCA’s ongoing commitment to truth-telling, reconciliation, and building respectful relationships with First Nations partners and communities.
- Launched the Talking Forest trail app at several conservation areas, which uses GPS to trigger audio stories, images, and captions as visitors move along the trails. From wildlife and ecology to history and geology, the app turns each walk into an opportunity to learn.
- Offered inclusive and low-sensory programs, including mindfulness hikes in conservation areas. At Wild Waterworks, a Sensory Day was held in partnership with Autism Ontario, offering a quieter, calmer experience for visitors who benefit from reduced noise and stimulation.



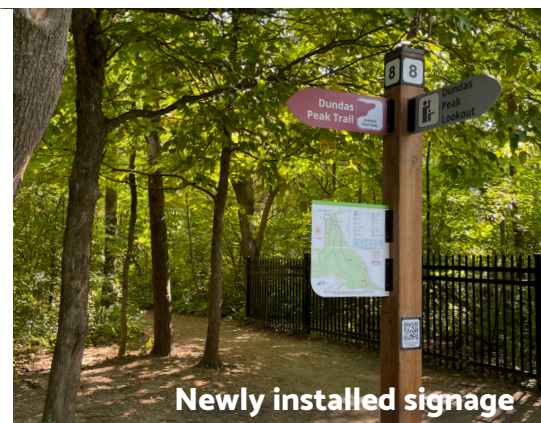
The Basadinaa Experience

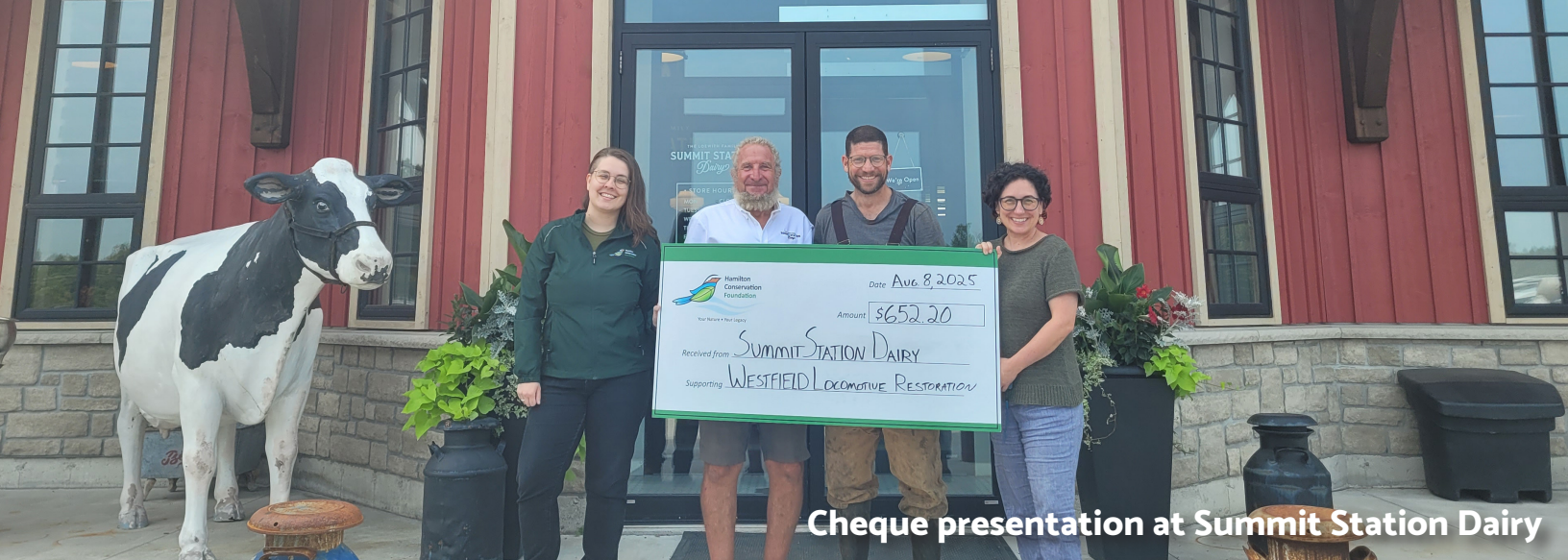
Improving navigation, accessibility, and recreation

- Installed new trail map and wayfinding signage at Christie Lake, Crooks' Hollow, and Spencer Gorge Conservation Areas to help visitors easily navigate HCA trails. Trailhead welcome signs, clear maps, trail ratings, estimated hike times, and QR codes linking to online information all support better trip planning and informed choices on the trails.
- Invested in recreation infrastructure that supports safe, enjoyable outdoor experiences. This included expanding parking and trails at Saltfleet Conservation Area, road rehabilitation and rebuilding the accessible fishing platform at Fifty Point Conservation Area, and replacement of boardwalks and bridges on popular trails. Accessible parking was also expanded at Westfield Heritage Village Conservation Area to better welcome visitors with mobility needs. HCA expanded boat rental offerings to include standup paddleboards at Christie Lake and Valens Lake, giving visitors another way to enjoy time on the water.

Planning for future visitors and programs

- Completed several key planning documents to guide future visitor use and investments in conservation areas. HCA finalized and received Board approval for the Eramosa Karst Conservation Area Master Plan, the Chippewa Trail Management Plan, and the Tiffany Falls Conservation Area Visitor Use Management Plan. These plans will help balance recreation, conservation, and safety as demand for access to nature continues to grow.
- Delivered in-school programs that reached hundreds of local students following the cancellation of the Hamilton Children's Water Festival.
- Presented Watershed Steward Awards, recognizing landowners for leadership in caring for their properties and supporting local conservation.





Cheque presentation at Summit Station Dairy

Message from Hamilton Conservation Foundation

Two Partners, One Hamilton Conservation. The Hamilton Conservation Foundation is proud to work alongside HCA to raise and steward charitable funds that protect the watershed’s natural spaces and cultural heritage. Our vision is simple: to be your Foundation of choice for investing in the future of conservation, environmental education, and heritage in the Hamilton watershed.

2025 at a Glance

Thanks to our generous community of supporters, the Foundation had a record-breaking fiscal year for 2024-2025, raising nearly \$1.16 million. From this, \$1.092 million was invested directly into key HCA projects that enhance conservation areas, programs, and visitor experiences throughout the watershed.

Donor support helped advance several impactful initiatives, including:

- Continued construction and progress of the Saltfleet Conservation Area Wetland Restoration Project.
- Hands-on learning opportunities for 4,623 local students through the Outdoor Environmental Education program.
- The Basadinaa Experience, a new Indigenous-led trail signage journey located in the Dundas Valley Conservation Area.
- Capital improvements enhancing visitor experiences, such as the new accessible fishing platform at Fifty Point Conservation Area, as well as the new lookout tower that is currently under construction at Valens Lake Conservation Area.
- Supporting invasive species mapping across the City of Hamilton for the Natural Areas Inventory project, and early detection efforts for the Woolly Adelgid, which was recently identified in the Dundas Valley Conservation Area.
- Native tree planting at the Eramosa Karst Conservation Area that builds on HCA’s invasive species management efforts completed earlier in the year and supports long-term restoration plans.

Thank you. 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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A Healthy Watershed for Everyone

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