

NIAGARA PENINSULA
CONSERVATION
AUTHORITY

Annual Report 2016

Welcome Message



It is my pleasure to present to you the 2016 NPCA Annual Report. We have accomplished many great things and have taken great strides forward on some major projects.

The 2014-2017 Strategic Plan is nearing completion. A report to the Board of Directors in October of 2016 showed that NPCA had completed approximately 85% of the deliverables within the plan. We are pleased to see the positive changes within the organization as a result of effective new policies and more efficient delivery of services to our stakeholders.

In 2016, we witnessed the organization advance on two key projects; the Living Landscape Policy Review and Welland River Floodplain Mapping. Both projects have included extensive public and stakeholder consultations. The NPCA has been going above and beyond expectations in regards to listening to our partners and all those that are affected by our legislation, policies, and regulation.

We are very proud of our staff for their tremendous effort and commitment that was put forth in the completion of the Cave Springs Management Plan. This marked the first time the NPCA completed a Management/Master Plan in-house. We presented that plan to the public at an Open House in the Fall of 2016. We were overwhelmed by the positive feedback we received. Every presentation was received with applause from the gallery. The plan honours the cultural and ecological heritage of the site, and we foresee Cave Springs as another flagship property within our expanding group of Conservation Areas.

The NPCA has planted over 69,803 trees, 36,713 wildflowers, and created over 8.8 acres of wetland in 2016. These numbers are astonishing and are proof that our staff is some of the hardest working and dedicated individuals in their field. It also does not go unnoticed that the NPCA had over 750 volunteers in 2016 - The highest ever.

The success of 2016 has set the table for the important work we have ahead of us; listening and balancing the many voices of our partners, and identifying our strengths and weakness. We embrace the challenges ahead and remain committed to finding pragmatic solutions.

We have consistently adapted to the ever-expanding role of conservation authorities as downloaded by the province. Conservation authorities have taken on more regulations, and policy with little to no increase in our funding. We are working towards striking a balance between the priorities set by legislation and remain steadfast in achieving our goals while meeting the expectations of our stakeholders.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Bruce Timms'.

Bruce Timms, P.Eng
Chair, NPCA Board of Directors

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Peter Graham'.

Peter Graham, P.Eng., MBA
Acting CAO

Cave Springs Management Plan



At its June 2014 Board meeting, the NPCA Board of Directors authorized the initiation of a Management Plan process for its Cave Springs property, in the Town of Lincoln. The Board further directed that a cross-functional team of NPCA staff members would lead the process, in contrast to the traditional approach of hiring an external consultant. In 1981 and again in 2006 master plan processes were initiated but not completed due to a combination of internal and external factors. Over the past two and a half years, the project team has studied this property, as never before.

As the property runs along the Niagara Escarpment and is part of the Niagara Escarpment Parks and Open Space System (NEPOSS), the planning process was guided by the NEPOSS Planning Manual (2012). To be certain, the requirements outlined in the NEPOSS Manual, are specific and substantial and need to be fully documented. The entire project team embraced this challenging project and worked tirelessly to see it through to completion.

Along the way, there was extensive public engagement and involvement in the process. Stakeholders and members of the public gave generously of their time, knowledge and expertise to support and inform the project.

In October 2016, the Cave Springs Management Plan Steering Committee approved the Draft Management Plan and its final recommendations to the NPCA Board of Directors.

Now approved by NPCA Board of Directors, Management Plan, as will be submitted to the Niagara Escarpment Commission for review and endorsement, before being presented to the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry, for final approval.

Cave Springs is a truly unique escarpment property, rich in both natural and cultural heritage. The establishment of a management plan for this property ensures that the natural and cultural heritage features and attributes of this property will be protected, enhanced and celebrated for many years to come. It also ensures that the public will have access to this beautiful property.



756 Volunteers
6,315 Volunteer Hours

Treetop Trekking



At the September 2015 Board meeting, a report outlined an opportunity to enter into a revenue-generating partnership with Treetop Trekking, at Ball's Falls Conservation Area. Treetop Trekking is an industry leader in aerial zip line parks in Ontario and Quebec. Of its five existing aerial zip line parks in Ontario, three of them are within Conservation Areas; Ganaraska Forest Center, Bruce Mills, and Heart Lake.

Through formal and informal discussions with the Niagara Escarpment Commission, it became clear that the idea of establishing an aerial game and zip lining park at Ball's Falls would be challenging. Given the restrictive legislative parameters within the Niagara Escarpment Plan and the associated parameters within the Niagara Escarpment Parks and Open Space System (NEPOSS) it was decided to no longer move forward with Treetop Trekking at Ball's Falls.



At the July 2016 Board meeting, staff informed Board members of the perceived challenges and asked for permission to explore the viability of establishing such an operation at the Binbrook Conservation Area. Board members provided preliminary support for this request.

Treetop Trekking capital and operating investments in this operation include over \$1.8 million within a three-year phase-in plan.

NPCA revenues related to this operation are expected to reach over \$75,000 by Year 3, over \$100,000 by Year 4 and over \$150,000 from 5 years and beyond. Also, NPCA anticipates greater entrance fees at Binbrook with the implementation of this project and the new splash pad.



69,803 Trees Planted

Wainfleet Bog Recovery & Restoration



Since 1997 there have been five confirmed fires at the Wainfleet Bog. The risk of fires at the Bog is greatly increased when the summer months are hot and dry. Recognizing the high risk of fire in 2016, due to weather conditions, NPCA convened a meeting of key stakeholders, including the Fire Chiefs from Welland, Port Colborne and Wainfleet, and the Resource Management Supervisor from the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry (MNRF) on June 28th. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss and update protocols, roles, and responsibilities related to monitoring and mitigating the risk of fire at the Wainfleet Bog, and dealing with a fire event, should one occur.

During this meeting some suggestions were put forward, many of which had minimal financial implications, such as the development of a site-specific fire plan, enhanced communication strategies, the development of fire risk parameters, monitoring the property more frequently, and closing the Wainfleet Bog during times of high fire risk. Other suggestions focused on the need to purchase equipment that would better allow NPCA to monitor the site, access more remote areas of the property and support fire suppression efforts, as required.

On July 5th, a fire was detected at the Bog. NPCA's experience with this fire further confirmed the need for this investment.

Site Management and Ecological Restoration Plans were completed for the Conservation Area in 1997 and 2000 respectively. This included a full ecological inventory 1997-1999, and restoration measures implemented 2000-2001.

The Wainfleet Bog Restoration Plan implements the Wainfleet Bog CA Management Plan, and its goals and objectives. This primary goal is to restore the site to a healthier, more natural bog ecosystem, providing recreational, education and scientific research opportunities for existing and future generations. It includes natural restoration and monitoring measures based on ecosystem wise philosophies to correct identified factors of adverse impact on the bog.



Gord Harry Trail Restoration



Gord Harry Trail Conservation Area in Wainfleet is approximately 13 kilometres long, traversing from Cement Plant Road to the County of Haldimand boundary. A portion of the trail from Etling Road to East of Hutchinson Road was used by Niagara Region Wind Corporation/Enercon by agreement for the construction and to maintain two nearby wind turbines. The trail was widened by 3 metres and restored to pre-construction conditions or better.

During 2015-2016, the trail reconstruction was completed. Vegetation was removed. An entrance for one wind turbine and for a side lane which was installed for truck passing was later removed. A native seed mix of grass and flowers will be hydroseeded at the site as part of the restoration. The seed mixture of Big Bluestem, New England Aster, Fox Sedge, Bottlebrush grass, Fowl manna grass, Fowl Bluegrass and Brown-eyed Susans will be used. There is no cost to the NPCA for restoration of the site.



36,713 Flowers Planted

Customer Service Charter



As part of the 2014-2017 Strategic Plan, staff has developed a Customer Service Charter to publicly affirm the NPCA's commitment to providing a high standard of effective and efficient service delivery.

The Customer Service Charter is developed as a platform upon which a broader Customer Service strategy may be built. It outlines as succinctly as possible the NPCA's customer service commitment.

Customer satisfaction surveys would be a key component of a broader Customer Service strategy regarding assessing the organization's success in delivering on the Charter. Customer Feedback Forms and Planning Client Surveys will be developed. It is anticipated that additional surveys may be developed in the future as required to assess specific areas of customer service.

Strategic Plan Update



With the provision of over 50 years of NPCA regulations, programming and services, the NPCA Board of Directors developed and implemented its inaugural Strategic Plan in 2014 to guide the corporation over the next four years.

The Strategic Plan contained the first ever Mission, Vision, and Values of the organization. Also, the Strategic Plan returned the corporation back to its legislative mandate of conserving, restoring, managing and development of the natural resources within the watershed.

The 2014 - 2017 Strategic Plan contained 42 Deliverables under the themes of:

- Effective NPCA Model to set Policies and Priorities; Streamlined, Efficient Delivery of Development Approvals Process;
- Improved Capacity for Managing Assets and Land Program; Transparent Governance and Enhanced
- Accountability; and Effective Communication with Stakeholders and Public.

The NPCA is on pace to meet all deliverables in 2017.

Living Landscape Policy Review



The Living Landscape is the name given to this NPCA's policy review project, with its primary objective to review and complete a fundamental rewrite of NPCA's primary development guidance document titled Policies, Procedures and Guidelines for the Administration of Ontario Regulation 155/06 and Land Use Planning Policy Document.

This policy review and update is also an important element of the NPCA Strategic Plan (2014-2017) to develop streamlined, efficient delivery of its development approvals process. As noted, the updated "NPCA policy document should clearly distinguish between broader planning guidance and regulatory/permit requirements."

In June 2016, the Discussion Paper was publicized and open for public comment. The purpose of the Discussion Paper is to present the themes, issues, and opportunities to be addressed in the Living Landscape Policy Project. It is intended to provide direction for the broad range of policy changes and modifications to be considered for updating the NPCA's Policy Document.

Ducks Unlimited Partnership



Ducks Unlimited Canada (DUC) is the recognized leading agency in wetland design and creation; NPCA initially consulted with DUC on many projects for their expertise in the creation of wetlands and subsequently started a partnership in 2002.

Since 2002, DUC and the NPCA have been working together with Niagara landowners to create wetland projects in Niagara. This collaboration has allowed for the sharing of both expertise and resources. The DUC-NPCA partnership has successfully implemented over 70 wetland projects, creating over 125 ha of wetlands with a total project value of \$1.3 million dollars. The respective organizations' goals and conservation programs are well aligned, and their strengths and expertise complement one another.

Under the current partnership structure, DUC will contribute \$26,000 towards seven (7) wetland projects to be completed during the term of this agreement (by March 31, 2017). These seven (7) wetland projects are located as follows: Niagara Falls (2), West Lincoln (2), Niagara-on-the-Lake (1), Port Colborne (1) and Haldimand County (1). The NPCA and landowners will fund the remaining costs not covered by DUC, with NPCA funding up to a maximum of \$10,000 (as per NPCA program guidelines) for each wetland project.

Source Water Protection



The Ministry of Environment and Climate Change (MOECC) completed a successful program review of the Source Protection program at the NPCA in January 2016. It was the first conservation source protection program review conducted in the province. A Source Protection Committee meeting was held in September. A Draft Annual Progress Report was presented at the meeting summarizing the progress made in Source Protection Plan implementation from October 2014 to December 2015. As part of the source protection program, staff also participated on the MOECC's provincial auditor's Source Protection Recommendation "5b" Committee. This concerns notifying the public about naturally occurring groundwater elevated above drinking water standards. NPCA is the only conservation authority on this committee. Complimentary to this, protection of groundwater quality was pursued through almost 100 Highly Vulnerable Aquifer reviews for Niagara Region, local municipalities, and the Niagara Escarpment Commission. Staff continued to address groundwater data gaps identified during the source protection technical studies through on-going partnerships with the Ontario Geological Survey, McMaster University and the University of Waterloo and purchase and installation of equipment for long-term monitoring.

Welland River Floodplain Mapping

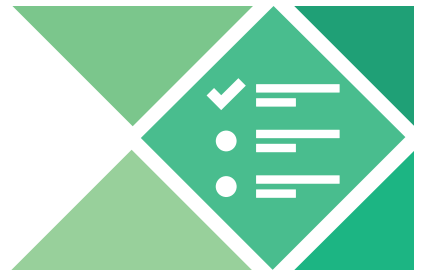


A Consultation Summary Report, incorporating comments and answers to questions from the February Public Information Sessions, was distributed to all Committee members for their feedback. The Consultation Summary Report is posted on the project website (www.wellandriver.ca) once all comments are received and updated.

Mark Hartley of MMM Group presented to floodplain committee members an updated technical presentation that was later used to communicate to the public at the 2nd round of information sessions in June.

A total of 8 public information sessions were held in 2016 in February and June. Through the consultation process, it was decided that the Policy Review would be completed before the implementation of new floodplain mapping. Both projects are expected to be completed in 2017.

Watershed Plans



Between 2005 and 2012 the NPCA developed watershed plans for 12 of its 18 watershed planning areas. The program was suspended in 2012 due to budget constraints.

In 2014, the Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority (NPCA) was awarded a grant of \$25,000 from Niagara WaterSmart to conduct an assessment of its watershed plans.

Aecom was retained to undertake the study. Prioritizing the recommended actions was a key element of the study report. For instance, NPCA wanted to know if existing older watershed plans should be updated first or whether the areas with no watershed plans should be a higher priority.

The Community Liaison Advisory Committee (CLAC) and a technical steering committee consisting of staff from NPCA, Niagara Region, and some municipalities provided input to the study.



188 Permits Issued
18 Day Average Processing Time

Water Quality Best Practices



The NPCA continually collects and analyzes water samples from 74 surface water locations and 13 groundwater locations throughout the NPCA watershed. The 2016 NPCA Annual Water Quality Monitoring Report was presented to the NPCA Board in June 2016. It summarizes the results of the Water Quality Monitoring Program for 2015. For surface water, the biological and chemical monitoring results indicate that most of Niagara's watersheds have poor or impaired water quality. For groundwater, results indicate that water quality meets Ontario Drinking Water Standards.

Improving the quality of water in the NPCA's watercourses is a challenging and complex task. There are many factors such as human activities, land use, urbanization, faulty septic systems, and agricultural practices that can have an impact on the quality of our water. Often the way the land is managed is reflected in the health of our water.

The NPCA is committed to achieving and maintaining a healthy and sustainable environment. To this end, the NPCA's Water Quality and Habitat Improvement Program is an initiative focused on providing local landowners with financial incentives to implement water quality and habitat improvement projects on their properties. These projects can include wetland creation, reforestation, and implementing Best Management Practices for agriculture, and the decommissioning of abandoned water wells.

Highlights from 2016 include:

- 66 projects
- 69,803 trees planted
- 36,713 wildflower plugs planted
- 5.0 acres of land seeded with wildflowers
- 8.8 acres of wetlands created
- 2.5 km of grassed waterways installed on agricultural fields
- 9 abandoned water wells plugged and decommissioned

The difficulty of improving water quality is too immense for the Restoration Program to correct on its own. Watershed plans and sub-watershed plans are first needed to developed an overall strategy in each watershed planning area.

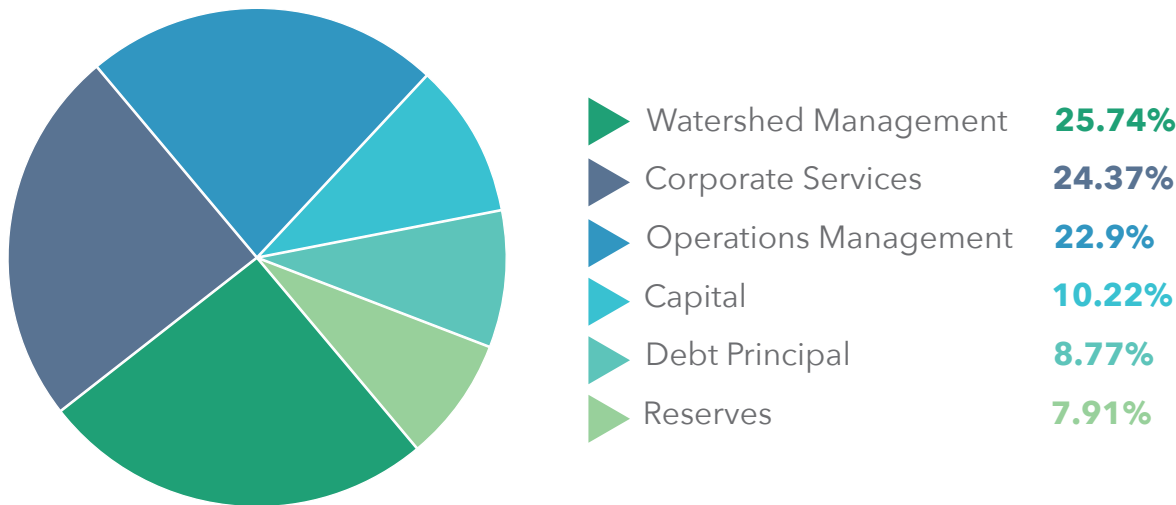
Watershed plans are developed to help protect the long-term health of the ecosystem within the watershed, as land uses change over time. The Watershed Plans do this by managing the land/water interactions, aquatic life and other water resource elements within the watershed. Water quality is a central part of this watershed management planning process.

In 2012, NPCA discontinued its watershed planning program due to budget concerns, but has initiated the processes to reestablish the program in 2016.

Financials



ALLOCATION



SOURCES

