



# Strategic Plan

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 2021-31





Beamer Memorial Conservation Area





## Land Acknowledgement



The Niagara Peninsula watershed is situated within the traditional territory of the Haudenosaunee, Attiwonderonk (Neutral), and the Anishinaabeg, including the Mississaugas of the Credit—many of whom continue to live and work here today. This territory is covered by the Upper Canada Treaties (No. 3, 4, and 381) and is within the land protected by the Dish with One Spoon Wampum agreement. Today, the watershed is home to many First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples.

Through this Strategic Plan, we re-confirm our commitment to shared stewardship of natural resources and deep appreciation of Indigenous culture and history in the watershed.



## About Us

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The Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority (NPCA) is a community-based natural resource management agency that protects, enhances, and sustains healthy watersheds. With over 60 years of experience, the NPCA offers watershed programs and services that focus on flood and hazard management, source water protection, species protection, ecosystem restoration, community stewardship, and land management. The NPCA is one of 36 Conservation Authorities in the Province of Ontario and manages 41 Conservation Areas within the Niagara Peninsula watershed held in public trust for recreation, heritage preservation, conservation, and education.

## Purpose

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The purpose of the Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority is to further the conservation, restoration, development, and management of natural resources in the Niagara Peninsula watersheds, as per the *Conservation Authorities Act*.





Tulip tree

## Vision

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Nature for all.

We envision a healthy and vibrant environment with shared greenspace and clean water that sustains life for future generations.

## Mission

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To create a common ground for conservation-inspired action and accountability to nature.

# Introduction

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In 2020, the NPCA Board of Directors approved launching a staff-led process to create a new strategic plan that would guide the NPCA for the next ten years while reflecting its mandate as per the *Conservation Authorities Act* and fulfilling its important role within the community. The NPCA Strategic Plan (2021-2031) is a critical milestone in our organization's transformation. The plan reaffirms our commitment to the mandate of conservation authorities and charts the course for the next generation of work to address the evolving issues of climate change, growth, and the need for green infrastructure.

This plan is guided by principles based on a conservation-first and ecosystem philosophy, collaboration ethics, and an importance of innovation rooted in science. The NPCA consulted broadly with its Board of Directors, Public Advisory Committee, staff, Indigenous groups, partners, members of the public, and other local stakeholders to develop the strategic plan. Through six overarching strategic priorities, twenty-one specific goals, and measurable actions, the plan charts the course for future actions and collective outcomes. For the first time, our strategic plan has a strong focus on results and performance to make well-informed decisions for the future and measure our actions against set targets.

Collectively, the strategic priorities guide our actions toward a vision of the Niagara Peninsula watershed with robust nature, thriving agriculture,

and resilient urban areas vital to the health and well-being of our residents. This plan will improve ecosystems and natural cover, protect drinking water sources, develop resilient communities and shorelines, build active transportation routes to greenspace destinations (conservation areas), engage communities in the watershed, and contribute to the thriving and vibrant economy of Niagara. We will build on the region's reputation as a Gateway to Canada.

The NPCA recognizes that our organization must remain flexible and adaptable to change over the next ten years. We continue to navigate and respond to the recent legislative changes to the *Conservation Authorities Act* by developing this strategic plan. We remain mindful of the updated regulations and the need to prioritize our actions as we align this transition carefully with the revitalization of our organization. Furthermore, we understand that the Niagara Peninsula watersheds will experience growth, intensification and extreme weather impacts, as well as a tremendous need for greenspace.

We look forward to working with our communities and partners as we operationalize and implement this new Strategic Plan to 2031 toward a shared vision of Nature for All!







Upper Falls at Ball's Falls Conservation Area

## Core Values

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Integrity

Respect

Customer Service

Conservation Leadership

## Guiding Principles

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**Watersheds transcend municipal boundaries.**

We are committed to working with the watershed community to support and create climate-resilient and connected natural systems.

**Natural green infrastructure is critical to life.**

Our day-to-day work conserves and restores our communities' integral ecological, socio-economic, public safety, and health services.

**Diverse experiences and ideas lead to better and stronger collective impact and outcomes.**

We seek to exemplify inclusion and equity through meaningful engagement and collaboration.

**Innovation requires learning from each other and the past.**

As a result, we are progressive, resilient, adaptable, and strive for continuous improvement to remain a trusted and valued partner.

## The Niagara Peninsula Watershed: *A Natural Treasure*

A watershed is the land that drains into a particular watercourse such as a stream, river, lake. Gravity and the land's topography (the high and low areas) move water, rain, and snowmelt across the landscape from one area to another.

The Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority's watershed area encompasses 2,424 km<sup>2</sup> including the entire regional municipality of Niagara, portions of the City of Hamilton (21%), and Haldimand County (25%). Since time immemorial, this area has been the home to Indigenous peoples – a place for sharing, trading, hunting, gathering, stewardship, and friendship. Currently, the watershed supports a population of approximately 520,000 people.

The Niagara Peninsula watershed is a natural treasure of distinct cultural, geological, hydrological, and biological aspects not found elsewhere in North America. It is part of the Carolinian life zone – the most biodiverse and threatened ecoregion in Canada. The Niagara Peninsula watershed boasts approximately 30% natural cover that provides critical habitat such as forested woodlots, slough forests, alvars, and coastal wetlands that support rich biodiversity, including rare plants and animals.

The watershed is uniquely situated between two Great Lakes, with the Niagara River as a boundary shared with the United States of America. As a result, the watershed area includes several notable natural features such as the Niagara Escarpment Biosphere Reserve, the Niagara Falls, Wainfleet Bog, Ball's Falls, Willoughby Marsh, and other significant landforms such as the Fonthill Kame ice contact-delta complex. The unique microclimate created by the Niagara Escarpment and rich soils supports one of Ontario's most productive agriculture systems, including vineyards, tender fruit orchards, livestock, and various specialty crops (greenhouses for flowers, vegetables, sod farms, and mushroom farms).

These important watershed features provide life-sustaining benefits for all and many opportunities to discover nature and culture.



NIAGARA PENINSULA  
**CONSERVATION**  
AUTHORITY









# Strategic Direction



The strategic priorities will guide the NPCA's actions to meet its vision, mission, and mandate over the next ten years. The following six strategic priorities were developed through extensive engagement activities with internal and external stakeholders to guide the NPCA's work over the coming years. Each strategic priority includes specific goals and actions for the NPCA to undertake with its partners and communities to achieve a thriving environment that sustains life for future generations.

# 1

## Healthy and Climate Resilient Watersheds

*Improving nature for the betterment of all life across the watershed.*



# 2

## Supporting Sustainable Growth

*Helping to create resilient communities through land-use planning and the use of sustainable technologies to prepare for a changing climate and related environmental challenges.*



# 3

## Connecting People to Nature

*Creating equitable access to greenspace for the health and well-being of people.*



# 4

## Partner of Choice

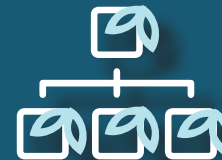
*Strengthening our relationships with stakeholders, partners, the watershed community, and Indigenous peoples.*



# 5

## Organizational Excellence

*Striving for excellence through high service delivery standards and accountability to the environment and its people.*



# 6

## Financial Sustainability

*Ensuring a financially stable and sustainable organization and continued service-delivery through innovative business models, diverse funding sources, and best practices.*







Chippawa Creek Conservation Area

## Measuring Performance

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For each of the strategic priorities, the NPCA established Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to track performance against the goals set out in the strategic plan and guide our organization's decision-making and implementation process into the future. In addition, the NPCA developed a list of specific metrics to help measure the success of our organization's day-to-day activities and support the achievement of the KPIs. In addition, progress and achievement toward each of the KPIs will be tracked and shared publicly through the NPCA's Annual Report each year.

## Implementation

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The next major step in the NPCA's strategic planning process is to implement the strategic plan by developing an operational plan that sets out specific actions to enable the NPCA to meet its goals in collaboration with our communities and partners from 2021 to 2031. The operational plans will be updated annually to reflect organizational and environmental changes, meet the *Conservation Authorities Act* and its regulations, and ensure that the NPCA remains responsive to the constantly evolving needs of the watershed and the communities we serve. Given that this strategic plan spans ten years and we recognize that there may be changes in that time, we will review it after five years of implementation to ensure it remains relevant and achievable.





## Healthy and Climate Resilient Watersheds

### Goal 1.1

Support evidence-based decision-making for climate-resilient watersheds and shorelines



#### TO ACHIEVE THIS GOAL, THE NPCA WILL

- Expand and enhance monitoring and associated tools to fill information gaps and research needs
- Lead water quality (e.g., surface and groundwater) and quantity monitoring throughout the NPCA jurisdiction
- Support municipal partners with watershed data collection and analysis to understand cumulative impacts
- Develop a solid understanding of climate impacts and risks on NPCA watersheds
- Implement the Source Protection Program as mandated by the *Conservation Authorities Act* and *Clean Water Act*

#### PERFORMANCE INDICATOR

Robust data collection program established by 2023 and data gaps filled by 2026



## Goal 1.2

Protect people and properties from natural hazards and climate impacts



### TO ACHIEVE THIS GOAL, THE NPCA WILL

- 🍁 Implement permitting and regulations under section 28 of the *Conservation Authorities Act*
- 🍁 Deliver accurate, real-time information for flood forecasting, messaging, and warning using state-of-the-art technology and communication tools
- 🍁 Complete and maintain updated floodplain and regulation mapping within the watershed
- 🍁 Develop a watershed-based resource management strategy as mandated by the *Conservation Authorities Act*.
- 🍁 Update shoreline management plans with a climate resilience lens

### PERFORMANCE INDICATOR

A climate risk and vulnerability action plan developed by 2023 integrated with provincially-mandated watershed-based resource management strategy

## Goal 1.3

Restore and enhance natural habitat, water resources, and forest cover



### TO ACHIEVE THIS GOAL, THE NPCA WILL

- 🍁 Expand restoration program service offerings
- 🍁 Integrate watershed planning information (e.g., GIS, water quality, biological data) proactively targeting restoration efforts
- 🍁 Develop programs aimed at urban and rural landowners (e.g., urban stewardship program, agricultural best management practices)
- 🍁 Understand the carbon potential of NPCA natural systems to examine the feasibility of voluntary carbon offsetting
- 🍁 Lead special projects that improve water quality and ecosystem health (e.g., Niagara River Remedial Action Plan)

### PERFORMANCE INDICATOR

Increased area (ha) of protected and restored habitat by 2031 measured annually



## Healthy and Climate Resilient Watersheds



Green Frog - Ball's Falls Conservation Area

## Goal 1.4

Manage NPCA lands to increase biodiversity, habitat connectivity, and natural cover



### TO ACHIEVE THIS GOAL, THE NPCA WILL

- 🌿 Develop and update management plans for NPCA properties
- 🌿 Develop plans to manage invasive species and enhance biodiversity at NPCA properties (e.g., forest management plan)
- 🌿 Complete and implement the NPCA land acquisition strategy
- 🌿 Implement regulations under section 29 of the *Conservation Authorities Act*

### PERFORMANCE INDICATOR

Management plans completed for 100% of NPCA properties by 2031





## 2

### Supporting Sustainable Growth

Neighbourhood in Niagara

## Goal 2.1

Maintain a high standard of client services, tools, and procedures for planning review and permits



### TO ACHIEVE THIS GOAL, THE NPCA WILL

- Continuously improve implementing NPCA Client Services Standard for Plan and Permit Review protocol to support streamlining, efficiency, and transparency
- Refine decision-support tools for efficient application management and review
- Enhance customer service feedback mechanisms to support performance evaluation and reporting
- Communicate the role and responsibilities of NPCA in plan review and permitting

### PERFORMANCE INDICATOR

Improvement in client service metrics year over year

## Goal 2.2

Lead an integrated watershed management approach to support planning and policy for protecting and enhancing watersheds



### TO ACHIEVE THIS GOAL, THE NPCA WILL

- Implement a proactive sub-watershed work program to complement and inform the quaternary and sub-watershed planning for growth areas within the NPCA jurisdiction
- Support municipalities and the development sector to implement smart growth principles (e.g., preserve open space, farmland, natural areas, reduce urban sprawl)
- Lead a proactive research agenda to determine cumulative watershed impacts and applied solutions from extreme weather and land-use changes
- Develop policies and procedures for land dedication that support conservation and watershed enhancement through the planning process

### PERFORMANCE INDICATOR

100% of sub-watershed plans for future growth areas updated by 2031

## Goal 2.3

Lead the implementation of sustainable technologies and green infrastructure best practices for climate resilience and sustainability



### TO ACHIEVE THIS GOAL, THE NPCA WILL

- Advance the implementation of green infrastructure best practices in future development proposals and through NPCA's demonstration projects to minimize impacts to the watershed
- Engage municipalities, the development community, and other private landowners in implementing green infrastructure and sustainability best practices and actions
- Identify opportunities for brownfields to enhance green infrastructure or innovative planning for in-fill development
- Develop education materials/programs to inform the public about sustainable best practices

### PERFORMANCE INDICATOR

A green infrastructure and sustainable technologies program established at NPCA by 2026









### Connecting People to Nature

## Goal 3.1

Create equitable access to greenspace for the health and well-being of people



### TO ACHIEVE THIS GOAL, THE NPCA WILL

-  Identify and remove socio-economic barriers to accessing NPCA properties and programs
-  Proactively seek opportunities to enhance trail connections with active transportation routes
-  Highlight and promote recreation (e.g., cycling, hiking, walking, birdwatching) opportunities at NPCA properties
-  Improve services and visitor experiences at NPCA properties (e.g., buildings, trail maps, wayfinding, and accessibility, where possible)

### PERFORMANCE INDICATOR

Public greenspace within urban or near-urban areas increased by 2031

## Goal 3.2

Lead nature education, environmental stewardship, and volunteerism

### TO ACHIEVE THIS GOAL, THE NPCA WILL

- Implement an outreach, stewardship, and education strategy for nature education and engagement opportunities
- Strengthen and continue to deliver education programs for various socio-economic and multi-lingual groups
- Enhance volunteer opportunities for all age groups
- Expand opportunities for citizen-science monitoring

### PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

- An outreach, stewardship and education strategy developed by 2024
- 100% of actions from outreach, stewardship, and education strategy implemented by 2031

## Goal 3.3

Improve cultural connections and heritage appreciation

### TO ACHIEVE THIS GOAL, THE NPCA WILL

- Maintain and honour heritage buildings at NPCA properties, including St. John's, Cave Springs, Ball's Falls, and Rockway Conservation Areas
- Examine opportunities to expand cultural connections and heritage programming at all conservation areas
- Work with municipalities on heritage listing and designation of NPCA buildings and properties

### PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

- A cultural heritage strategy developed by 2025
- 100% of actions from cultural heritage strategy implemented by 2031

## Goal 3.4

Promote the watershed as a destination of choice for adventure, culture, and ecological tourism

### TO ACHIEVE THIS GOAL, THE NPCA WILL

- Develop a marketing and ecotourism strategy to support safe and sustainable visits to NPCA properties
- Optimize visitor experience at NPCA properties
- Enhance and promote ecotourism opportunities at NPCA properties
- Provide sustainable tourism opportunities across the watershed by working with partners

### PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

- A marketing and ecotourism strategy developed by 2025
- 100% of actions from marketing and ecotourism strategy implemented by 2031



# 4



Partner of  
Choice



Binbrook Conservation Area

## Goal 4.1

Strengthen government relations toward collective outcomes and impact



### TO ACHIEVE THIS GOAL, THE NPCA WILL

- 🌿 Develop a government relations strategy
- 🌿 Execute Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) and Service-Level Agreements (SLAs) with Niagara's lower-tier municipalities
- 🌿 Establish the NPCA as an environmental service provider to municipals partners with co-management and delivery of programs and projects of mutual interest
- 🌿 Partner with government agencies to advance mutual goals

### PERFORMANCE INDICATOR

Agreements with all three upper-tier municipalities in 2023 and lower-tier municipalities by 2025

## Goal 4.2

Foster relationships with the community, non-government organizations, businesses, agriculture, industry, and academic institutions for collective outcomes and impact



### TO ACHIEVE THIS GOAL, THE NPCA WILL

- Implement a stakeholder and community engagement strategy
- Collaborate with local educational institutions (e.g., school boards, colleges, and universities) on mutual research interests that enhance knowledge sharing
- Provide technical expertise to support our partners and their work through agreements
- Collaborate with non-government organizations, businesses, agriculture, and industry on projects/initiatives that enhance stewardship and advance mutual goals

### PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

- A stakeholder and community engagement strategy developed by 2025
- 100% of actions from stakeholder and community strategy implemented by 2031

## Goal 4.3

Improve engagement with local First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples that supports shared stewardship



### TO ACHIEVE THIS GOAL, THE NPCA WILL

- Implement actions that support Truth and Reconciliation with Indigenous peoples
- Provide mentorship and employment opportunities that support the cross-cultural exchange of knowledge
- Proactively engage with Indigenous peoples and seek diverse perspectives on land management and shared stewardship
- Expand Indigenous cultural programming and ensure recognition and acknowledgment of Indigenous heritage on future signage at NPCA properties
- Provide Indigenous awareness training for NPCA staff

### PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

- Indigenous engagement guidelines developed in 2022
- Staff provided with Indigenous awareness training





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## Organizational Excellence

### Goal 5.1

Attract, retain, and invest in high caliber, diverse talent to deliver superior outcomes

#### TO ACHIEVE THIS GOAL, THE NPCA WILL

- Ensure adequate staff capacity and resources required to deliver on superior outcomes
- Provide relevant training and advancement opportunities to support staff learning and professional growth
- Implement health and safety and corporate wellness programs for staff well-being
- Modernize human resource policies and practices to encourage a healthy work environment
- Encourage a culture of innovation to find new ways of doing NPCA work

#### PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

- A talent management strategy developed in 2022
- 100% of actions in the talent management strategy implemented by 2031

## Goal 5.2

Improve internal operations and processes

### TO ACHIEVE THIS GOAL, THE NPCA WILL

- Enhance tools and procedures for program and project management, planning, reporting
- Modernize and invest in digital technology to enhance internal processes
- Deploy tools for efficient internal and external information sharing
- Provide staff training on new technologies as they are deployed
- Implement a record management program and policy

### PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

- A digital transformation strategy developed in 2023
- 100% of actions in the digital transformation strategy implemented by 2031

## Goal 5.3

Provide high standards of customer service

### TO ACHIEVE THIS GOAL, THE NPCA WILL

- Develop customer service guidelines and improve customer service feedback mechanisms
- Implement a client management system that facilitates overall governance and relevant information sharing
- Provide equitable access to information
- Utilize various communication tools and tactics to facilitate engagement

### PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

- Customer service guidelines developed in 2022
- All staff provided customer service training

## Goal 5.4

Demonstrate leadership in addressing climate change and sustainable practices through NPCA lands and operations

### TO ACHIEVE THIS GOAL, THE NPCA WILL

- Develop a corporate climate change strategy to implement actions that reduce the NPCA's climate impacts and carbon footprint
- Employ low-impact development techniques at key NPCA properties as demonstration sites
- Develop a program to support other local organizations to become leaders in conservation
- Develop a feasibility study to build a carbon-neutral NPCA headquarters

### PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

- A corporate climate change action commitment and launch of a strategy in 2022
- 100% of actions in corporate climate change strategy implemented by 2031





## Financial Sustainability

### Goal 6.1

Ensure responsible, sustainable, and sound fiscal practices



#### TO ACHIEVE THIS GOAL, THE NPCA WILL

- Develop a business plan based on the *Conservation Authority Act's* direction on programs and services
- Consistently review and update fee schedules to retain accurate cost of services
- Demonstrate the value of NPCA programs and services to stakeholders and municipal partners
- Deploy a full cost recovery model for fee-for-service programs and services

#### PERFORMANCE INDICATOR

Variance against the budget no greater than 20%



Comfort Maple Conservation Area

## Goal 6.2

Optimize self-generating revenue using innovative approaches



### TO ACHIEVE THIS GOAL, THE NPCA WILL

-  Broaden opportunities for potential revenue streams at conservation parks taking a balanced approach
-  Identify fee-for-service opportunities through partnership agreements for various expert services
-  Explore varied funding sources and innovative partnerships to diversify funding
-  Leverage the Niagara Peninsula Conservation Foundation to help raise funds for conservation programs and projects

### PERFORMANCE INDICATOR





Increased self-generated revenue

## Goal 6.3

Improve asset management and close the state of good repair gap



### TO ACHIEVE THIS GOAL, THE NPCA WILL

-  Establish an asset management plan with a proactive asset management program
-  Complete and deploy a natural asset management accounting initiative and support municipalities, as appropriate
-  Implement best-practice standards for closing the state of good repair gap
-  Invest in NPCA assets (e.g., trails, buildings) and ensure they are assessed over their lifecycle

### PERFORMANCE INDICATOR

Maintenance of Good Facility Condition Index





Niagara River

# Glossary of Terms

## Access/Accessibility

The ability for a person to utilize a resource, program, or service.

## Active transportation

To get from one place to another using a recreational mode of transportation (e.g., cycling, walking).

## Asset(s)

All of the property, including trails, buildings, and equipment, are assets of an organization.

## Climate-resilient

To withstand the changes and impacts due to changing climatic conditions.

## Greenspace

A natural area that benefits the ecosystem, community, and human health (mental/physical). For example, conservation areas, provincial or municipal parks, woodlots, rivers, beaches.

## Green infrastructure

Natural vegetation (e.g., forests, farmland, wetlands, waterways) and green technologies (e.g., engineered stormwater ponds, bioswales, green roofs) offer environmental, economic, health, and social benefits.

## Natural hazards

Natural events that can pose a threat to humans, their property, or the environment are natural hazards. Natural hazards include extreme rainfall or snowmelt, fog events, snow/ice storms, forest fires, tornadoes, and earthquakes.

## State of good repair

The condition of the organization’s property, buildings, and equipment should operate at a full level of performance.

## Sustainability

The process of living within the limits of available physical, natural, economic, and social resources in ways that do not impact future needs.

## Watershed

An area of land that drains or “sheds” surface water into a specific waterbody such as a creek, stream, river, or lake.

This strategic plan was developed thanks to the financial support of the NPCA’s municipal partners, direction from the Board of Directors, and extensive input from staff, the community, and stakeholders. We also gratefully acknowledge StrategyCorp for their facilitation and consultant support of this staff-led strategic planning process.





Woodend Conservation Area





Nature for all.





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Conservation  
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