



2023 Annual Report

St. Clair Region
Conservation Authority

A Message from Our Chair

I am pleased to present the St. Clair Region Conservation Authority's (SCRCA) Annual Report for 2023 which outlines our organization's many successes this past year. Through direction provided by our 2023-2028 Strategic Plan, we made great progress working towards the Authority's strategic goals and actions. I would like to thank our staff and Board of Directors for their hard work and continued dedication to conservation in the St. Clair Region.

The SCRCA achievements were plentiful over the course of 2023. Our Conservation Education program continued to be a popular choice among teachers and students alike with close to 22,000 students engaged over the past year. By continuing to offer virtual and schoolyard programs, our staff were also able to overcome barriers associated with bussing costs and availability, ensuring all students had the opportunity to learn about important environmental concepts, regardless of location.

In collaboration with St. Clair Township and the City of Sarnia, our team continued to complete critical shoreline protection work along the St. Clair River and Lake Huron shorelines to reduce erosion, protect important municipal infrastructure, and prepare our shoreline communities for the impacts of climate change. The Authority also issued over 200 permits to support safe and resilient development in the watershed.

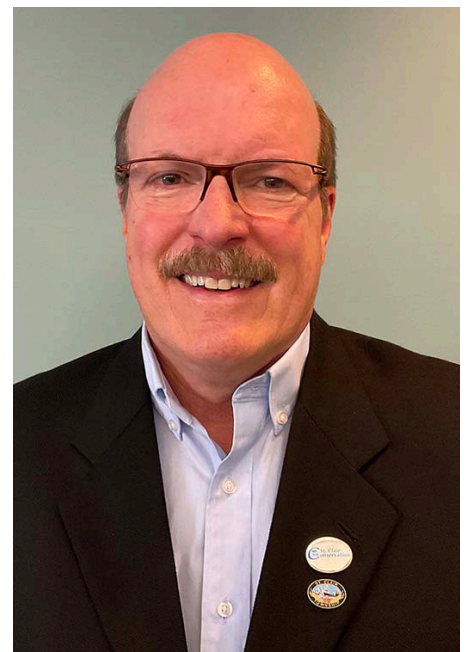
The SCRCA's Biology team continued their important work monitoring, protecting, and assisting our most vulnerable species. The Authority also planted over 70,000 trees and completed 41 stewardship projects to increase local habitat and protect local water quality. Again in 2023, our Conservation Areas were well visited, and seasonal camping was fully booked throughout the camping season.

We also continued to meet the legislative requirements prescribed under new regulations issued through the *Conservation Authorities Act*. Of particular importance was the development and negotiation of agreements with our member municipalities for programs and services viewed as being outside of the SCRCA's core mandate. Many of our local municipalities entered into formal agreements, which speaks to how the work of the Authority is valued and appreciated by our watershed communities.

In closing, I would like to thank the many partners, supporters, and donors we have had the pleasure of working with this past year. It is through these collaborations that we will realize our vision of a healthy and sustainable natural environment in the St. Clair Region.



Pat Brown
Chair, Board of Directors
St. Clair Region Conservation Authority



About Us

The St. Clair Region Conservation Authority (SCRCA) is one of Ontario's 36 Conservation Authorities responsible for the conservation, restoration, and management of natural resources within its watershed. The St. Clair Region includes the Sydenham River watershed and smaller watersheds that drain directly into southern Lake Huron, the St. Clair River, and northeastern Lake St. Clair.

Our programs aim to 1) reduce the risk of life and property from flooding and erosion; 2) improve water quality; 3) promote habitat creation and stewardship; 4) provide outdoor recreation opportunities; 5) increase environmental awareness and literacy; and 6) monitor and protect our most vulnerable species. We achieve this in cooperation and partnership with our member municipalities, government agencies, Indigenous communities, community groups, local landowners, and businesses.

Our Watershed



Population
146,665



Area
4,130 km²



Trails
> 40 km



Landuse
81% Agricultural



Conservation Areas
13 (605 ha)

Board of Directors

Township of Adelaide Metcalfe

Betty Ann MacKinnon

Municipality of Brooke-Alvinston

Don McCabe

Municipality of Chatham-Kent

Rhonda Jubenville

Aaron Hall

Township of Dawn-Euphemia

Alan Broad

Township of Enniskillen/ Village of Oil Springs

Mary Lynne McCallum

Municipality of Lambton Shores

Lorie Scott

Municipality of Middlesex Centre

Sue Cates

Town of Petrolia

Brad Loosley

Town of Plympton-Wyoming

Kristen Rodrigues

Village of Point Edward

Greg Grimes

City of Sarnia

Terry Burrell

Anne Marie Gillis

Adam Kilner

Municipality of Southwest Middlesex/Village of Newbury

Don McCallum

Township of St. Clair

Pat Brown

Steve Miller

Municipality of Strathroy-Caradoc

John Brennan


Frank Kennes

Township of Warwick

Jerry Westgate

Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry

Emery Huszka



In August 2023, the St. Clair Region experienced a significant precipitation event that led to substantial flooding throughout the watershed. Depending on location, between 100 and 150 mm of rain fell over a 24-hour period.

Water Resources

Our water resources team oversees the SCRCA flood forecasting and warning program, and the maintenance and operation of flood control structures, including the W. Darcy McKeough Floodway. We work closely with local municipalities to protect public infrastructure through shoreline protection works. Our team also administers the Drinking Water Source Protection program for the St. Clair Region which protects municipal sources of drinking water from contamination. Lastly, our water resources department monitors and reports on Great Lakes water levels and conducts groundwater sampling on behalf of the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation, and Parks.

Erosion Control Projects

The SCRCA works closely with shoreline municipalities to protect critical infrastructure from erosion caused by high water levels and extreme waves triggered by strong storm events. In 2023, \$650,000 in funding was secured through the provincial Water & Erosion Control Infrastructure Fund, in addition to multi-year funding provided by the federal Disaster Mitigation and Adaptation Fund to support shoreline protection projects along the Lake Huron (Penhuron Avenue to Kenwick Street) and St. Clair River shorelines (Seagar Park Shoreline Restoration).

Drinking Water Source Protection

Residents living in the SCRCA watershed are protected from significant drinking water threats through the administration of the Thames-Sydenham and Region Source Water Protection Plan. The SCRCA houses a Risk Management Official/Inspector who works with local communities, industries, and municipalities to ensure risks to drinking water are identified and mitigated. The Risk Management Services office continues to provide contracted support to municipalities in the Lambton and Chatham-Kent areas, maintaining compliance with the provincial Drinking Water Source Protection Program. Annual inspections continue in the region for existing managed threats along with ongoing review and screening for any potential or new threats.





2023 Flood Bulletins

Normal Conditions

No flood conditions exist

Shoreline Conditions Statement

Water Safety

Shoreline danger due to high water levels, wave action and erosion

0

Flood Outlook

Early notice of potential flooding along shorelines

0

Watershed Conditions Statement

Water Safety

River danger due to fast flows and unstable banks

3

Flood Outlook

Early notice of potential riverine flooding

3

Combined Water Safety/Flood Outlook

2

Flood Watch

Potential for flooding in some municipalities

3

Flood Warning

Flooding is imminent or occurring

0



Groundwater Monitoring

In an effort to better understand Ontario's groundwater resources, the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation, and Parks implemented the Provincial Groundwater Monitoring Network (PGMN) to monitor water quality and quantity in local wells. The Network is a cooperative effort of the Conservation Authorities in Ontario, on behalf of the Ministry. The SCRCA monitors nine groundwater wells for water levels and eight groundwater wells for water quality as part of this program. The data gathered are reported in the Authority's Watershed Report Card, released every five years.

Flood Operations

Flooding is a natural process and while the Authority has done much to reduce the risk to life and property, some flooding in developed and undeveloped areas is still inevitable. As such, the SCRCA operates a flood warning program designed to warn municipalities of flood conditions. Through a network of 11 stream gauges, five snow sampling sites, ice monitoring, and meteorological data, our staff monitor ice and streamflow conditions, and issue bulletins should a flood be imminent.

The Authority also monitors watershed conditions using Low Water Indicators to determine whether we are in a drought. Under drought conditions, the Authority meets with the Low Water Response Committee to issue a Level I, II, or III Low Water Condition. No Low Water Conditions were issued in 2023.



Staff meet with landowners on-site to review proposed works and determine applicable setbacks, technical requirements, and application requirements. SCRCA staff also follow up on calls where works are ongoing yet haven't received the required permissions from the Conservation Authority.

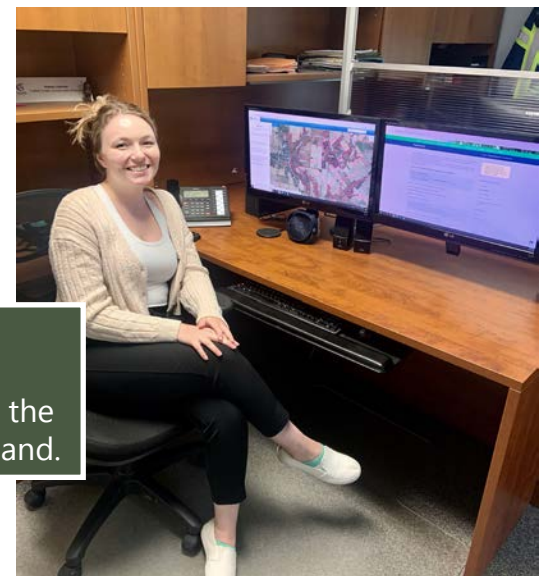
Planning and Regulations

As a watershed management agency acting under the *Conservation Authorities Act*, the SCRCA is responsible for ensuring that development is directed outside of areas prone to flooding and erosion. Under *Ontario Regulation 171/06, "Development, Interference with Wetlands and Alterations to Shorelines and Watercourses"*, staff review permit applications for development within these areas to ensure that the proposed development will not result in future risk to lives or property. In addition, the SCRCA assists our member municipalities with review of development applications under the *Planning Act* to ensure that development adheres to the natural hazard policies identified in the Provincial Policy Statement.

The SCRCA Planning and Regulations Team offers a wide range of services to both landowners and those interested in purchasing and/or developing properties adjacent to or within areas affected by regulations. In addition to issuing permits under Ontario Regulation 171/06 and assisting our Member Municipalities with *Planning Act* review and comment (as it pertains to Natural Hazards and Provincial Policy), the Authority's Planning and Regulations Team provides a number of additional services including:

- Providing legal inquiry letters to lawyers on real estate transaction closings;
- Providing property inquiry letters to landowners and prospective purchasers so they are aware of and understand the regulations and restrictions that may impact their property; and,
- Pre-consultation letters and meetings with landowners and developers so they are versed on what technical studies and supporting information may be required prior to developing on regulated lands. This pre-consultation step helps ensure applications are complete when received by the SCRCA and can reduce processing time and delays.

Prior to purchasing or developing a piece of land within the SCRCA regulated area, the Authority recommends prospective purchasers and developers complete a property inquiry to ensure they are aware of all the implications, restrictions, and limitations associated with the parcel of land.



Planning Activity 2023

Inquiries	98
Active Files	208
Application Types (Note: Active files may have multiple applications)	255
Minor Variances	50
Severances	56
Site Plan	22
Subdivision/Condominium	33
Zoning By-law	74
Official Plan	20

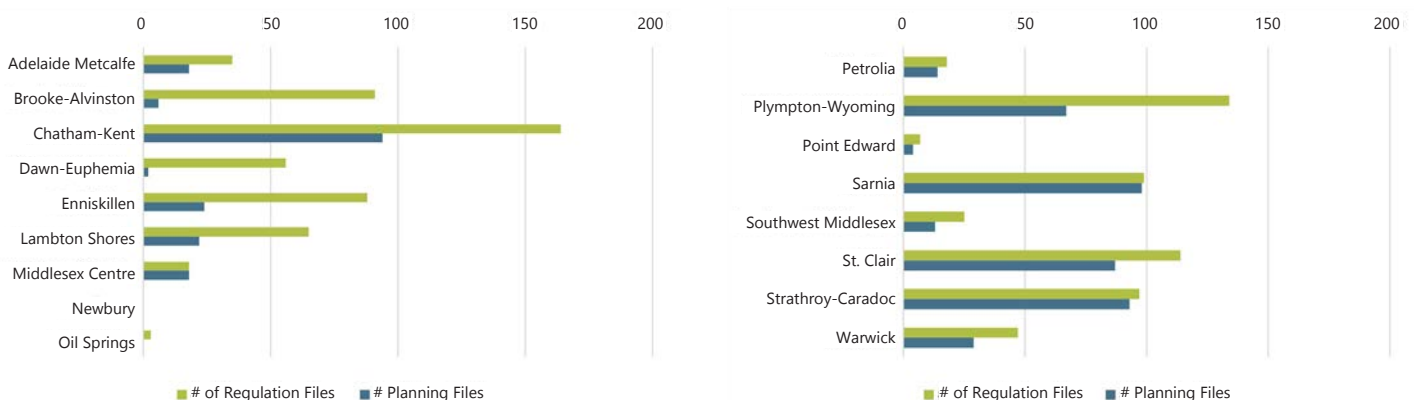
Regulations Activity 2023

Legal Inquiries	53
Permits Issued under Ontario Regulation 171/06	230
Inquiries under Ontario Regulation 171/06	458
Compliance/Enforcement Matters under Ontario Regulation 171/06	23
Hearings	0

Drainage Act and Section 28 Regulations Team (DART) Protocol Activity 2023

Total Drainage Projects Reviewed	166
Standard Compliance Requirements (SCRs) Issued	131

2023 Planning and Regulations Activity by Municipality





Every year, the SCRCA Biology Department spends countless hours in the field collecting data on the population and distribution of aquatic species in the SCRCA watershed and important habitat characteristics including water quality, substrate, and stream flow. Pictured - Freshwater fish sampling in Highland Creek

Biological Monitoring

The Sydenham River, located within the St. Clair Region, is recognized provincially, nationally, and even internationally for its biodiversity. SCRCA biologists work with government agencies and non-profit organizations to monitor populations of local aquatic and terrestrial species (including Species at Risk) throughout the Sydenham River watershed and the smaller watersheds that make up the St. Clair Region. Staff also collect important data (e.g., water quality, benthic invertebrates) to assess the health of local habitats and overall watershed health. This data is used by both the SCRCA and our partners to help guide policy development, prioritize research efforts, and implement rehabilitation and protection measures.

Water Quality Monitoring

Every year, the SCRCA monitors local water quality through the chemical analysis of surface water samples collected from 21 sites throughout the watershed and the collection and identification of bottom-dwelling biological indicators (benthic invertebrates) from 14 sites. In 2023, 158 surface water samples were collected and analyzed for nutrients, *E. coli*, and metals, in addition to 28 benthic invertebrate samples. Water quality data is shared with partner agencies and organizations and reported on in our Watershed Report Card, released every five years.



Drain Classification

The St. Clair Region watershed is home to over 3,400 kilometres of municipal drains that serve important functions for both the agricultural community and municipalities. They also serve as habitat for an array of native fish. On behalf of the Department of Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO), the SCRCA Biology Department samples drains throughout the watershed to support the classification of drains as part of the Fish and Fish Habitat Protection Program. The program ensures fish and fish habitat are protected by issuing permits for drain maintenance activities (e.g., cleanouts) based on the drain's sensitivity to disturbance (classification). The SCRCA collected 430 fishes, representing 8 species from 6 unclassified drains in 2023 to support the streamlining of DFOs drain maintenance review and authorization mandate.

North Sydenham Mussel and Host Fishes Inventory

The Sydenham River is one of the most biodiverse rivers in Canada. It is home to at least 82 of the 129 native freshwater fish species found in Ontario and has the greatest diversity of freshwater mussels in all of Canada. With funding provided by DFO's Habitat Stewardship Program, the SCRCA initiated a new freshwater mussel and fish sampling program where fish and mussel information was collected in previously un-sampled streams to continue filling knowledge gaps related to Species at Risk (SAR) distribution and population. Sampling efforts focused on Lake Huron and St. Clair River tributaries (10 sites) in 2023. Four species of mussels were recorded and 906 fishes were collected, identified, and released, representing 23 different species. The three-year project will see sampling efforts focus on the North Branch of the Sydenham River in 2024 and 2025 with the goal of aiding species recovery while simultaneously implementing stewardship projects and providing education and outreach opportunities to mitigate threats and raise awareness of aquatic SAR.



Captive Hatch and Release Turtle Program

The St. Clair Region watershed is home to six of eight different species of turtle found in Ontario – all of which are considered Species at Risk. The SCRCA's Captive Hatch and Release program aims to increase turtle hatchling survivorship by eliminating threats to turtle eggs posed by nest predation, shoreline development, and human activities. Efforts focus on the collection and incubation of eggs laid by the Eastern Spiny Softshell Turtle – an endangered species at imminent risk of extinction. The 2023 program saw the collection of 2,939 eggs from at-risk nests throughout the watershed and the release of 2,621 turtle hatchlings back into the wild. Additionally, 2023 marked the release of the 10,000th turtle hatchling since the program began in 2016!

2023 Highlights



Fish Monitoring

27 fish species

2 invasive species

Tubenose Goby
Round Goby



Mussel Monitoring

4 mussel species

Cylindrical Papershell
White Heelsplitter
Creeper
Giant Floater



Turtle Program

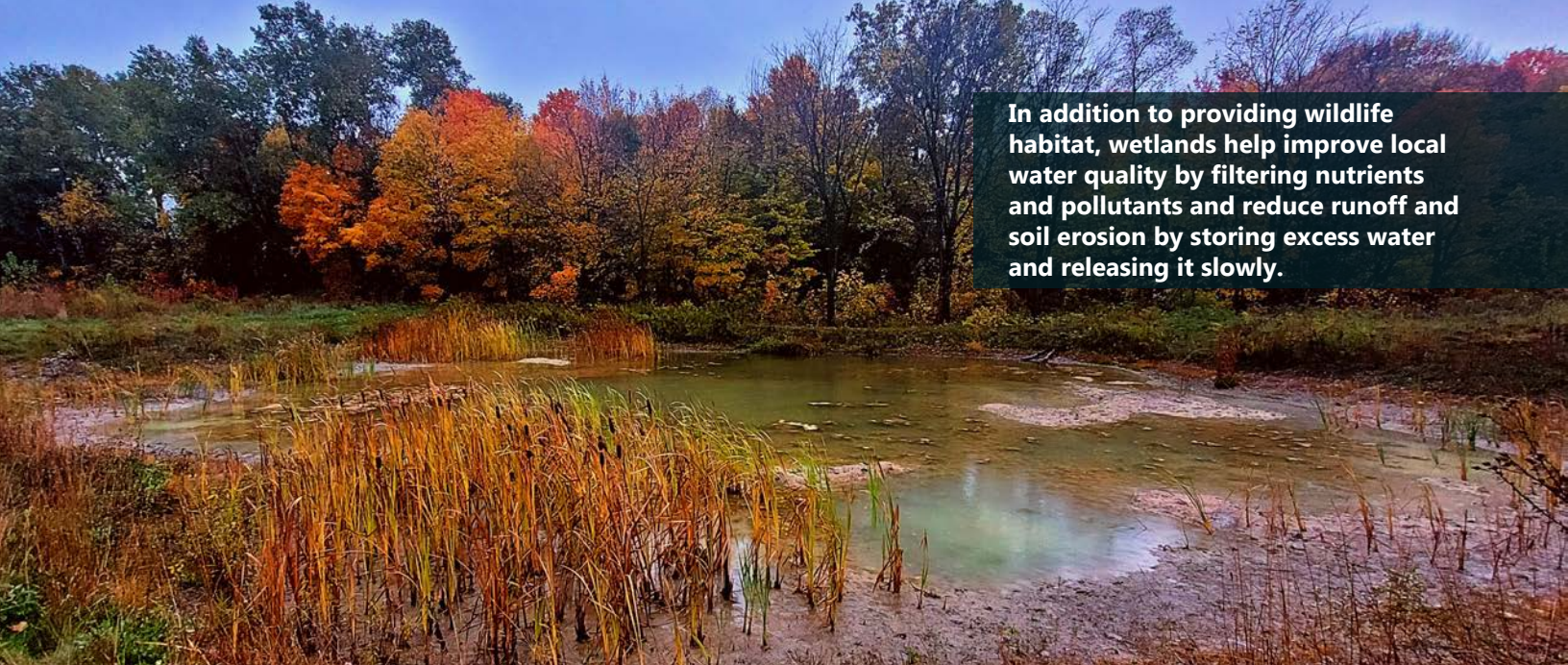
2,621 turtle hatchlings

869 Eastern Spiny Softshell
Turtles
555 Northern Map Turtles
1,157 Snapping Turtles
40 Midland Painted Turtles



Snake Monitoring

SCRCA Biologists found 3 clutches of hatched Eastern foxsnake eggs, totaling 40 individuals, in one of our artificial nesting structures. The network increased to 16 in 2023 with the construction of 6 additional structures in targeted habitat where Eastern foxsnakes are likely to find them.



In addition to providing wildlife habitat, wetlands help improve local water quality by filtering nutrients and pollutants and reduce runoff and soil erosion by storing excess water and releasing it slowly.

Stewardship and Forestry

The SCRCA promotes and supports activities that will create healthy watersheds and improve local water quality and soil health. Conservation Authority staff achieve this by providing educational opportunities, technical advice, and financial assistance to local landowners interested in establishing Best Management Practices (BMPs) and stewardship projects on their properties, such as tree planting and wetland creation. The SCRCA also offers several forestry services to promote sustainable woodlot practices.

Environmental Stewardship

Environmental stewardship projects are completed annually throughout the St. Clair Region watershed to improve and protect rural water quality and soil health. SCRCA staff actively seek grants to provide funding to support the efforts of local landowners. In 2023, \$537,000 in grant funding was secured to support 41 projects, with participating landowners contributing an additional \$121,300. In total, over 37 hectares of agricultural land (valued at approximately \$805,000) were taken out of production by local landowners to allow for the implementation of stewardship projects.



2023 Stewardship Projects

28 tree planting projects (33 hectares)

7 wetland projects (4.8 hectares)

4 erosion control projects

- including 30 berms and 1 municipal drain erosion project

2 cover crop projects (36.5 hectares)



Stewardship staff organize several events throughout the year to provide interested landowners with information on stewardship projects and potential funding opportunities while also showcasing current on the ground projects.

Tree Planting

The SCRCA had another successful tree planting year in 2023, with 74,740 seedlings and 887 large-stock trees planted throughout the St. Clair Region watershed. A total of 65,730 tree seedlings were planted by SCRCA seasonal staff on 28 properties. Large-stock trees and the remaining 9,010 seedling trees were provided to local landowners and municipalities for plantations, windbreaks, and roadside plantings, among others.

Tree Seed Collection

Every fall, SCRCA staff collect seeds from native trees throughout the watershed. These seeds grow into trees that will be used in future afforestation projects in the SCRCA region to ensure the trees produced are genetically adapted to our local growing conditions. Seed collection in 2023 improved significantly from 2022 with a variety of native tree seeds collected. A total of 3,387 L was collected throughout the watershed by SCRCA staff and two dedicated landowners with an abundance of black walnuts on their property. Seeds from a total of 10 different species were collected which will result in a greater diversity of trees available for the 2025, 2026, and 2027 tree planting seasons.



The SCRCA worked with the Canadian Chestnut Council in September to help reestablish American Chestnut in the St. Clair Region watershed by planting 100 trees at Warwick Conservation Area. The American Chestnut is a Species at Risk in southwestern Ontario after being almost completely wiped out by an invasive bark fungus in the mid-1900s.

Lambton County Woodlands Conservation By-Law

Since 2011, the SCRCA has partnered with the County of Lambton and has provided professional forestry services in administering the County of Lambton Woodlands Conservation By-Law. The by-law aims to encourage good forestry practices among County woodland owners to ensure sustainable harvesting and maintenance. While enforcement of the by-law can occur for unauthorized woodland removals, etc., the SCRCA also implements an educational component to engage landowners on the environmental and social benefits of woodlands and best management practices to promote the preservation of tree cover within the County.



Tomorrow's Greener Schools Today - Lambton

The SCRCA and Lambton Public Health were excited to revive the Tomorrow's Greener Schools Today – Lambton program after a three-year hiatus due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The program sees Authority and Health Unit staff and students from Lambton County elementary schools plant trees to increase greenspace and shade in their schoolyards. The 2023 initiative resulted in 59 trees planted at six schools. Over 110 students participated in the 2023 program which includes an educational component that introduces students to the benefits of trees from both a health (e.g., sun protection) and environmental perspective.





Wawanosh Wetland Conservation Area, located east of the City of Sarnia, is a provincially significant marsh and popular hiking location known for its excellent bird-watching opportunities.

Conservation Areas

Research has shown that spending time in nature has many positive effects on both mental and physical health. The SCRCA owns and maintains 13 Conservation Areas that span a total of 605 hectares throughout the watershed. Visitors can enjoy numerous recreational activities that include hiking along our over 40 km of trails, camping at our three regional campgrounds, fishing, and bird watching. In addition, the SCRCA manages seven natural areas for Lambton County.

Camping at the Authority’s three regional campgrounds (A.W. Campbell, Lorne C. Henderson, and Warwick Conservation Areas) continued to be in high demand with seasonal camping fully booked throughout the camping season. Thanks to a dedicated group of volunteers, visitors were treated to several campground events and activities including Canada Day fireworks, fishing derbies, and other family-friendly activities. The SCRCA campgrounds brought in over \$1.5M in gross revenue in 2023.



C.J. McEwen Conservation Area

Disposition of Highland Glen and C.J. McEwen Conservation Areas

In December 2023, ownership of the Highland Glen and C.J. McEwen Conservation Areas was transferred to the Town of Plympton-Wyoming, reducing the Authority’s Conservation Areas to 13 properties. The transfers were finalized after the conclusion of a 45-day public comment period and negotiations with the municipality. Both properties will remain as public spaces to support passive outdoor recreation.

Improving Accessibility and Visitor Experience

Improving the visitor experience and accessibility of Authority-owned trails and properties continues to be a priority for the SCRCA, and staff actively seek funding opportunities to support upgrades at all our Conservation Areas. In 2023, over 2 kilometres of trail were upgraded to stone-dust material, new picnic tables were purchased, 50 m of boardwalk was replaced, and treatment of the invasive grass Phragmites was initiated at Peers Wetland, among others, thanks to several government grants, local funding streams, and donations.



Stone-dust trail at Peers Wetland



GIS and IT

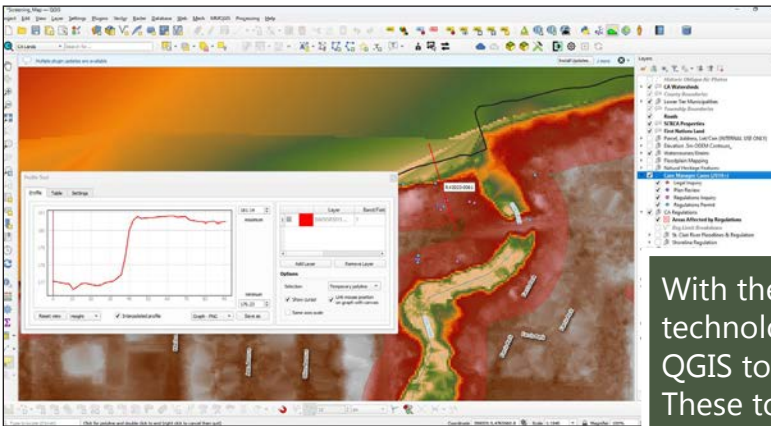
Our Geographic Information System (GIS) and Information Technology (IT) experts provide essential support services to all SCRCA departments and programs. In addition to maintaining important technological infrastructure (i.e., computers, servers), our GIS and IT staff create, update, and manipulate geographic data into a form that other departments and programs can easily comprehend and utilize. Our GIS/IT staff also research and investigate new and exciting technologies to improve efficiencies within the Authority.

2023 GIS and IT Highlights

GIS Project Highlights

In 2023, the SCRCA implemented Open Source Mapping technologies to enable access to more GIS maps and data throughout the organization. QGIS is now used exclusively in the Planning and Regulations department for development and permit applications. As the use of GIS data and maps increases, Open Source GIS software replaces the need for expensive licenses and makes GIS available to all staff for daily use. The use of PostgreSQL has also enabled granular security measures to ensure

the appropriate access privileges are granted by department. This has also resulted in better data management which improves overall efficiency for all GIS data users which, in turn, leads to improved service delivery.

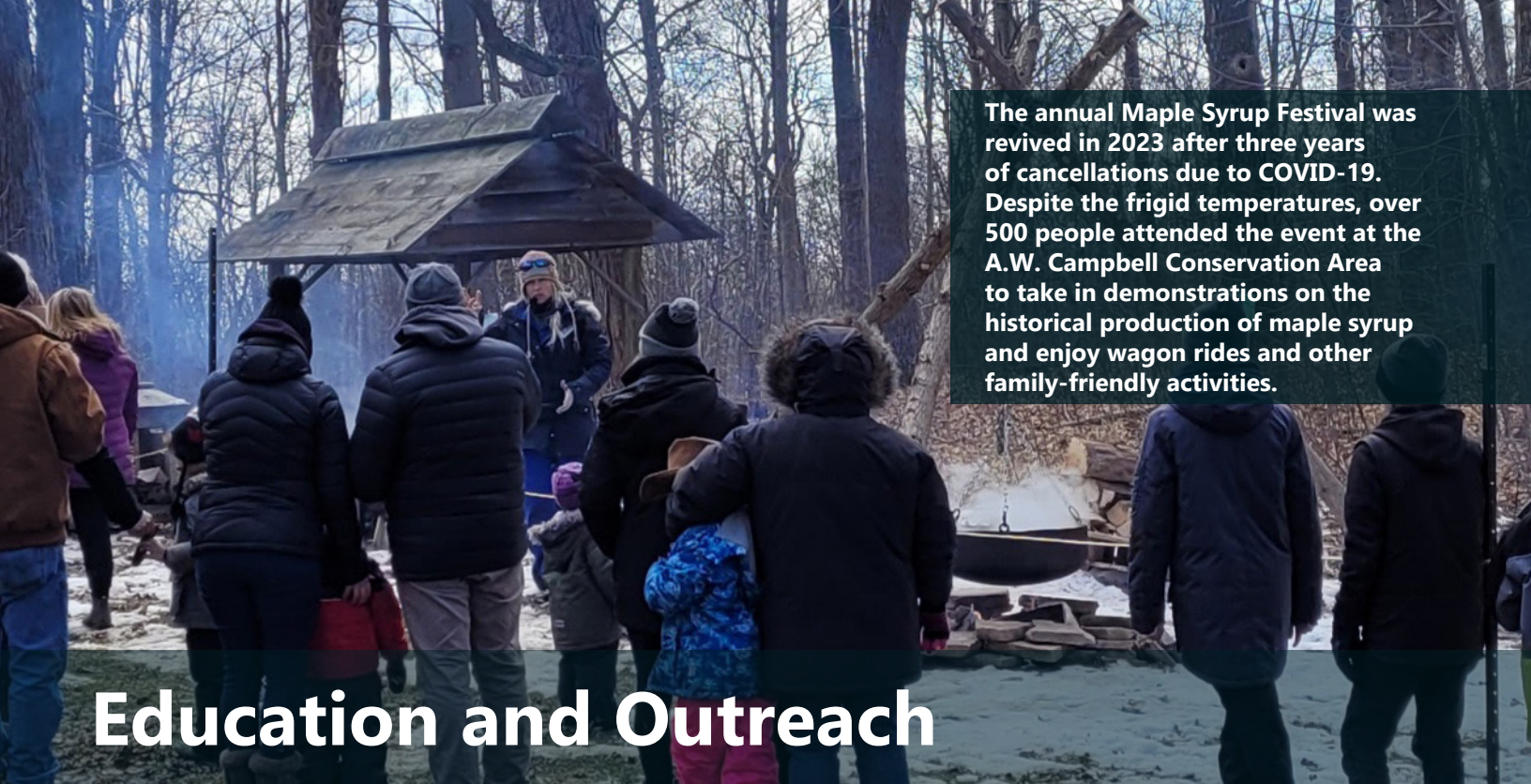


With the implementation of Open Source Mapping technologies, all SCRCA staff can utilize powerful QGIS tools to review applications for development. These tools were previously only available to GIS staff using licenced software.

IT Project Highlights

In 2023, numerous technology improvements were completed for the administration office thanks to funding support from the Federal Government’s Community Services Recovery Fund. Upgrades and improvements included:

- Upgraded office network hardware and firewall security,
- New physical server with migrations from older virtual server operating systems,
- A new cloud-based phone system to improve staff availability while working remotely, and
- Cyber Security Awareness Training for all staff.



The annual Maple Syrup Festival was revived in 2023 after three years of cancellations due to COVID-19. Despite the frigid temperatures, over 500 people attended the event at the A.W. Campbell Conservation Area to take in demonstrations on the historical production of maple syrup and enjoy wagon rides and other family-friendly activities.

Education and Outreach

Education is an important part of shaping tomorrow's environmental leaders and teaching communities about local conservation efforts. Our conservation education program offers a variety of hands-on, curriculum-based, indoor, and outdoor programs geared towards both elementary and secondary school students. Local media outlets and social media are utilized to enhance and expand conservation awareness throughout the St. Clair Region watershed and beyond. Additionally, staff organize and attend local events to introduce communities to the SCRCA, what we do, and how we can assist them in becoming more environmentally minded in their everyday lives.

Conservation Education

Conservation education programs continued to be a popular choice among teachers and students alike in 2023. The SCRCA Conservation Education Team continued to offer virtual (e.g., webinar-style) and schoolyard (Nature in Your Neighbourhood) programs, in addition to traditional field trips to accommodate the changing environment of education delivery and to overcome barriers associated with bussing costs and availability. Because of this, almost 22,000 students were engaged throughout the watershed.



2023 Conservation Education by the Numbers

1,345 students - Nature in Your Neighbourhood

6,775 students - Webinar-style Programs

2,810 students - Special Interest Groups/Local Events

3,528 students - Field Trips to Lorne C. Henderson Conservation Area

7,111 students - In-School/Sponsored Programs

261 students - Specialist High Skills Major (SHSM)

2,266 adults - Teachers/School Support Staff/Chaperones

In partnership with the Lambton-Kent District School Board and the St. Clair Catholic District School Board, the SCRCA Education team offered a webinar series education program in 2023. Initially developed in response to school closures associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, webinars continued to be a valued and inclusive education option. Over 6,700 elementary students were engaged between February and June 2023 on topics including 'Nature in Winter', 'Flooding in the Sydenham Watershed', and 'A Day in the Life of a Farmer', among others.

A Day in the Life of a Farmer Webinar



Communications

Social Media



Facebook

2,520 Followers
162 Posts
80,411 Accounts Reached
3,164 Engagements



X

919 Followers
160 Posts
161 Reposts
1,046 Engagements



Instagram

1,024 Followers
76 Posts
6,057 Accounts Reached
2,397 Engagements

Media Relations

15 media releases
811 news article mentions

Website

147,589 website views

Special Events 2023

Soil Health and Nitrogen Management with Dr. David Burton

Virtual

Decision-Making Around BMPs

Virtual

Garden Delights:

Planting with Native Species Workshop

Strathroy

Maple Syrup Festival

A.W. Campbell Conservation Area
 Alvinston

Rural Landowner Workshop

(in cooperation with Upper Thames River and Ausable Bayfield Conservation Authorities)
 Ilderton

Crump Family Farm Sediment and Erosion Control Feature Tour

Middlesex Centre

Al Bycraft Memorial Bridge Dedication

Coldstream Conservation Area
 Middlesex Centre

Ipperwash Beach Shoreline Clean-up

Lambton Shores

A Geocaching Adventure

Lorne C. Henderson Conservation Area
 Petrolia

St. Clair River Evening

Bogey's Inn & Suites
 St. Clair Township



Through the Healthy Lake Huron program, SCRCA staff completed a survey of private tile outlets into municipal drains, looking at the current state of erosion protection around these outlets.

Special Projects

Healthy Lake Huron

To improve water quality and promote clean beaches along the southeast shores of Lake Huron, the Healthy Lake Huron (HLH) program was launched in 2011. Since then, the SCRCA has partnered with all levels of government, local health units, other Conservation Authorities, and community groups to retain nutrients on land and reduce the risk of harmful algal blooms between Sarnia and Tobermory. In 2023, the HLH team worked with landowners, Drainage Superintendents, and contractors to highlight Agricultural Drain Best Management Practices. This included co-hosting a “Drainage Bus Tour”, where close to 50 drainage engineers, superintendents, and government staff attended to learn about rural green infrastructure and the different best management practices implemented during routine agricultural drain maintenance. The goal of the tour was to highlight how best management practices can greatly assist in improving water quality along Lake Huron’s shorelines.



Sydenham River Aquatic Species at Risk Threat Inventory

Through funding from the Habitat Stewardship Program for Aquatic Species at Risk, the SCRCA is completing a Threat Inventory for aquatic species at risk in the Sydenham River. The East Sydenham River supports a wide diversity of plants and animals and is designated as one of 13 freshwater Key Biodiversity Areas in Canada by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN). Key Biodiversity Areas are areas contributing significantly to the global persistence of biodiversity. For this project, the SCRCA is synthesizing data on local threats to the aquatic environment that can be used to direct stewardship and recovery efforts.

St. Clair River Area of Concern

The St. Clair River was identified as an Area of Concern (AOC) in 1987 due to a lengthy history of urban and industrial development. For over 30 years, the local community, Indigenous Peoples, and government have been working together to improve local water quality and aquatic habitat to remove the river from the list of Great Lakes AOCs. A new 5-year work plan for the St. Clair River AOC was finalized in 2023 and outlines the actions needed to be completed by 2027 to be able to re-designate the remaining Beneficial Use Impairments (BUI). On January 20, 2022, the Beneficial Use Impairment related to Restrictions on Drinking Water Consumption or Taste and Odour Problems entered the process to be redesignated to a not impaired status based on the outcome of a BUI assessment report. Engagement of stakeholders and Indigenous communities on the recommendation began in 2022 and concluded in December 2023. Confirmation on the redesignation recommendation for the Drinking Water BUI by both Environment and Climate Change Canada and the Ontario Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks is expected in early 2024.

To assist in gathering information on the consumption of fish from the St. Clair River by recreational and sports anglers, a community survey was developed in 2021 and closed in December 2022 with over 170 responses received. A summary of the survey results was prepared and presented to community groups and the Binational Public Advisory Council in 2023. The survey findings will be incorporated into the status assessment report that will be prepared for the BUI related to Restrictions on Fish and Wildlife Consumption.

The Canadian Remedial Action Plan Implementation Committee (CRIC) Habitat Subcommittee team made significant progress on the development of the draft status assessment report for BUI 14 - Loss of Fish and Wildlife Habitat. With seven delisting criteria to be considered as part of the assessment, the report has required compiling information on efforts over the past 30 years to restore and protect fish and wildlife habitat in the St. Clair River Area of Concern.

In September, the CRIC hosted the inaugural St. Clair River AOC Event (named "Honouring the St. Clair River") to provide an update to the community on the progress in addressing the remaining BUIs. The event also included a presentation from the Department of Fisheries and Oceans Canada on invasive species in the Great Lakes.



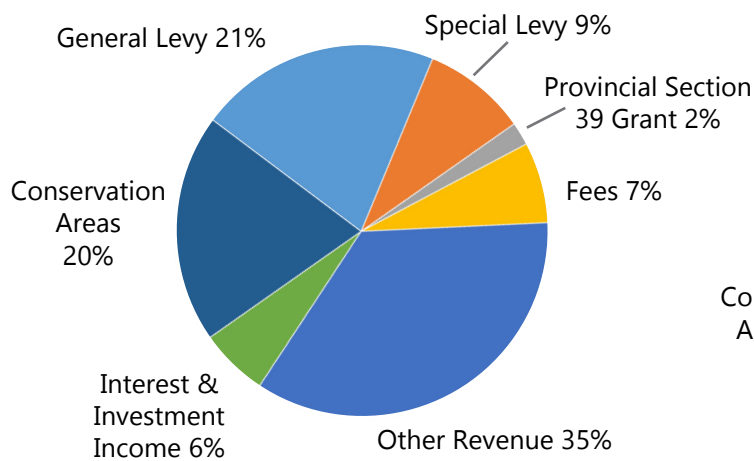
Sydenham River Watershed Phosphorus Management Plan

Through funding provided by Environment and Climate Change Canada and the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation, and Parks, the SCRCA has been coordinating the development of a phosphorus management plan for the Sydenham River to reduce excess loading of this nutrient to waterways, which contributes to degraded local water quality and algal blooms in Lake Erie. The objective of this program is to work with local stakeholders to identify sources of phosphorus, determine best-value solutions, and develop an outreach strategy.

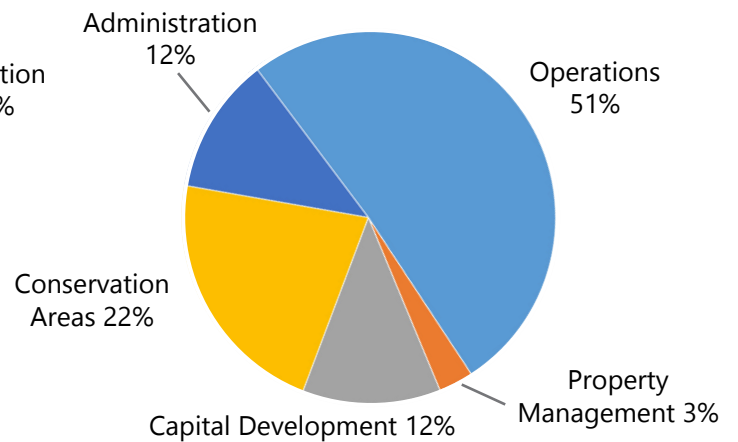
Administration

The administration and finance team at the St. Clair Region Conservation Authority plays an integral role in fostering a positive and safe workplace for all Authority employees and managing the Authority budget. Our team continuously updates and improves SCRCA policies to achieve business excellence and sustainability while maintaining a positive corporate atmosphere.

2023 Revenues – \$7,368,325*



2023 Expenditures – \$7,195,075*



*unaudited

Over **\$2.3 million** in funding secured by the SCRCA from 32 organizations, contracts, and/or government funding streams (2023-2024 fiscal year).



Imperial Oil Sarnia generously donated \$30,000 to support the SCRCA's 2023 Captive Hatch and Release program that saw the rescue and incubation of at-risk turtle eggs and the release of over 2,600 turtle hatchlings. Imperial Oil representatives joined SCRCA staff to see some of the 2023 turtle hatchlings (pictured) and help release them back into the wild.

Our Staff

Administration Office

Donna Blue, Manager of Communications
Ron Brooks, Regulations Officer (Dec)
Shelby Campbell, GIS Project Technician (Jan - Aug),
Planning Technician (Sept - Dec)
Vitra Chodha, Environmental Planner (Jan - Jul)
Stephen Clark, Risk Management Official/Inspector
Emily De Cloet, Water Resources Specialist (Jan - Jun)
Melissa Deisley, Director of Planning and Regulations
Nicole Drumm, Special Projects Technician
Chris Durand, Manager of IT/GIS
Emily Febrey, Stewardship Communications Technician
(Jan - Aug), Communication and Education Technician
(Sept - Dec)
Ashley Fletcher, Administrative Assistant/Board Coordinator
Nicholas Hagerty, Water Resources Technician (Jul - Dec)
Kate Jamieson, Payroll and Accounting Clerk
Chunning Li, Director of Corporate Services
Emily Millette, Species at Risk Field Technician (Jan - Sep)
Mike Moroney, St. Clair River RAP Coordinator
Rashida Naznin, Engineering Technician
Krista Nicolson, Species at Risk Technician (Jan - Apr)
Kelsey Oatman, Planning and Regulations Clerk
Craig Paterson, Acting Manager of Biology (Jan - Nov),
Manager of Biology (Dec)
Tim Payne, Manager of Forestry
Ken Phillips, General Manager
Girish Sankar, Director of Water Resources
Alison Seidler, GIS Specialist
Jeff Sharp, Conservation Services Specialist
Steve Shaw, Manager of Conservation Services
Kelli Smith, Conservation Lands Specialist
Sarah Snetsinger, Watershed Biologist

Merrick Van Der Vaart, Drainage Officer (Dec)
Jessica Van Zwol, Healthy Watershed Specialist
Jeff Vlasman, Regulations Officer (Jan - Jul), Regulations
Coordinator (Aug - Dec)
Meagan Weber, Regulations Officer
Greg Wilcox, Manager of Conservation Areas

Drinking Water Source Protection

John Campbell, Senior Information Management Analyst
Deb Kirk, Administrative Assistant

Field Offices

McKeough Floodway

Shane White, Maintenance Foreman, McKeough Floodway

A.W. Campbell Conservation Area

Don Skinner, Superintendent
Maryanne Nieuwenhuizen, Assistant Superintendent

Lorne C. Henderson Conservation Area

Terry Barrie, Superintendent
Luke Derks, Assistant Superintendent
Melissa Levi, Conservation Education Coordinator
Myra Spiller, Conservation Education/Community
Partnership Technician

Warwick Conservation Area

Glenn Baxter, Superintendent
Derek Thompson, Assistant Superintendent

McLean Conservation Lands

Scott O'Brien, Superintendent



During the holiday season, staff at the St. Clair Region Conservation Authority collected non-perishable food items and monetary donations for the local Salvation Army Food Bank.

Thanks to the efforts of the SCRA social committee, initiatives like the holiday food drive along with other team building activities keep staff connected across departments and engaged on local issues and challenges facing the communities we serve.



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