



Essex Region Conservation  
the *place* for life

## 2017 Annual Report



Essex Region  
Conservation Authority  
*sustaining the place for life*



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### Contact us

360 Fairview Avenue West  
Suite 311, Essex, ON, N8M 1Y6

P: 519.776.5209  
F: 519.776.8688  
W: [www.essexregionconservation.ca](http://www.essexregionconservation.ca)



Conservation  
ONTARIO  
*Natural Champions*



## MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

As Canada celebrated its 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary from coast to coast to coast, Essex Region Conservation implemented many projects to enrich and sustain the Windsor-Essex County-Pelee Island region as the Place for Life. Trails were one of the great local news stories of the year, as we opened the Cypher Systems Group Greenway and the Rotary (1918) Centennial Hub, bringing our community's vision of a region connected by trails to fruition. As well, the entire Chrysler Canada Greenway was re-surfaced thanks to a contribution from the Ontario Trillium Foundation. In total, over the past 18 months, \$2.6 million dollars have

been fundraised through our Foundation and invested in our regional trail system.

We continue to express our most sincere gratitude to our partners, volunteers, donors, and colleagues in all levels of government for your ongoing commitment to making our region the Place for Life.

Sincerely,

Rick Fryer  
Chair/Councillor, Town of Amherstburg

# 2017 AT A GLANCE

Great places don't just happen...



**92,500**

Trees planted to increase green space.



**2,064**

Awesome **volunteers** helped enrich & sustain the Place for Life.



**51**

Projects implemented to improve **water quality**.



**81**

**Events** and **workshops** hosted to connect people with the Place for Life.



**12,224**

**Students** educated through outdoor education programs.



**9 days**

Average **permit response times** for minor developments.



**92.5**

**Acres** of forest, tall grass prairie, and wetlands restored.



**78**

Surface, ground and benthos water quality sites **monitored**.



**1,042**

**Permits** requested and reviewed to ensure landowner protection.



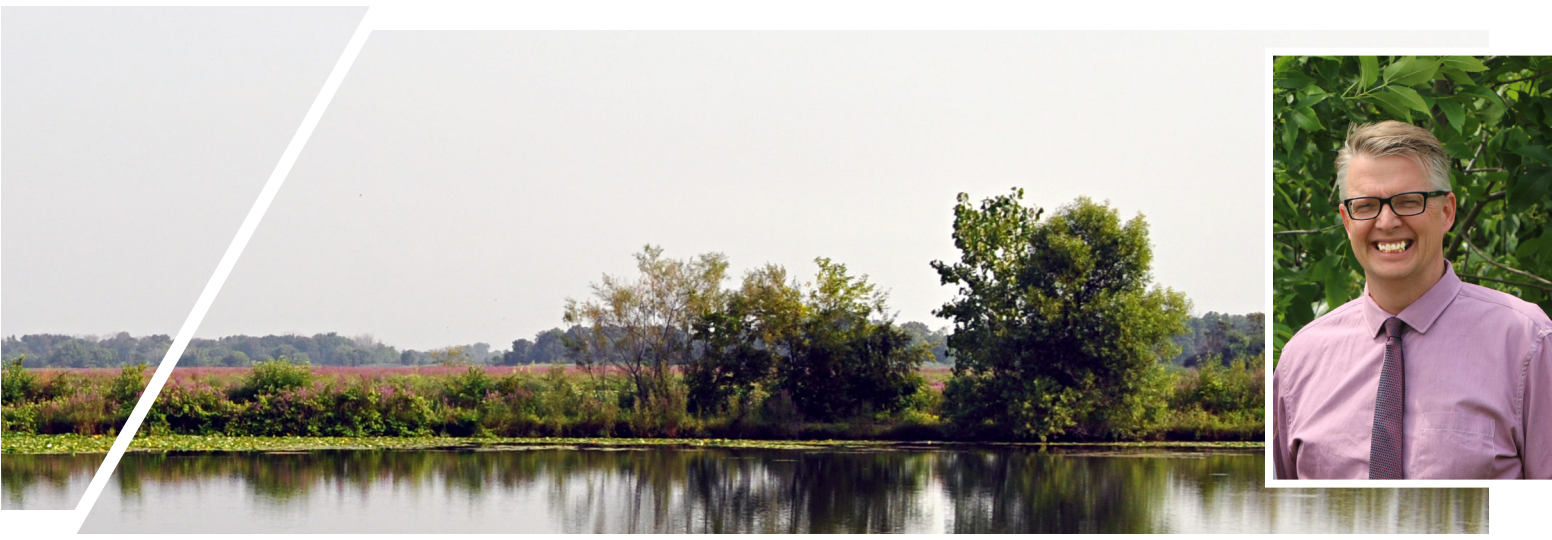
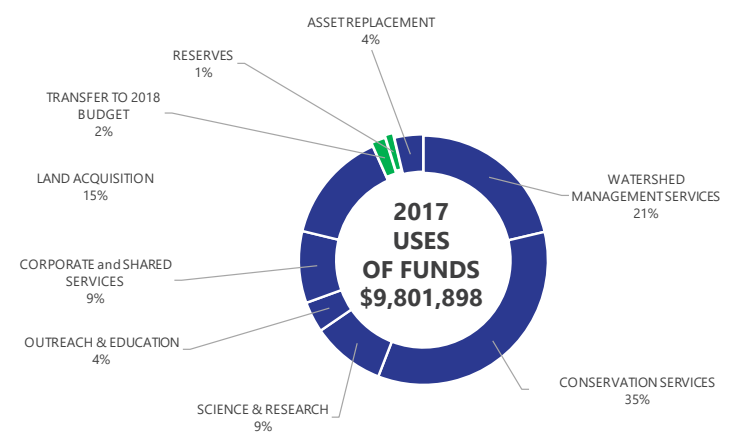
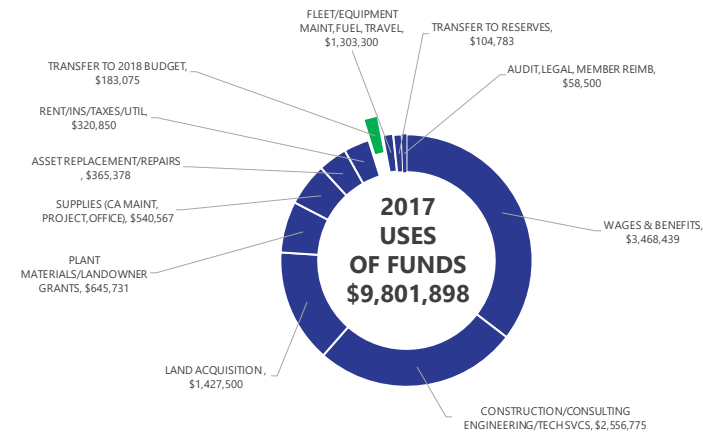
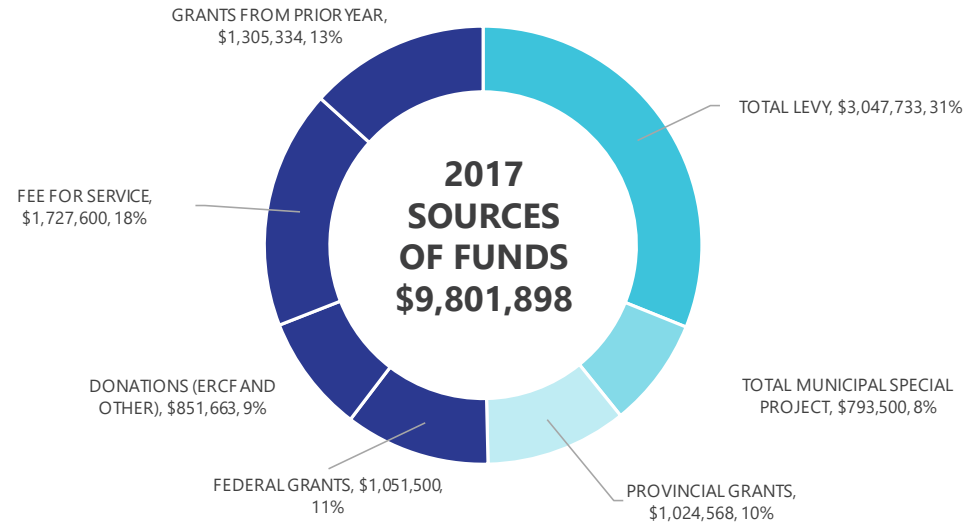
**\$2.6 million**

invested in **trails** to connect communities to natural landscapes.



Essex Region Conservation  
the place for life

# 2017 FINANCIAL REVIEW



## MESSAGE FROM THE GENERAL MANAGER

In December 2017, the Province of Ontario passed into law Bill 139, the "Building Better Communities and Conserving Watersheds Act, 2017" which modernizes the Conservation Authorities Act. ERCA, and the entire Conservation Authorities network, worked vigilantly over the last 2 years to ensure the new Act recognizes the wide variety of science-based, watershed management programs and services that we have delivered for more than 70 years.

Through monitoring and watershed management programs, ERCA and other Conservation Authorities see the growing impacts of climate change on a daily basis. This includes more frequent flooding,

stressed biodiversity, and reduced water levels and flow in streams and rivers.

We were well prepared to respond to this legislation with the launch of our Place for Life Policies earlier in the year. This comprehensive approach will allow us to operationalize our Strategic Plan while positioning us to capitalize on opportunities associated with these pending changes; all the while, ensuring that our region remains the Place for Life.

Yours in Conservation,

**Richard J. H. Wyma**  
General Manager/Secretary-Treasurer

**Note:** The 2017 Sources and Uses of Funds graphs are based on information available as of January 15th, 2018 and as such the numbers are subject to change. The graphs depict the expenses incurred by the Authority both by type and by program, and how those expenses were funded. The graphs are not intended to replace audited Financial Statements and readers interested in the financial condition of the Authority should consult Financial Statements, prepared in accordance with GAAP. Audited Financial Statements are available annually after June 30th and include all statements and schedules required for public sector entities.

# PLACE FOR LIFE POLICIES

In 2017, ERCA launched the comprehensive Place for Life Policies. This initiative encompasses all five key strategic directions identified in our 2016 – 2025 Strategic Plan – Sustaining the Place for Life. The policies combine existing Board-approved programs and related initiatives, as well as policies and principles that respond to the current conservation challenges identified in ERCA’s Strategic Plan. These policies include direction related to climate change, Great Lakes, natural heritage protection and restoration, sustainable places, outdoor education, recreation and cultural heritage appreciation.



## Great Lakes



		2015	2016	2017
Water Quality Improvement Projects Implemented	Agriculture/Other (total)	26	88	28
	Detroit River Watersheds	6	10	10
	Lake Erie Watersheds	10	19	13
	Lake St. Clair Watersheds	10	12	5
	Great Lakes Agricultural Priority Subwatershed Stewardship Initiative	-	47	23
Number of wells decommissioned		4	9	5
Number of landowners participating	Agriculture/Other	30	58	23
Number of surface water quality monitoring stations		71	77	58
Number of ground water quality monitoring stations		8	8	8
Number of benthos monitoring stations		15	8	20

## Sustainable Communities



	2015	2016	2017
Planning Services - transactions/year	597	689	822
Kilometres of Trails owned, managed & developed	79.6	95.1	98
Number of volunteers	2,580	1,904	2,064
Number of outreach events	33	35	19
Number of schoolyard naturalization projects	7	3	2
ERCA hosted special events	38	36	29
Number of schools	78	96	71
Number of unique education programs	285	294	434
Number of students	9,538	9,986	12,224
Number of public meetings/workshops	16	19	31
Day Use Visitors to JRPH (estimated)	10,895	11,190	11,830
Day Use Visitors to HBCA (estimated)	5,985	9,000	12,588
Number of seasonal campsites purchased	72	69	67

## A Strong, Resilient Organization



	2015	2016	4,2017
Area of CA Jurisdiction	1,681.3 sq km	1,681.3 sq km	1,681.3 sq km
Watershed Population	332,350	326,105	325,351
Staff - Permanent and Long-Term Contract	34	36	36
Staff - Special Grant and Short-Term Full Time Equivalent Contract	9	8	10
Average Full Time Staff Length of Service	9	10	12
Number of Local Committees, Boards and Advisory Panels with ERCA representation	25	27	29
Number of Provincial Committees, Boards and Advisory Panels with ERCA representation	26	26	28
Number of research studies with ERCA involvement	8	8	8
Number of unique visitors to our website	55,000	68,591	70,997
Number of Facebook followers	1,617	2,424	2,948
Number of Twitter followers	2,003	2,428	2,676
Number of Instagram followers (launched October 2016)		90	225
Number of Youtube video views		2,134 views 4,334 min	2,550 views 4,893 min

# ERCA ACCOUNTABILITY 2017

The following provides a three-year 'by the numbers' comparison of achievements. This report follows the priorities identified in our Strategic Plan, and these actions help ensure Windsor-Essex County-Peel Island are the Place for Life.



## Climate Change

	2015	2016	2017
Permits Requested	753	983	1,042
Permits Issued	560	808	1,005
Clearances Issued	100	97	135
Request for Information Letters Issued	242	273	392
Permits to Take Water Applications	3	4	5
Appeals	13	15	10
Appeals in CA favour	13	15	10
Violations Issued	14	19	34
Average Response time for permits			
Minor Development	15 days	10 days	9.13 days
Major Development	30 days	21 days	34 days
Alteration to Waterways	15 days	9 days	8.2 days
Number of structures located in the floodplain	10,000	10,000	10,000
Kilometres of watercourses with floodplain mapping completed	609	609	609
Hectares (area) digitally mapped delineating the CA Regulation Limit	38,304	38,304	38,304
Hectares (area) digitally mapped delineating the flooding hazard limit (flood plains)	38,304	38,304	38,304
Metres of shoreline protected from flooding and erosion	250	245	250
\$ Value of Water/Infrastructure Contributions to Municipalities	772,500	287,500	120,000
Flood Messages			
Watershed Conditions	6	2	13
Flood Watches	10	7	11
Flood Warnings	3	3	4
Wind Warnings	0	0	1

## Landscapes & Habitats



	2015	2016	2017
Total Landholdings (Hectares)	1,669.6	1,669.6	1,735
Hectares of recreational land owned and managed	1,036.8	1,036.8	1,056.8
Total hectares under forest management plans	44.39	44.39	44.39
Total Taxes for CA Landholdings	\$49,166	\$75,290	\$66,661
Land Acquisition in Reporting Year (in acres)	51	0	160
Value of acquisitions (Fair Market Value)	\$508,000	0	\$1,562,250
Total Acres of Habitat Restored	142.5	103.5	92.5
Number and Acres of Trees	125,450 trees 115 ac	101,000 trees 87 ac	92,500 trees 70 ac
Number and Acres of Wetlands	4 wetlands 5 ac	5 wetlands 5 ac	6 wetlands 15 ac
Number and Acres of Prairie	8 sites / 22.5 ac	8 sites/ 11.5 ac	5 sites/ 7.5 ac
Number of landowners involved in restoration	209	214	222
Trees planted by volunteers	2,912	2,603	2,973
Native plants planted by volunteers	1,669	3,858	1,610

# 2017 WATERSHED HIGHLIGHTS

We continued to implement the priorities identified in our Strategic Plan. As part of a team of Conservation Authorities, we worked with the Province of Ontario on the modernization of the **Conservation Authorities Act**, which addresses the roles, responsibilities and governance of our organizations in resource management and environmental protection. The Act was passed into law in December, 2017.

The following highlights are a snapshot of the projects and programs implemented this year to enrich and sustain the Essex Region as the Place for Life.



## Climate Change

*We are continuing to observe a changing climate. While efforts to slow climate change must continue, we also need to help our partner communities adapt to its impacts. This year, ERCA:*



- Aided municipalities in responding to the **most significant recorded rainfall** in Windsor's history, which caused widespread surface and basement flooding. This marked the second 1:100 year flood in less than a year, and insured damages exceeded \$300 million.
- Initiated steps to develop a regional **Climate Change Strategy** to address the ongoing impacts associated with a changing climate.
- Continued to coordinate the **Regional Stormwater Guidelines** in partnership with all municipalities to ensure consistent and complete application of stormwater requirements.
- Issued a record 38 advisories ranging from **water safety conditions statements to flood warnings**.
- Provided significant technical assistance to landowners for breakwall and shoreline protection requests as the third highest lake levels in history were recorded in this region.
- Worked with the City of Windsor, Town of Tecumseh and Town of LaSalle on a number of projects to **prevent flooding** in new and existing developments. These included improvements to the Lennon Drain, Upper Little River Watershed, Bouffard and North Roseland Subdivisions.

## Great Lakes

*The Great Lakes are our most significant natural resource. Our 2012 Watershed Report Card identified failing grades for surface water quality in virtually every watershed. More must be done to protect and improve water quality, and this year, ERCA:*



- Implemented **51 water quality improvement projects** across the region to protect soil health and water resources.
- Conducted year-round **water quality monitoring** at 58 surface water, ground water, and benthos monitoring stations across the region to collect data about land and weather-based influences on our rivers and streams.
- Worked with the Great Lakes Institute for Environmental Research to resolve issues related to **microbial contamination** along our beaches and with the provincial and federal governments to monitor and estimate sources of phosphorus entering Lake Erie.
- Partnered with academic researchers at the University of Waterloo and the University of Guelph, to research the effectiveness of **phosphorus-reducing Best Management Practices**.
- Collaborated with the University of Windsor's Chemistry Department to develop a new off grid **phosphorous filter** for installation in a wetland in 2018. This new filter is being designed to remove soluble Phosphorus from local waterways.
- Showcased best management practices and innovative technologies that will conserve soil, maintain productivity, improve water quality and quantity, and illustrate that farming and the environment can coexist at the **Essex County Demonstration Farm**, in collaboration with the Essex Soil & Crop Improvement Association, OMAFRA extension personnel, and AAFC scientists.
- Hosted the **Western Lake Erie Student Conference** to bring together 100 secondary school Special High Skills Major students to learn about the challenges associated with Lake Erie, and to engage them in helping to find solutions.
- Protected sources of drinking water by providing Risk Management Services on behalf of all of our member municipalities. As well, significant progress was made in implementing the policies in the **Essex Region Source Protection Plan**.
- Provided 200 people with the opportunity to better appreciate and connect with the Detroit River as a Canadian Heritage River at the **Eau Canada Paddling Event**, hosted in celebration of Canadian Rivers Day. Participants learned about the human and natural heritage and recreational values of the Detroit River, as well as all of the efforts being made towards its environmental restoration.
- Worked with senior levels of government toward finalizing the **Domestic Action Plan**, a national strategy to reduce Harmful Algae Blooms in Lake Erie. To date, ERCA has been at the forefront of experimental programs such as the Great Lakes Agricultural Stewardship Initiative (GLASI) to inform this strategy and reduce phosphorus loadings throughout our region.



## A Strong, Resilient Organization

*ERCA is a sustainable, resilient and valued agency. Since 1973, ERCA has been striving to achieve a state of sustainability for the Essex Region. In 2017, we worked toward organizational sustainability in the following ways:*



- Collaborated with the Essex Region Conservation Foundation to launch the Place for Life campaign in June. The campaign hopes to raise \$1 million dollars over three years for greening our region, connecting our community through trails, inspire future generations through outdoor education, and preserve our heritage.
- Achieved our Operational Reserves target, which was set in the 2013 – 2017 Sustainability Plan: The Way Forward. These reserves buffer for expenses which are difficult to predict, not insurable and which can significantly impact the Authority's financial condition, such as revenue declines related to weather, closure of properties or economic downturns.
- Sold the Authority's minority ownership in the Essex County Civic Centre, resulting in a reduction of both annual operating costs and administrative responsibilities.
- Eliminated the historical operational deficit as the final year of our existing Sustainability Plan was successfully implemented. The next phase of this plan is currently being developed to reflect the 2016-2025 Strategic Plan.



## Landscapes & Habitats

*Our landscapes and habitats are among the most significant in Canada, and, while we have planted more than 6 million trees and achieved 8.5% natural areas coverage, more action is needed to reach our 12% target. This year, ERCA:*



- Planted and distributed **92,500 trees** and restored **70 acres** of habitat to natural area.
- Utilized a new specialized prairie seed drill to restore four acres of **prairie habitat** in the Cedar Creek Watershed.
- Created 15 acres of new **wetlands and adjacent riparian areas** to help improve our water quality while simultaneously creating new habitat for hundreds of species, including animals that are nationally recognized as endangered.
- Initiated a feasibility study with Ducks Unlimited to design and operate a new **70 acre controlled wetland** adjacent to the Canard River.
- Enhanced terrestrial and aquatic habitat, increased wetland habitat and softened the shoreline of the abandoned marina in Sturgeon Creek to create the **Sturgeon Creek Wetland**, in partnership with the Caldwell First Nation.
- Restored sections of **Spring Garden Prairie** habitat, owned by the City of Windsor, by removing invasive species such as Autumn Olive and Phragmites. This restoration project will enhance habitat for multiple species-at-risk.



## Sustainable Communities

*Our urban areas will continue to grow and expand: ERCA will need to continue to work with all partners to plan sustainable communities that reduce urban sprawl, are walkable, have a healthy food supply and incorporate green infrastructure. This year, ERCA:*



- Assisted five partner municipalities with **Official Plans** updates to ensure the delegated responsibility for Natural Hazards is being properly incorporated into municipal planning documents and continued to advise on Natural Heritage issues for the region
- Began construction of new **boardwalks at Maidstone Conservation Area** to improve environmental sustainability and accessibility.
- Advocated for improvements to the **Esseltine Drain** to ensure development and hazard issues were properly addressed.
- Worked with the **Municipality of Leamington** to address drainage matters and environmental sustainability associated with new development.
- Initiated a **Junior Curator Program** at the John R. Park Homestead to allow students to engage with their local cultural heritage in a four week, hands-on, behind the scenes museum program

which culminated with the participants each curating their own small exhibit.

- Assisted Pelee Island with shoreline dyke assessments and preliminary ingress and egress strategies to reduce isolation.
- Aided a record **1042 landowners** in ensuring homes and new developments were protected from the dangers of flooding and erosion through permit reviews.
- Opened the **Holiday Beach cottage**, earning rave reviews from visitors to this beautiful new facility who enjoyed the natural environment of the Place for Life.
- Engaged over **12,000 students** in outdoor and conservation education programs, to provide curriculum-based experiences that teach young people about protecting our environment and preserving heritage.



- Opened the **Cypher Systems Group Greenway**, a 22 kilometre multi-use trail to support active living, promote economic diversity, and provide meaningful outdoor experiences for a healthier, more sustainable community. More than \$1.1 million dollars was raised for this project, and as part of the Place for Life campaign, Essex Region Conservation will continue to raise funds to establish new community entrances and trail connections.
- Resurfaced and graded the **Chrysler Canada Greenway** to improve accessibility and user experience, thanks to funding of \$200,000 from the Ontario Trillium Foundation, which was matched through ERCA's capital plan reserves.
- Completed the **Rotary (1918) Centennial Hub** to connect the Herb Gray Parkway trails, the Town of Tecumseh, the Town of LaSalle and the Chrysler Canada Greenway. The Hub is part of the County Wide Active Transportation System (CWATS) and the Trans Canada Trail. Partners included the Ontario Ministry of Transportation, the Town of Tecumseh, the Rotary Club of Windsor (1918), the Trans Canada Trail Foundation, Arbor Memorial, and the Essex Region Conservation Foundation.

