

# Working Together For A Healthy Environment

**2014  
Annual Report  
Summary**



# Protecting People and Property from Natural Hazards

## Promoting Safe Development and Healthy Communities

Under Section 28 Regulations of the Conservation Authorities Act, Conservation Authorities regulate development and activities in or adjacent to river or stream valleys, Great Lake shorelines, watercourses, hazard lands and wetlands in order to protect people's lives and property from natural hazards and to maintain the vitality of our watersheds.

The Authority also provides natural heritage, hazard, and surface/groundwater comments on municipal planning matters. The Authority responds to requests for property information from members of the public, lawyers, and real estate agents. These inquiries are very important so that prospective buyers of property or people wishing to work in high risk areas have a prior understanding of the risks involved.

## Flood Warnings - keeping a vigil

Flooding is a natural process. While the Conservation Authority has done much to reduce the risk to life and property, some flooding in developed areas is still inevitable. The Authority operates a flood warning program designed to warn residents in flood-prone areas. In addition, municipal representatives meet with Authority staff to review and update the Flood Warning Plan, enabling an organized and coordinated response in the event of changing watershed conditions. Through a network of 11 stream gauges, five snow sampling stations, ice monitoring, and current meteorological data, Authority staff monitor watershed conditions by tracking and updating data on an ongoing basis to scientifically determine short- and long-term trends. Should a flood be imminent, the Municipal Flood Coordinators and the media are advised and officials take appropriate action. In 2014, five events including one Flood Watch (May 13 - 16) and four Water Condition Statements were issued.



## W. Darcy McKeough Floodway

The W. Darcy McKeough Floodway is Ontario's largest flood diversion project. The diversion was constructed to help protect the Town of Wallaceburg and surrounding area from flooding. The W. Darcy McKeough Floodway is located 12 km north of Wallaceburg. The McKeough Floodway is capable of controlling all flood waters upstream of the dam by diversion and temporary storage. The Floodway controls approximately 37% of the total drainage areas of the Sydenham River upstream of Wallaceburg. Since 1984, the McKeough Floodway has been operated six times.



# Healthy Watersheds

## Grants for Landowners

The Conservation Authority's Healthy Watersheds Program is an initiative that provides technical and financial assistance to improve and protect rural water quality. The SCRCA actively seeks grants that will bring dollars into the region to support the conservation efforts of landowners. Projects include wetland creation, sediment traps, agricultural erosion control structures, buffer strips, riparian/stream bank protection, wildlife habitat creation, windbreaks, reforestation, and native grassland habitat.

In 2014-15, \$226,000 in grants were provided to landowners resulting in 34 stewardship projects. The total cost of the projects were nearly \$280,000 with a land retirement value of \$426,000. In total, 29 hectares of land were restored. Over the last 14 years, the Conservation Authority distributed more than \$2.4 million in grants to landowners which resulted in over 780 projects worth \$8.4 million.

## Helping Species at Risk

The Sydenham River watershed continues to be a hot spot in Canada for species that use aquatic habitats and are threatened with extinction. This includes many species of freshwater mussels, fish, and reptiles. The Conservation Authority received federal and provincial funds to undertake research, site-specific habitat improvements, and development and distribution of an annual newsletter. An education program where students learn about the biology and ecology of species at risk was implemented.

## Water Quality Monitoring

St. Clair Conservation, in cooperation with other agencies, monitors the quality of surface and groundwater at a number of stations throughout the watershed. Tests are conducted for surface water on parameters such as dissolved oxygen, pH, conductivity, and temperature, nutrients, *E. coli*, and metals. The health of the aquatic habitats is also assessed by sampling the invertebrate organisms such as insects, worms and crustaceans that live on the bottom or benthos of the watercourse. Groundwater is sampled at nine wells to gain a better understanding of groundwater quantity and quality. Results of this sampling form the basis for the water quality grades reported in the SCRCA Watershed Report Card.

## Tree Planting

This year, 84,000 seedling trees were planted on private and public lands. During the fall, 120 large stock potted trees were planted. Approximately \$180,000 in federal, provincial and local grant were secured through 8 separate funding programs and used to offset planting costs for most landowners taking part in the program.

## Woodlot Management Services

Qualified forestry staff provide woodlot management and marking services to landowners. This is an excellent option for landowners who would like independent advice or an appraisal of their woodlot. Management plans are created that meet the specific goals of the landowner. Proper silviculture techniques and "Good Forest Practices" are encouraged to ensure the long-term health of the woodlot while meeting the needs of the landowner.



# Great Lakes

## St. Clair River Area of Concern

The St. Clair River Area of Concern stretches from the Blue Water Bridge to the north shore of Mitchell's Bay on Lake St. Clair and includes the immediate drainage basin of the St. Clair River. This area is one of 43 Areas of Concern the International Joint Commission has identified within the Great Lakes basin where there are known environmental problems. In each area, local partners are working together to implement Remedial Action Plans so the area can be rehabilitated and removed from the list of Areas of Concern. The Conservation Authority is playing an important role in this plan by coordinating and managing projects. Delisting the St. Clair River as an Area of Concern under the Canada-US Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement is the ultimate goal of Ontario, Canada, and all local partners.

## Healthy Lake Huron

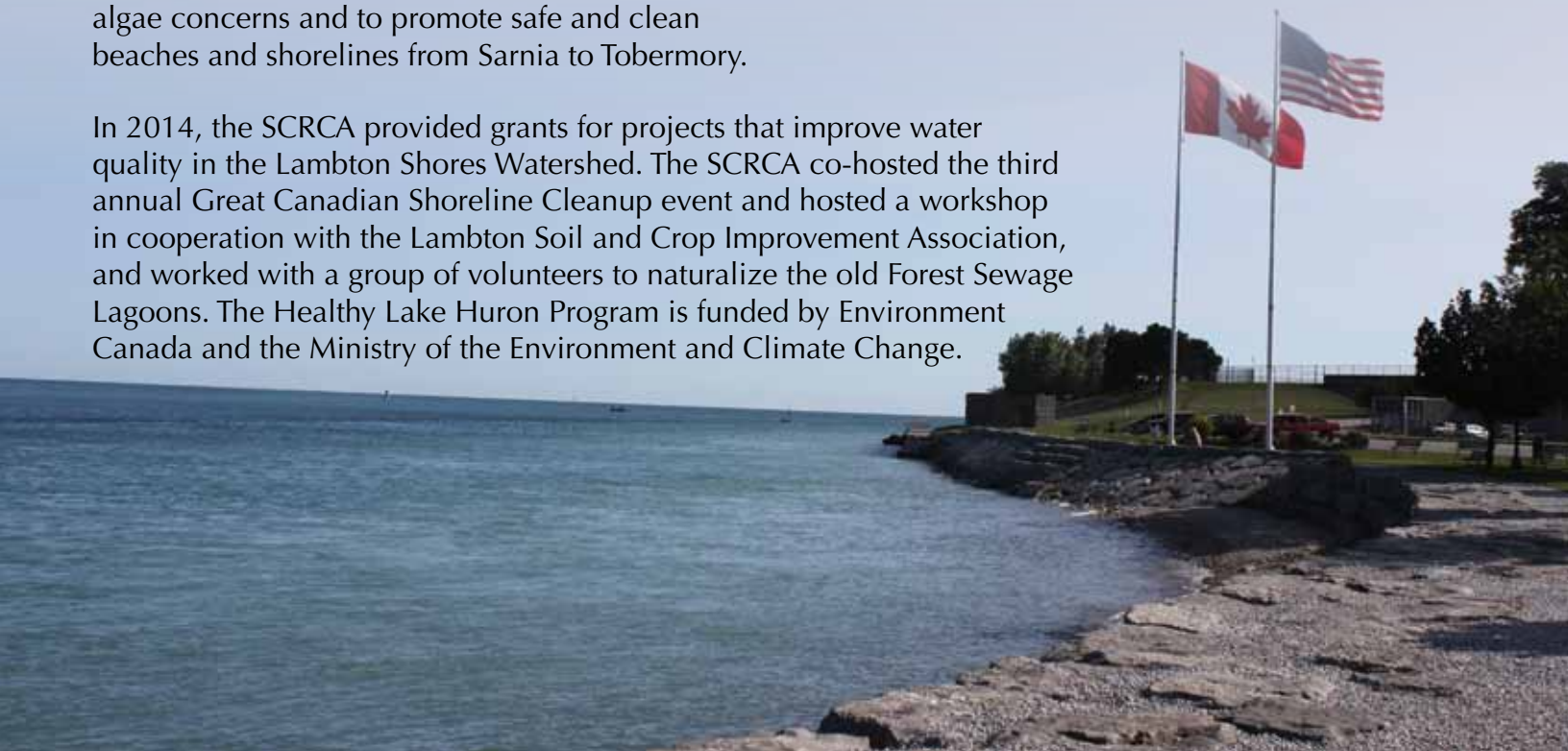
A team of dedicated environmental professionals joined together in 2011 to coordinate actions aimed at improving overall water quality along the southeast shores of Lake Huron. This group is leading the Healthy Lake Huron – Clean Water, Clean Beaches campaign, a concerted effort to address nuisance algae concerns and to promote safe and clean beaches and shorelines from Sarnia to Tobermory.

In 2014, the SCRCA provided grants for projects that improve water quality in the Lambton Shores Watershed. The SCRCA co-hosted the third annual Great Canadian Shoreline Cleanup event and hosted a workshop in cooperation with the Lambton Soil and Crop Improvement Association, and worked with a group of volunteers to naturalize the old Forest Sewage Lagoons. The Healthy Lake Huron Program is funded by Environment Canada and the Ministry of the Environment and Climate Change.

## Creating Safe and Healthy Shorelines

**Cathcart Park:** The third phase of protection at Cathcart Park was initiated in 2014 and will be complete in the spring of 2015. An additional 80 metres of armour stone protection are being constructed at a cost of \$290,000. Funds (\$170,000) were granted through the provincial Water and Erosion Control Infrastructure Program. Grants to enhance the project by providing improved shoreline habitat were received from the Great Lakes Sustainability Fund (\$100,000) and from the Ministry of the Environment and Climate Change through Canada-Ontario Agreement (COA) funding and the Ontario Great Lakes Guardian Fund (\$43,000).

**Lambton Area Water Supply System (LAWSS):** Work was initiated in 2014 and will be completed by spring 2015 for the construction of erosion protection at the mouth of the St. Clair River. Approximately 280 meters of shoreline will be restored with a combination of existing concrete blocks and armour stone sea wall. Funds (\$300,000) were granted through the provincial Water and Erosion Control infrastructure Program with matching funds from LAWSS. An additional \$50,000 has been secured from the Ministry of the Environment and Climate Change through the Canada-Ontario Agreement.





# Conservation Lands

St. Clair Conservation and its Foundation own more than 2,000 hectares of land including beaches along Lake Huron, campgrounds, day use parks, wetlands and forests. A wide range of recreation activities are available on these lands including swimming, boating, hiking, bird watching, camping, fishing and hunting.

## Conservation Areas

St. Clair Conservation has 15 Conservation Areas. These are the most visible of our properties and include 3 regional campgrounds, two beautiful beaches on Lake Huron, and several in-town parks that include trails and picnic facilities.

## Habitat Management Areas

Many of our lands have little or no facilities but provide a place for nature to flourish and people to explore. Some of the properties include mature forest and wetlands while others have been naturalized by planting trees, building wetlands, and planting native grasslands. Many of the areas include a parking lot and trails.

## Lambton County Lands

The County of Lambton has contracted out the management of a number of its properties to the Conservation Authority. In 2014, work focused on maintaining the trails and completing an inventory, mark and tender on a thinning operation. In addition, tree planting, as recommended in the approved management plans, occurred at the Bowen's Creek Management Area, trail work and tree planting was undertaken at Perch Creek, and a new sign was installed at the Marthaville Management Area.

## Camping - A Family Affair

Our three campgrounds were hopping this summer with many exciting events and activities for campers. Some of these events included Canada Day Fireworks, Elvis Day, Geocaching, Fish Fries, Pig Roasts, and live entertainment. Our campgrounds are very fortunate to have a group of dedicated volunteers who assist staff in delivering many events and activities throughout the camping season.

Campgrounds exceeded \$1 million in gross revenue. With 522 serviced campsites and 407 seasonal campers, these three campgrounds provided a significant contribution to the local economies while providing employment opportunities for over 22 contract and seasonal staff.





# Community Conservation

## Conservation For Kids

St. Clair Conservation reaches out to students with a simple message – what can you do to protect our watersheds? Over 25 programs have been developed to introduce students to nature and to empower them to make a difference. These programs are designed to create an enthusiasm for our natural heritage which will carry over into the student's adult life. The Authority offers outdoor and in-class programs. Many of the education programs are supported by donations from businesses and organizations. In total, 11,700 students participated in conservation education classes in 2014.



## Recognizing Our Leaders

St. Clair Conservation presents annual scholarships and conservation awards. The scholarships are available to graduating high school students who are continuing their education in a conservation related field and have shown a commitment to the environment. Conservation Awards are presented to individuals and organizations who have made a significant contribution to the environment in our region.



## Events for Everyone

Throughout the year, St. Clair Conservation reaches out with events to help our communities connect with our watershed. From shoreline clean-ups to our annual Sydenham River Canoe Race, communities get together to enjoy the outdoors and to participate in improving our watersheds.



## Reaching Out

**Kid's Funfest:** This Sarnia event focused on children and provided an opportunity for the Conservation Authority to engage youth in nature-based activities.

**Agriculture in the Classroom:** The Conservation Authority works with the Agriculture in the Classroom program at both the Brigden and Wyoming Fairs. Our display focused on common sources of pollution found on a farm and solutions to those problems. A hands-on 'Enviro-scape' model demonstrated how pollution travels across a watershed causing pollution of down stream water bodies.

**Aamjiwnaang Earth Day Celebration:** We provided community members with information about the unique and valuable wildlife found within our watershed, our programs to protect Species at Risk, critical habitat, and vulnerable ecosystems.

**Ontario Land Trust Alliance Annual Gathering:** SCRCA education staff delivered a presentation about the Young Naturalist group as part of a panel of speakers entitled 'Involving Youth in Conservation'. The conference included a discussion on the benefits of involving youth, steps to developing a youth program, necessary organizational support and sharing of successes and struggles of the program.

**Chatham-Kent, Lambton Children's Water Festival:** The SCRCA participates in this event that attracts 1,800 students over the 3 days of the festival. In 2014, however, school buses were cancelled for two of the days due to fog.

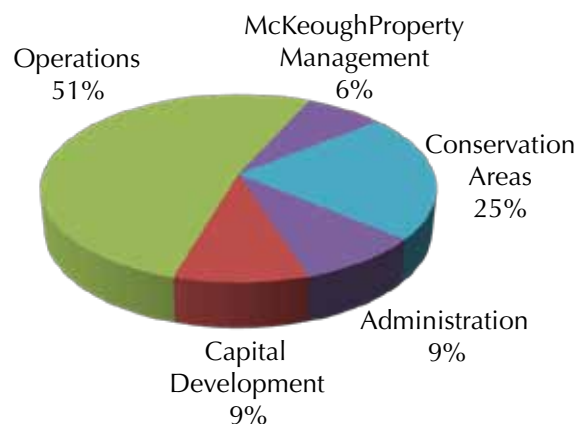
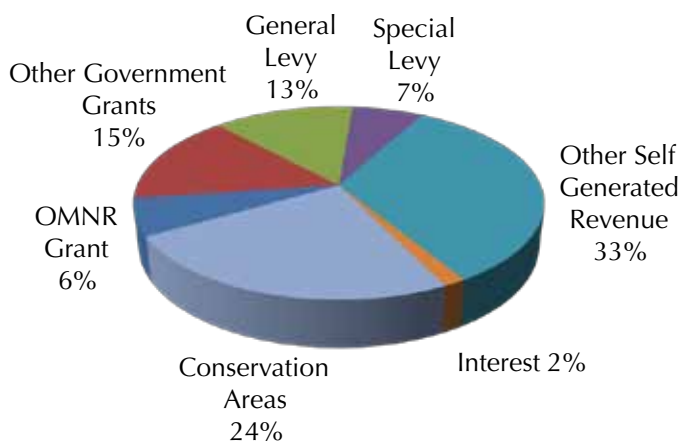
**Camp Blast - Our Lady Immaculate:** Conservation Authority staff introduced kids at "Camp Blast" to aquatic species living in their own community. About 20 participants checked minnow traps, investigated rare mussel species and learned about our native reptiles.



# SCRCA 2014 Finances

Revenue - \$4,991,435

Expenditures - \$4,924,641



## Conservation Foundation

The St. Clair Region Conservation Foundation raises funds to support the conservation initiatives of the Conservation Authority. In addition to raising funds, the Foundation accepts land donations. Over the last 30 years, the Foundation has acquired 16 properties totalling 455 hectares. These properties include wetlands, forests and agricultural lands.

The St. Clair Region Conservation Foundation launched the memorial forest program in 1987 with the purpose of raising funds to reforest lands within our region. To date, 13,400 trees have been dedicated covering 45 different sites.

In 2014, we supported Conservation Education, development of trails, tree planting, 3-D mapping project, benthic and water quality sampling, scholarships, and a workshop addition at the Clark Wright Conservation Area.



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