



## CVCA Conservation Area Strategy



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## Legislative Background

Conservation Authorities were created in 1946 by an Act of the Provincial Legislature. The Crowe Valley Conservation Authority (CVCA) was formed on November 6, 1958. Its purpose and goals focused primarily on water management, flood forecasting and warning, monitoring, conservation of land for public education and recreational usage and general education and outreach initiatives.

*The Conservation Authorities Act* and accompanying regulations have been amended by the Province of Ontario since 2017, including the following change made in 2021 to Section 20 of the *CA Act*.

*As per Section 20*

- 1) *The objects of an authority are to provide, in the area over which it has jurisdiction,*  
*(a) the mandatory programs and services required under section 21.1;*  
*(b) any municipal programs and services that may be provided under section 21.1.1; and*  
*(c) any other programs or services that may be provided under section 21.1.2. 2020, c.36, Sched. 6, s.6 (1).*

CA programs and services are categorized as follows per legislation:

- **Category 1:** Mandatory programs and services
- **Category 2:** Municipal programs and services provided on behalf of a municipality
- **Category 3:** Programs and services advisable by the CA to implement in the CA's jurisdiction.

Ontario Regulation (O. Reg.) 687/21 and Sections 21.1.1 and 21.1.2 of the Conservation Authorities Act established a requirement for Transition Plans (including a Program and Service Inventory) and Agreements to carry out CA Programs and Services.

O. Reg. 686/21 sets out the mandatory programs and services which must be delivered by CAs in Ontario. Specifically, section 9(1)2 of the regulation requires all Conservation Authorities to prepare a "Conservation Areas Strategy".

## The Crowe Valley Conservation Authority Watershed

The Crowe Valley Conservation Authority was established on the 6<sup>th</sup> of November 1958 with the mandate to manage the 2006 square kilometers the Crowe River drains on behalf of the now 10 member municipalities with a population of approximately 10,000 inhabitants. The CVCA's services and programs aim to protect people and property from natural hazards such as flooding and erosion. Another extremely important service is the preservation and protection of natural ecosystems and the ecosystem services they provide through the Land Management Program.

Natural ecosystems have been proven to provide vital services such as the moderation of extreme weather events, carbon sequestration, erosion control, and water supply & filtration. The rivers, streams, wetlands, and forests that make up the Conservation Areas mentioned in the following section provide these vital services to community members throughout the Crowe Valley watershed. It is the responsibility of the CVCA to protect and preserve these ecosystems and the services they provide.

First and foremost, the guiding principle of the CVCA Conservation Area Strategy is to manage and protect conservation lands so that they are not degraded by development or other unauthorized activities, and can be enjoyed by current and future generations. The CVCA is fortunate to have as pristine a watershed as it currently is where watershed residents and visitors are able to live, economically prosper and recreate in a responsible manner with a natural environment providing the stable foundation.

Beyond the preservation of these ecosystems, the CVCA aims to provide community members as well as visitors to the watershed with access to nature through these beautiful conservation areas. There have been numerous studies demonstrating the vast benefits of spending time in nature to both physical and mental health. Not only does the CVCA ownership of conservation areas provides the invaluable service to the community of providing access to nature, it also enables nature on these properties do what nature intended. The ecosystem thrives as it should with virtually no interference from human activities.

The purpose of this Conservation Areas Strategy (Strategy) is to satisfy provincial regulatory requirements and a high level guidance document for the CVCA to make decisions regarding its land holdings. Detailed information on each land holding is located in the CVCA's Land Inventory.

All CVCA owned properties and lands used for water management are included in this Strategy.

## Crowe Valley Conservation Authority Conservation Lands

The CVCA owns a diverse array of land throughout the Crowe Valley watershed that is preserved and maintained by CVCA staff as conservation areas. The CVCA inventory of conservation areas include Callaghan's Rapids, Crowe Bridge, The Gut and McGeachie. Each Conservation Area offers a unique glimpse into the ecosystems and species that make up the Crowe Valley Watershed. The CVCA also owns a managed forest, the CVCA administrative office, and multiple water control structures.

The total number of hectares owned by the CVCA is approximately 670. Although this is a very small percentage of the total area of the watershed, the ownership of the conservation areas gives the public ample opportunity to experience four different properties.

The acquisition of the conservation areas resulted from either financial support from the provincial government when purchasing from private landowners at market value rates or donations from watershed residents.

With the exception of the Crowe Bridge Conservation Area (see below), CVCA properties do not have personnel on site and require limited resources to maintain. In order to continue with this management plan, the CVCA is considering expanding its volunteer base to assist with the property maintenance and possibly expand certain key amenities on site for public use and limit certain abuses.

Currently, all of the properties are open to the public with the exception of the Agreement Forest, which is landlocked. There are no user fees and the services are limited to parking lots and trails. Garbage bins and a trailhead kiosk are only provided at the McGeachie Conservation Area. There are no CVCA staff on site at any of the CVCA's properties. Crowe Bridge is staffed with employees from the Municipality of Trent Hills.

Hunting is allowed on two of the CVCA properties to aid with expenses. Hunters must enter into a hunting lease agreement with the CVCA and provide the necessary documentation to hunt on these properties. This arrangement has served the CVCA well to not only reduce expenses, but keep illegal hunting on CVCA properties at bay.

All of the properties are dominated by natural ecosystems which in most of the areas contain a wide range of habitat allowing for a diverse range of species. Maintaining a healthy ecosystem will always be a goal of the CVCA conservation areas and the most effective, efficient and least expensive approach has been limiting capital infrastructure and allowing natural processes to continue uninterrupted.

## **Primary Landholdings for Public Use**

### **Callaghan's Rapids Conservation Area**

Callaghan's Rapids features two waterfalls which are about one metre in height and span approximately 40 to 60 metres across, the entire width of the Crowe River. When river flows are low enough, you can walk out and explore the river bed. The upper waterfall is forms on a wedge-shaped outcrop of limestone which appears beveled down to a sharp edge, right at the crest of the falls. The lower falls is similar, but does not exhibit the beveled-edge crest. This conservation area of 400 acres is situated approximately southwest of the village of Marmora. The CVCA used the Managed Forest Tax Incentive Program (MFTIP) to help reduce costs and manage the property.

### **Crowe Bridge Conservation Area**

Crowe Bridge features a scenic stretch of the Crowe River that is a popular attraction for community members and visitors alike. The forests surrounding the river are also a popular attraction for nature lovers, families, and community groups to enjoy nature. Crowe Bridge was operated as a small campground and swimming area. The campground has been closed for a number of years, however the swimming area on the Crowe River remains open for the public to use. This has been made possible through an agreement with Trent Hills to operate Crowe Bridge on the behalf of the Crowe Valley Conservation Authority. It is only through this cooperative support the public is still able to enjoy a local amenity which had been and continues to be firmly entrenched in the local facilities fabric.

### **The Gut Conservation Area**

The Gut Conservation Area is a 400-acre site located approximately 10 kilometers east of Apsley, Ontario featuring a parking lot, walking trails, a look out area and a stairway down to the gorge. The "Gut" is a large gorge that the Crowe River flows through for about 230 meters. The fissure that forms the gorge is over 30 meters high and varies from five to ten meters in width. The gorge presents a breath-taking glimpse of this unique terrain. The Gut has been referred to as a much smaller version of the popular tourist destination, the Elora Gorge in the Grand River Conservation Authority. It is a popular secluded natural feature that offers a view of the Crowe River taking a 90 degree turn through bedrock and then plunging into the gorge. The CVCA used the Managed Forest Tax Incentive Program (MFTIP) to help reduce costs and manage the property.

### **McGeachie Conservation Area**

The McGeachie Conservation Area is located in Hastings County on beautiful Steenburg Lake, comprising of approximately 530 acres of land. This bulk of the land was donated by Jack and Ethel McGeachie in 1994, with two subsequent additions from neighbouring landowners. Eleven kilometers of walking trails have been added to the property offering an opportunity to explore and enjoy deep forest wonders, whether it be 100+ year old forest growth, beaver ponds, wetlands or discovering the vast array of plants and animals that call it home. Also located on the property is the original homestead built nearly 150 years ago (plus a couple of additions). The homestead is now rented out to the public as a vacation cottage. The CVCA used the Managed Forest Tax Incentive Program (MFTIP) to help reduce costs and manage the property.

### **The Managed Forest**

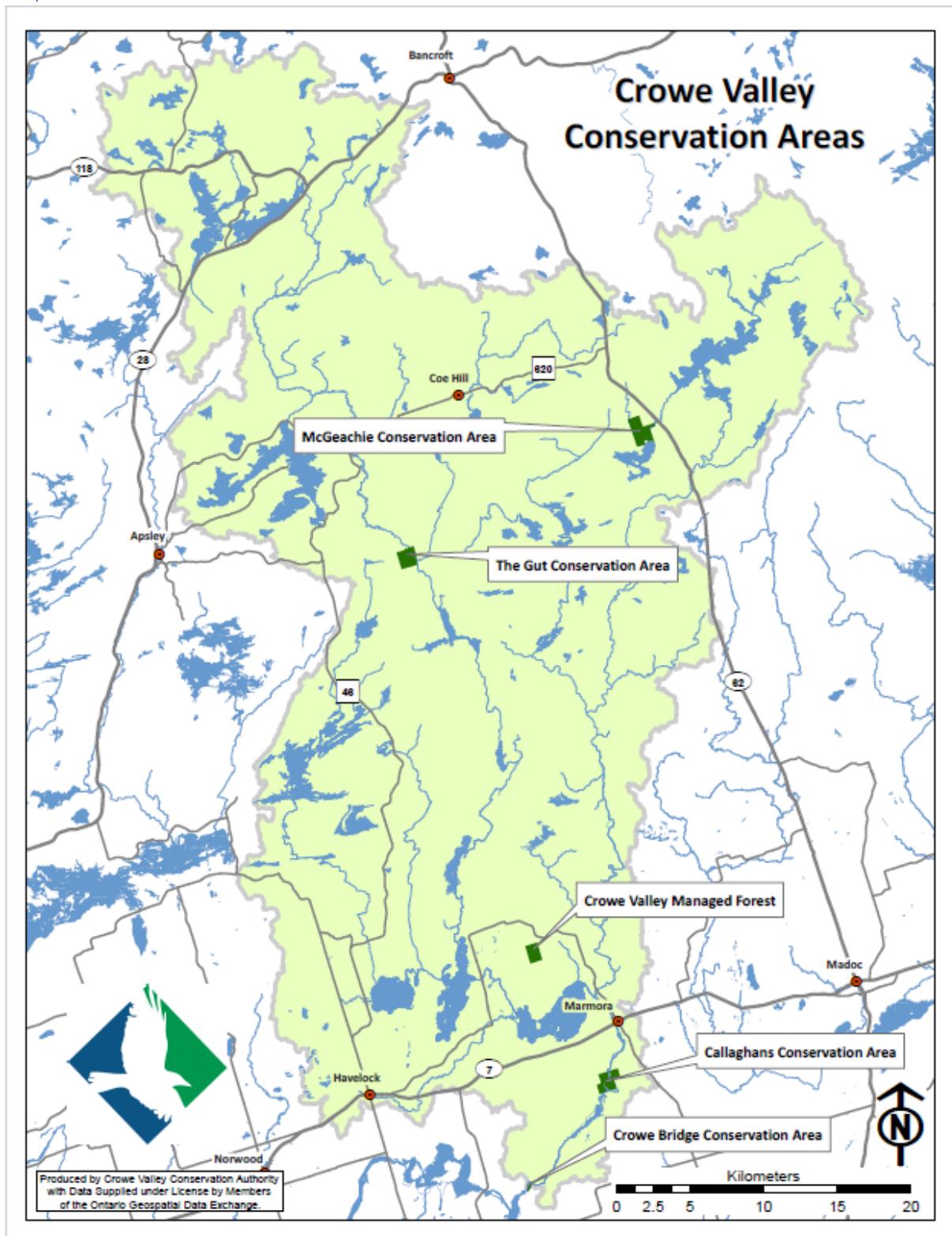
Originally the 100-hectare property was owned and managed by the Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR). However, through an agreement with the Ministry the property was given to the CVCA. Much of this area had been extensively cleared and high-graded by the early 1900's when it was cleared for settlement, lumber and fuelwood for the mining industries of Cordova Mines. The Crowe Valley Conservation Authority obtained the property primarily for soil and water conservation purposes, and "the utilization and maintenance of lands which would otherwise be left neglected". The property contains wetlands and watercourses that are conserved under CVCA ownership. The CVCA used the Managed Forest Tax Incentive Program (MFTIP) to help reduce costs and manage the property.

This property is landlocked with no public access.

### **CVCA Administration Office**

The CVCA Administration Office is located at 70 Hughes Lane in Marmora, Ontario. The building was formerly a housing unit for the local mine. It is located on a scenic plot of land adjacent to the Crowe River. All services provided by the CVCA are run out of this office.

Map 1: CVCA Conservation Areas



## Land Use Categories

The CVCA has classified its properties into the following based on uses at each location.

### **Conservation Areas (Active Recreation, Accessible to the Public)**

- None

### **Conservation Areas (Passive Recreation, Accessible to the Public)**

- The Gut Conservation Area
- McGeachie Conservation Area
- Callaghan's Rapids Conservation Area
- Crowe Bridge Conservation Area

### **Management Areas (Public Accessibility Varies) (e.g., Natural Heritage Lands, Natural Hazard Lands, Water Management Areas, Forest Management Lands, Environmentally Sensitive Lands, etc.)**

- Authority Forest – MFTIP
- Marmora Dam
- Belmont Lake Dam
- Wollaston Lake Dam
- Allan Mills Dam

### **Conservation Authority Administration Areas**

- CVCA Office

## **Primary Landholdings for Water Management Program**

### **Water Control Structures**

The CVCA owns and operates dams located on Crowe Lake, Belmont Lake, and Wollaston Lake. The CVCA also owns a non-operational dam located in Trent Hills known as Allan Mills and a weir located at Crowe Bridge Conservation Area. In order to access these structures for operations, maintenance or reconstruction, the CVCA has either purchased the immediate land adjacent to the dam or obtained a right-of-way.

In conjunction with these dams, the CVCA operates multiple Ministry of Natural Resource (MNR) dams in the Crowe Valley watershed through MOU's with the Ministry. The MNR dams are located at Paudash, Kasshabog, Cordova and Round lakes.

In addition to these structures are two hydro facilities at the Cordova and Marmora dam locations.

By managing and operating these 14 water control structures throughout the watershed 365 days a year, the CVCA actively aims to balance human needs with environmental concerns and requirements.

## **Water Management**

The land use holdings for the CVCA's dams are critical to support the CVCA's water management program which is used to mitigate flood events and provide forecasting services. This is crucial for protecting the health and safety of watershed residents and visitors to the watershed.

In addition to managing high volumes of water during flood events, the CVCA also uses the network of dams and weirs during periods of low flows. From a watershed residents perspective, perhaps the role of maintaining seasonal water levels affects their properties and how the watercourses are used the most during the course of the year.

## **Land Use Categories**

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### **Management Areas (Public Accessibility Varies) (e.g., Natural Heritage Lands, Natural Hazard Lands, Water Management Areas, Forest Management Lands, Environmentally Sensitive Lands, etc.)**

- Authority Forest – MFTIP
- Marmora Dam
- Belmont Lake Dam
- Wollaston Lake Dam
- Allan Mills Dam

### **Conservation Authority Administration Areas**

- CVCA Office

## Land Acquisition and Disposition

The CVCA does not have a policy for the acquisition of property. Generally, each opportunity to purchase or receive a donation is dealt with on an individual basis by the CVCA's Board of Directors. The lack of financial resources has dictated the decisions to either pursue purchasing opportunities or whether to accept potential land donations.

The CVCA is a corporate entity which owns property much like an individual. As a result, the CVCA would be subject to the same legal obligations and restrictions.

Disposition of CVCA owned property would be subject to approval of the Board of Directors. In addition, the Ministry of Natural Resources would require notification and the CVCA would be required to follow the Ministry's guidelines governing the land dispositions. This would be particularly relevant when Provincial grant money was available to purchase the property originally. As well there are other considerations that the Authority has to take into account for donated properties.

## Present and Future Challenges

Land ownership does not come without responsibilities and with those responsibilities comes challenges from external and internal pressures. Like many conservation authorities, the CVCA is faced with a set of issues which have influenced the management of the CVCA's properties. External factors include the increasing demand for the public to have access to natural spaces, climate change, invasive species, future generational concerns, funding support and political decisions at all levels of government.

Perhaps the most challenging immediate concerns are related to the local understanding and value placed on what the property offers. For example, Callaghan's Rapids Conservation Area is faced with primarily pressures exerted upon it by a certain user group which ultimately destroys habitat and conflicts with other more passive recreational users. Therefore, there are two opposing values, which requires a long term solution.

Property, like any asset, needs ongoing investment in both the capital infrastructure and maintenance of the asset. A long term solution needs to be sought to ensure sustainability, enhance visitor's experiences and protect the asset from any real and perceived threat.

The water management infrastructure (dams, weirs) owned by the CVCA will always be crucial to protect life and minimize property damage from flooding and erosion for the communities in the Crowe Valley watershed. It will be imperative to ensure the appropriate resources are allocated to these properties.

Garnering the financial and "emotional" support for reviewing and expanding on this Strategy will be an essential key for the CVCA's properties.

## CVCA Conservation Areas Strategy Objectives

The following objectives of the Conservation Areas have been identified to establish a framework for the Conservation Areas Strategy.

1. Ensure the CVCA's properties are in compliance with the Conservation Authorities Act and all other municipal, provincial and federal regulations that govern the ownership of property.
2. Ensure ecosystems on the properties will not be altered or reduced appreciably at any point in time by managing CVCA properties in a fiscally responsible and sustainable manner
3. The CVCA will retain properties as outdoor recreational areas for the benefit of its watershed residents and visitors to connect with the natural environment.
4. Issues such as climate change impacting the CVCA's properties will be identified and resources (when available) will be allocated to study, review and provide recommendations for management of conservation areas.
5. Promote additional partnerships with all CVCA municipalities, First Nations, environmental organizations and all other interested stakeholders as staff and financial resources permit.
6. Continue with the formal and informal municipal partnerships with the Municipality of Trent Hills and Limerick Township.

The CVCA will strive to uphold these objectives, but may be limited to current and future financial and staff resources to implement fully 100% all of the time.

Through this Conservation Area Strategy, the CVCA aims to preserve and protect the natural ecosystems which provides a healthy foundation for the communities making up the Crowe Valley watershed.

## Into the Future

The Crowe Valley Conservation Authority watershed is situated in rural eastern Ontario and has had less development activity than virtually any other watershed in southern Ontario. This primarily stems from its past history of low opportunity for the development of farming and industry in the area. Forestry emerged as the dominant economic activity and although it remains active, as a significant economic driver, it has taken a backseat to the development of a seasonal recreational based economy. The cottage industry has left fewer scars on the landscape which means the pristine nature of the watershed remains intact. This legacy has given the Crowe watershed breathing room to continue to function as a watershed should and all forms of flora and fauna species generally are able to live an uninterrupted life cycle most of the time. This natural ecosystem is based on the hydrological cycle and is also able to absorb and mitigate the effects of extreme conditions like flooding and drought while protecting its

natural habitat. This in turn enables the natural environment is allowed to flex its muscle and help protect people and the development in the watershed while providing recreational opportunities.

The CVCA has a glorious opportunity to ensure a symbiotic relationship is maintained for future stakeholders, and the people who visit or live, work and play in this watershed.

#### **Periodic Review and Updates**

This Strategy will be reviewed every five years and/or updated as required by staff and presented to the CVCA Board for approval.

## Appendix A: Programs & Services, Technical Studies & Cost Estimates

Category 1: Mandatory		
Programs & Services	Description	Program Guidance
Conservation Lands Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Maintain passive Conservation Areas</li> <li>Maintain trail networks</li> <li>Maintain &amp; administer seasonal cottage rentals</li> <li>Administer leased Conservation Area</li> <li>Maintain the Managed Forest Tax Incentive Program (MFTIP)</li> <li>Monitor &amp; maintain forest management plans (tree planting, harvesting)</li> <li>Hazard tree management</li> <li>Offer hunting on designated CVCA properties</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>MFTIP</li> <li>Land Inventory</li> </ul>
Conservation Lands Management <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Water Control Structures</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Maintain water control structures as required</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Engineered studies</li> <li>Dam Safety Assessments</li> </ul>

Cost Estimates		
Category	Operational Costs	Capital
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2024 Budget</li> <li>2025-2029 yearly rate of inflation increases plus operational pressures</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>TBD based on Asset Management Plan</li> </ul>