

Conserving Our Watershed, Ensuring Our Future

Rideau Valley Conservation Authority
Strategic Plan 2020





Welcome to the Rideau Watershed

The Rideau River and its surrounding watershed is the heart of eastern Ontario and our Nation's capital. Beautiful and diverse, our watershed is home to mixed forests, rich wetlands, numerous lakes, rivers and streams, floodplains and natural shorelines, underground aquifers and a diversity of native plants and animals — all interconnected, all interdependent. Our watershed is also home to farms, businesses and nearly 450,000 people who are also reliant on these natural features and the benefits they provide.

Benefits of a Healthy Watershed

While many people see the beauty in nature, not everyone sees the benefits. Without natural features like forests and wetlands, we wouldn't have healthy ecosystems and we wouldn't have air to breathe, clean water to drink, rivers to boat, swim and fish in, water and soil to support agriculture and industry and green spaces to explore and relax in. Simply put, natural areas sustain life. They also support economic development and property values, reduce flood, erosion and drought impacts and they are the best defense against climate change.

Purpose of a Conservation Authority

Under Ontario's *Conservation Authorities Act*, conservation authorities are responsible for furthering the "conservation, restoration, development and management of natural resources" in their watershed. They are also responsible for protecting people and property from natural hazards like flooding and erosion. For 50 years, the Rideau Valley Conservation Authority has worked to protect the health of our watershed and the people who live in it through environmental monitoring and reporting, on-the-ground restoration and stewardship, conservation lands and education, development review and approval and flood forecasting and warning. Close partnerships with our member municipalities, other levels of government, farmers, property owners, local conservation groups, businesses and academia has made this work possible.

Tackling Future Challenges

Over the next few years there may be external factors that impact our programs and services: the impact of climate change and development on our environment, the current economic and political climate that is limiting funding, diminishing capacity in other levels of government and potential changes to provincial policies and legislation including the *Conservation Authorities Act*. This Strategic Plan outlines key priorities to try and tackle these challenges while fulfilling our mission and pursuing our collective vision for a healthy watershed.



Our Vision

A thriving watershed with clean abundant water, natural shorelines, rich forests and wetlands, diverse habitat and sustainable land use that is valued and protected by all.



Our Mission

To understand, manage, protect, restore and enhance the Rideau watershed through science, stewardship, education, policy and leadership.

Our Values

Collaboration

To work closely with our municipalities, partners, and the community to achieve shared goals.

Balance

To balance human needs with the needs of the natural environment when managing the watershed's natural resources in a holistic and integrated manner.

Knowledge

To provide expertise in our field to meet our watershed's needs and use science and policies in our decision-making.

Integrity

To adhere to ethical standards, be transparent and accountable, and conduct ourselves professionally.

Excellence

To embrace challenges, welcome new opportunities and develop creative and innovative ideas and solutions.



1

Develop and Share Watershed Knowledge that Advances Decision Making and Leads to On-The-Ground Action

Our goal is to understand the health and complexity of our watershed in order to develop and shape effective programs and services, make sound decisions and undertake meaningful actions that benefit the watershed. We will share this knowledge with our partners and residents to inform and support their actions and decisions to improve the watershed.

Priorities

- Focus and tailor watershed monitoring to meet program and decision-making needs.
- Complete a watershed information management system to monitor, analyze and assess key watershed indicators and conditions, to support watershed management decisions.
- Create a public geoportal to make watershed data and knowledge easily accessible by municipalities, other partners and the public.
- Expand partnerships with academia and the private sector to better understand and address watershed issues.
- Begin to quantify the value and benefits of natural areas in our watershed and use modeling to assess the impact of land use changes.
- Continue to monitor and report on subwatershed health with a growing emphasis on identifying trends and required actions.
- Enhance flood forecasting and warning capability in the upper watershed.
- Develop climate change adaptation strategies for our organization and the watershed.



2

Protect, Restore and Enhance Watershed Health and Safeguard People and Property from Natural Hazards

Our goal is to implement programs and services that lead to meaningful protection, restoration and enhancement of watershed health and protect people and property from natural hazards like flooding, erosion and slope failures. This focus fulfills the two core mandates of a conservation authority and contributes to the creation of a healthy watershed.

Priorities

- Initiate actions in key program areas to adapt to the effects of climate change and mitigate its effect on the watershed.
- Continue to partner with landowners to reforest idle land, naturalize shorelines, enhance habitat and wetlands, re-inspect septic systems and implement other best management practices. Enhance these efforts where monitoring results indicate they are needed most.
- Update development review policies to guide development away from natural hazards (areas prone to flooding, erosion or slope failure) and natural features (wetlands, shorelines and watercourses). Ensure updated policies are effective, balanced and user-friendly.
- Prepare an analysis of our current approach to regulating wetlands to determine if it is still appropriate given that wetlands are critical in protecting watershed health, reducing flooding and mitigating the impacts of climate change. If a new approach is required a new policy will be drafted.
- Promote low impact development and natural channel design, especially in urban areas, to reduce runoff and erosion and improve water quality and habitat.
- Focus new or updated regulatory mapping in areas where there is development pressure.
- Implement the Mississippi-Rideau Source Protection Plan to protect local sources of drinking water.
- Prepare an implementation strategy to address any changes made to the *Conservation Authorities Act* that may result from the legislative review currently underway.



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Increase Watershed Awareness and Appreciation and Inspire Action in Others

Our goal is to create an engaged public that both supports and undertakes actions and decisions that protect watershed health. When the public has an appreciation for the watershed, an understanding of its value and importance, and a desire and ability to protect it, conservation efforts can be fully realized.

Priorities

- Implement a communications and outreach strategy that will engage key stakeholders, convey our purpose and responsibilities, promote the importance of a healthy watershed and lead to positive change and program uptake.
- Help municipalities implement their environmental policies, strategies, projects and initiatives.
- Continue to provide technical and financial assistance to help people undertake stewardship projects on their property.
- Implement best management practices on our lands and make them public demonstration sites.
- Employ new strategies to attract more visitors to our conservation areas where people unwind and develop an appreciation for nature.
- Integrate more technology and innovation into our outdoor education programs at Baxter and Foley Mountain to enhance student learning and inspire the next generation of conservationists.
- Create more opportunities for students, businesses and the public to assist staff with watershed monitoring, stewardship projects and conservation area enhancements to experience conservation firsthand.
- Recognize and promote good conservation work by local landowners, farmers, schools, businesses, municipalities and others through awards and other recognition tools.



Actions

4 Operate a Sustainable, Well-Managed, Service-Driven Organization Fueled by Engaged Employees

Our goal is to build a strong resilient organization that supports employees and the ongoing delivery of programs and services that contribute to watershed health. We will strive to deliver our programs in an efficient and effective manner and provide service that is client-focused.

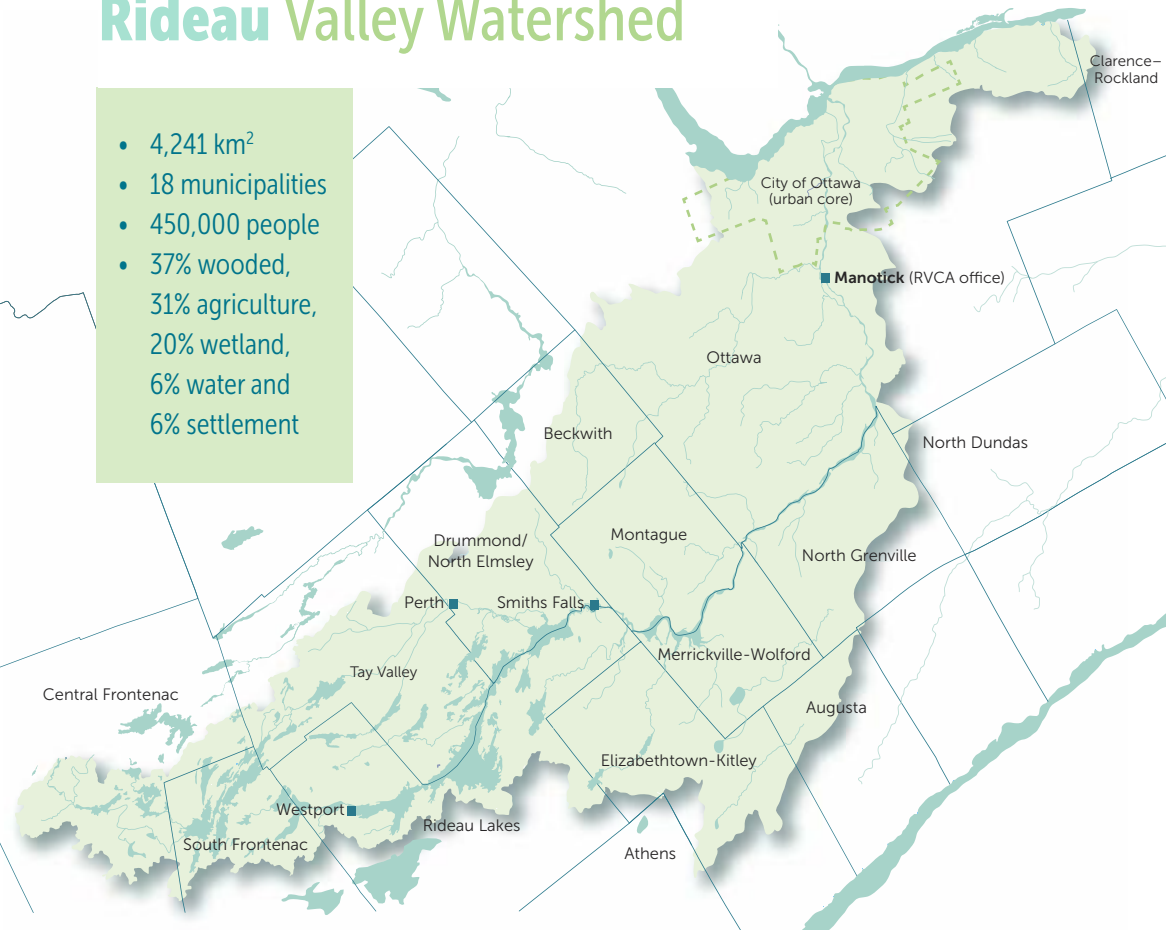
Priorities

- Produce a long-range financial plan to improve decision-making.
- Review delivery costs, revenue generation and value to the watershed for all programs and implement changes that improve efficiency, effectiveness and client service.
- Modernize financial processes, including budgeting and reporting, to increase automation, strengthen internal controls and provide timely and reliable data.
- Continue developing new partnerships and business models that increase capacity, reduce costs or generate new revenue.
- Electronically organize our corporate information to give staff easy access and ensure proper information management and the long-term security of our records.
- Redesign our website to be user-friendly and provide easy access to our programs and services.
- Strengthen leadership skills, strategic thinking, work planning, project management and collaboration across the organization for better accountability and results.
- Develop strategies to attract, train and reward top quality staff to develop and retain capacity within the organization.
- Create a Code of Conduct and update governance policies for the Board to align with best practices.



Rideau Valley Watershed

- 4,241 km²
- 18 municipalities
- 450,000 people
- 37% wooded,
31% agriculture,
20% wetland,
6% water and
6% settlement



50 Years of Conservation

The Rideau Valley Conservation Authority has been part of your community since 1966 and for 50 years we have worked hard to have a positive impact on the watershed. Thanks to our many partners, our accomplishments include:

- 5.7 million trees planted
- 46 km of shoreline naturalized
- \$9 million in grants for landowner stewardship
- 186,500 water quality samples collected
- 9,500 km of streams surveyed
- 15,000 septic systems approved, 3,600 re-inspected
- 24,000 *Planning Act* applications reviewed
- 6,500 development permits processed
- 2,800 ha of conservation lands protected
- 42 km of trails developed
- 62,000 annual visitors to conservation areas
- 10,000 students educated annually at Baxter and Foley Mountain

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