

Conservation Areas Strategy

Draft

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**KAWARTHA
CONSERVATION**

Discover • Protect • Restore



About Kawartha Conservation

Who we are

We are a watershed-based organization that uses planning, stewardship, science, and conservation lands management to protect and sustain outstanding water quality and quantity supported by healthy landscapes.

Why is watershed management important?

Abundant, clean water is the lifeblood of the Kawarthas. It is essential for our quality of life, health, and continued prosperity. It supplies our drinking water, maintains property values, sustains an agricultural industry, and contributes to a tourism-based economy that relies on recreational boating, fishing, and swimming. Our programs and services promote an integrated watershed approach that balances human, environmental, and economic needs.

The community we support

We focus our programs and services within the natural boundaries of the Kawartha watershed, which extend from Lake Scugog in the southwest and Pigeon Lake in the east, to Balsam Lake in the northwest and Crystal Lake in the northeast – a total of 2,563 square kilometers.

Our history and governance

In 1979, we were established by our municipal partners under the *Ontario Conservation Authorities Act*.

The natural boundaries of our watershed overlap the six municipalities that govern Kawartha Conservation through representation on our Board of Directors. Our municipal partners include the City of Kawartha Lakes, Region of Durham, Township of Scugog, Township of Brock, Municipality of Clarington, Municipality of Trent Lakes, and Township of Cavan Monaghan.



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Land Acknowledgement

We would like to acknowledge that many Indigenous Nations have longstanding relationships, both historic and modern, with the territories upon which we are located.



Today, this area is home to many indigenous peoples from across Turtle Island. We acknowledge that our watershed forms a part of the treaty and traditional territory of the south-eastern Anishinaabeg.

It is on these ancestral and treaty lands that we live and work. To honour this legacy, we commit to being stewards of the natural environment and undertake to have a relationship of respect with our Treaty partners.

Executive Summary

The Conservation Areas Strategy outlines Kawartha Conservation's vision and long-term plan for managing and enhancing over 880 hectares of natural spaces within our watershed. In the face of increasing environmental pressures such as climate change, habitat loss, and increasing public demand for outdoor spaces, this strategy serves as a roadmap to protect biodiversity, increase resilience, and improve community access to our conservation areas. Conservation areas are essential to the well-being of communities, providing critical environmental, social, and economic benefits. By establishing a set of guiding objectives for decision-making, this strategy will support our efforts to manage our conservation areas in a way that reflects the values and needs of our communities.

Guiding Objectives of Land Management include:

- Healthy Environment

Our conservation areas are under increasing pressure to provide habitat and ecological goods and services. Considering the impacts from increased urban development, climate change, and habitat loss as part of a management decision making process is critical to ensuring the best value for our community. A Healthy Environment includes many facets. Based on community input, the specific factors under consideration in this context include natural heritage, species at risk, invasive species, environmental restoration, and climate change.

- Healthy Community

Conservation areas promote physical emotional and mental wellbeing for our community. They provide a place for community gatherings which promote a sense of belonging and place. Considering community health in the management of conservation areas is fundamental to creating vibrant, healthy and connected communities. A Healthy Community is multi-dimensional and could include several factors. Based on community input, the specific factors under consideration in this context include mental health, physical health, community gatherings, recreation, and public engagement.

- Discovery

Conservation areas provide a unique educational opportunity that promotes a better understanding of our natural environment. Scientific inquiry within our conservation areas helps support conservation efforts, provides for community involvement, and improves our approach to managing our lands. Considering opportunities to integrate community education and scientific exploration as part of our decision-making process is essential for informing effective management practices, as it helps us develop strategies based on scientific evidence. Discovery is a broad topic that includes a variety of opportunities for exploration. Based on community input, the specific factors under consideration in this context include education and community engagement, scientific research, environmental monitoring, and partnerships with academia.

The strategy recognizes that collaboration across all sectors—government, private, and public—is essential for success. Kawartha Conservation remains committed to innovation, sustainable management practices, and community involvement to ensure that these conservation areas continue to provide vital ecosystem services, recreational opportunities, and biodiversity support for future generations.





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1.0 Introduction

Legislative Background:

The provisions within the *Conservation Authorities Act* And its accompanying regulations outline the requirements for Mandatory Programs and Services (refer to Section 21.1 of the Act and O. Reg. 686/21). Ontario Regulation 686/21 specifies the Mandatory Programs and Services that all Conservation Authorities (CAs) in Ontario other required to provide. Under Section 10 of this regulation, all CAs must develop a “Conservation Areas Strategy” as part of the “Conservation and Management of Lands” mandatory program. According to Ontario Regulation 686/21 of the *Conservation Authorities Act*, a “conservation area” refers to land owned by an authority.

The Conservation Areas Strategy serves as a foundational document for guiding the management and enhancement of conservation areas within Kawartha Conservation’s watershed. Covering over 880 hectares of conservation land, this strategy establishes a clear vision for the protection, conservation, and enhancement of these valuable areas. At its core, this strategy is shaped by a set of overarching objectives that ensure a balanced approach to preserving ecological integrity, promoting sustainable recreational use, and fostering community engagement while addressing challenges posed by climate change, habitat loss, and increasing public demand for outdoor spaces.

The Conservation Areas Strategy will be used as a roadmap for decision-making, resource allocation, and partnership development, aligning efforts to balance conservation with sustainable public use. It will also support efforts to collaborate with local stakeholders, including municipalities, Indigenous communities, conservation organizations, and the public, to implement effective stewardship initiatives. Ultimately, the strategy will guide long-term planning to ensure our conservation areas remain vital to the health and well-being of the watershed and our community.

1.1 Community Input

In developing the overarching objectives for our Conservation Area strategy, we conducted a consultation process involving the community, staff, and key partners. This engagement was facilitated through an online survey, which was available throughout the summer of 2024. The survey provided a platform for participants to share their insights, priorities, and suggestions, ensuring that the strategy reflects a diverse range of perspectives. This collaborative approach has helped shape a forward-thinking strategy that addresses the environmental, recreational, and educational needs of the community while supporting the long-term sustainability of our natural spaces.

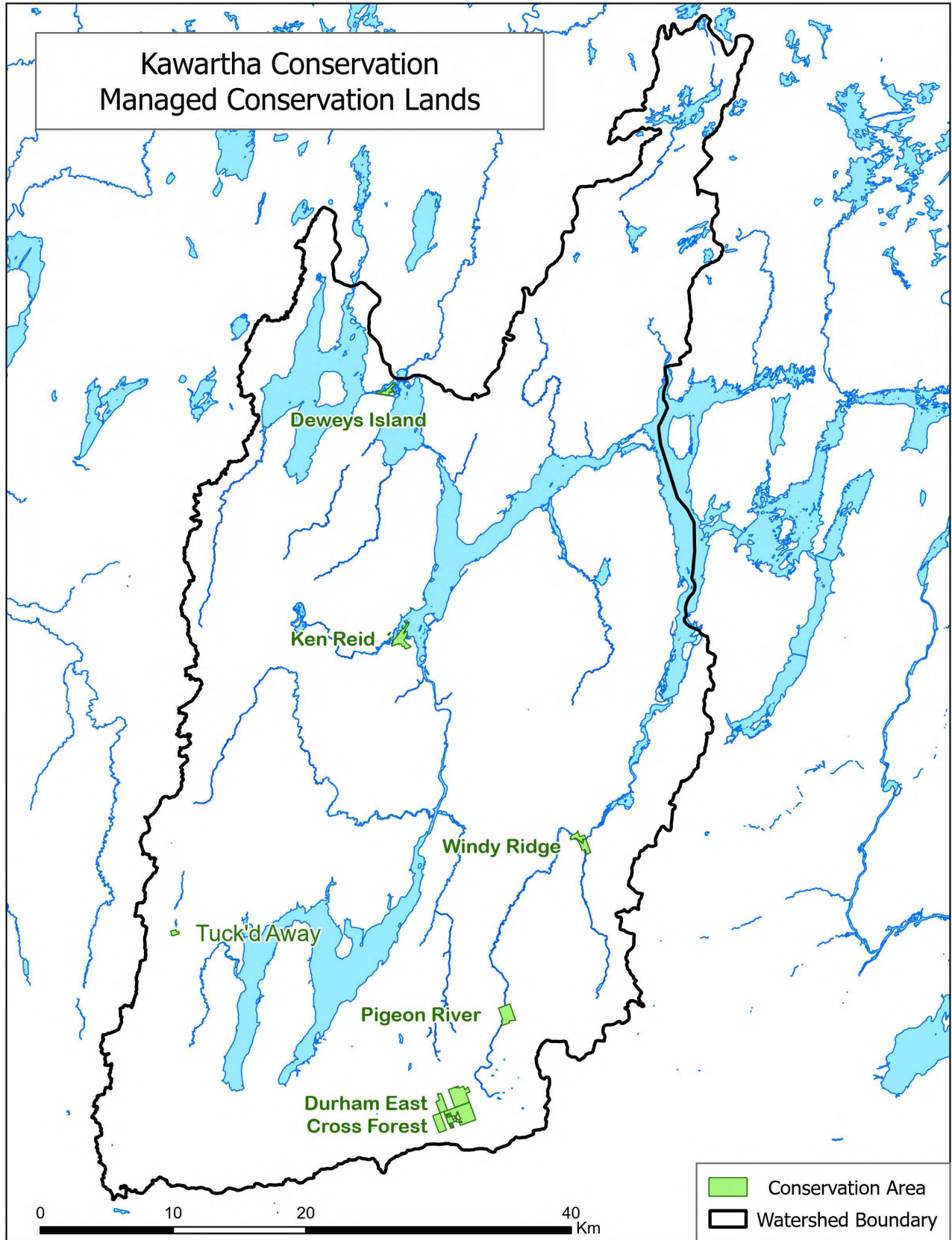


Figure 1 Kawartha Conservation Watershed Map

1.2 The Importance of Conservation Areas

Conservation areas are essential to the well-being of communities, providing critical environmental, social, and economic benefits. They serve as vital habitats for wildlife, preserving biodiversity and supporting the ecosystems that surround them. By protecting natural spaces like forests, wetlands, and watersheds, conservation areas contribute to improved water quality, flood mitigation, and climate change mitigation by absorbing carbon dioxide, absorbing rainwater, reducing runoff and regulating local temperatures. These areas act as natural buffers against the negative impacts of climate change, safeguarding both ecosystems and the communities that depend on them.

Beyond their environmental significance, conservation areas offer immense value to the community by promoting mental and physical well-being through recreational activities such as hiking, birdwatching, and outdoor education. Access to these natural spaces and the associated outdoor activities enhances the quality of life by reducing stress and fostering a sense of connection with nature. Economically, they attract tourism, support local businesses, and reduce costs associated with flood control and water filtration. For organizations like Kawartha Conservation, these areas are not just natural assets, but community lifelines that enhance resilience, sustainability, and stewardship in the face of ongoing environmental challenges.

Kawartha Conservation's conservation areas play a pivotal role in reaching our organization's vision of *'Engaged communities that love, respect and appreciate our natural environment'* (see Figure 1).

2.0 Guiding Objectives for Land Management

The primary purpose of using overarching objectives in guiding decision-making is to establish a clear, consistent framework that aligns with Kawartha Conservation's vision and mission to champion watershed health while creating opportunities for people to experience meaningful connections to nature. These objectives serve as a foundational reference point, ensuring that all actions and decisions contribute to the long-term health and sustainability of our conservation areas. By having well defined goals, Kawartha Conservation can evaluate property management opportunities in a way that is consistent with our organizational strategic direction.

The objectives within this strategy provide a strategic vision that helps to prioritize actions and allocate resources efficiently in the management of our conservation areas. In the face of limited funding and competing interests, it is essential to have a set of guiding principles that direct efforts towards the most impactful conservation and community initiatives. These objectives help to balance ecological protection with recreational use, ensuring that public access and enjoyment of natural areas is in alignment with our need to protect and restore sensitive features on our properties. They also facilitate adaptive management, allowing for the incorporation of new scientific knowledge and changing conditions into the management practices, thereby ensuring the resilience and adaptability of conservation efforts.

Clear objectives enhance transparency and accountability in the management of conservation areas. Stakeholders, including the public, local communities, and partner organizations, can better understand

the rationale behind management decisions when they are based on articulated goals. By communicating these objectives effectively, Kawartha Conservation can build stronger partnerships.

2.1 Healthy Environment

Considering aspects of a healthy environment into the decision-making process for managing conservation areas is crucial for ensuring the long-term sustainability of these ecosystems. Kawartha Conservation recognizes the importance of protecting and restoring our sensitive natural areas, which involves the protection of species at risk and reducing impacts of invasive species. Such objectives provide a comprehensive framework that guides conservation efforts, ensuring they are aligned with broader environmental goals.

As urban development continues to expand, our conservation areas are under increasing pressure to provide habitat and ecological goods and services. Considering the ongoing pressures placed on these natural spaces as part of a management decision making process is critical to ensuring the best value for our efforts. Climate change poses significant challenges to the management of conservation areas, necessitating adaptive strategies that are informed by broader environmental objectives. Rising temperatures, altered precipitation patterns, and extreme weather events can drastically impact ecosystems, requiring dynamic and forward-thinking management approaches.

Environmental restoration is also a critical component of these overarching objectives, aiming to rehabilitate degraded ecosystems and restore their functionality. This involves not only re-establishing native species but also improving ecosystem services such as water filtration, carbon sequestration, and soil stabilization. By focusing on these broader environmental goals, conservation managers can create more robust and resilient ecosystems that are better equipped to withstand various threats and continue to provide essential benefits to both wildlife and human communities.

When considering guiding management objectives for environmental health, we found that the criteria outlined on the following page were the most important to our community.



Figure 2 Ken Reid Conservation Area Point Loop



Healthy Environment Objectives:

Natural Heritage

- Ensure land management practices in our Conservation Areas promote long-term ecological sustainability, balancing human use with habitat conservation.
- Prioritize connecting fragmented habitats when identifying restoration opportunities
- Safeguard sensitive water features on our properties by protecting riparian areas.

Species at Risk

- Identify, protect, and maintain critical habitats that support species at risk.
- Restore degraded habitats and improve conditions to support the recovery and population growth of species at risk.
- Ensure all conservation activities comply with local, provincial, and federal laws related to species at risk.

Invasive Species

- Implement site-specific invasive species removal and control programs, using a combination of mechanical, chemical, and biological methods where appropriate.
- Increase public awareness about invasive species through educational programs, volunteer opportunities, and community involvement initiatives.

Environmental Restoration

- Restore degraded ecosystems including wetlands, forests, rivers, and grasslands to improve biodiversity, ecological function, and habitat quality.
- Implement restoration techniques to stabilize soils and reduce sedimentation in waterways.
- Enhance water quality through the restoration of natural hydrological processes.
- Restore forested areas by planting native trees and shrubs to increase canopy cover.

Climate Change

- Focus on planting and maintaining climate resilient native species and support assisted migration during restoration and tree-planting efforts to ensure long-term survival and ecosystem health
- Continuously evaluate and adapt land management practices in response to emerging climate science
- Partner with government bodies, conservation organizations, and Indigenous communities to align efforts and ensure an integrated approach to managing the impacts of climate change on conservation areas.

2.2 Healthy Community

Considering community health as an objective in the management of conservation areas is crucial because these natural spaces significantly contribute to both physical and mental well-being, while also providing climate change mitigation benefits that enhance the health of our communities. Kawartha Conservation recognizes the important role we play in community wellbeing.

Access to green spaces encourages physical activity through passive recreation such as walking, jogging, and cycling, which are essential for maintaining physical health. Trails and linkages within conservation areas provide safe and attractive routes for exercise. The natural environment also offers a serene setting that helps to alleviate stress, anxiety, and depression, enhancing overall mental health. The presence of well-maintained trails and recreational amenities fosters regular interaction with nature, promoting a healthier, more active lifestyle for the community.

Conservation areas serve as vital venues for community gatherings and social cohesion, which are also important aspects of community health. These spaces provide opportunities for organized events, informal meetups, and recreational activities that bring people together, fostering a sense of community and belonging. Such interactions are essential for building social networks and support systems and establishing a sense of place, which are beneficial for mental and emotional well-being. By prioritizing the creation and maintenance of areas conducive to passive recreation and social interaction, Kawartha Conservation can ensure that its managed lands serve as hubs for community engagement and resilience. The integration of trail linkages not only facilitates easy access to these green spaces but also connects different parts of the community, promoting inclusivity and social equity. Considering community health in the management of conservation areas is fundamental to creating vibrant, healthy, and connected communities.

When evaluating guiding management objectives for community health, we found that the criteria outlined on the following page were the most important to our community.



Figure 3 Ken Reid Conservation Area Lookout



Healthy Community Objectives:

Mental Health

- Develop guided nature walks and mindfulness programs to encourage mental well-being through connection to nature.
- Design restorative areas that are specifically intended for quiet reflection.
- Ensure conservation areas offer accessible green spaces for all community members.
- Foster partnerships with mental health organizations.

Physical Health

- Create and maintain well-designed, accessible trails for walking, hiking, and biking, encouraging physical activity among community members of all abilities.
- Establish designated areas for active recreational activities such as jogging, yoga, disc golf, and more.
- Design and maintain natural play areas.
- Offer trails with varying levels of difficulty including length, incline, and other factors.
- Facilitate fitness events such as cross country runs, group hikes, etc.

Community Gatherings

- Create and maintain designated areas for community gatherings, events, and social activities.
- Organize and promote regular community events to foster social connections and community spirit.
- Collaborate with local organizations, schools, and community groups to co-host events and utilize the conservation areas for community programs.
- Ensure that gathering spaces are accessible to all community members, including those with disabilities.

Recreation

- Develop a variety of recreational opportunities to cater to diverse interests and abilities.
- Install clear signage to enhance the recreational experience.
- Create and maintain a network of well-marked trails for various levels of ability.
- Collaborate with local organizations and recreational groups to host community events.

Public Engagement

- Honour Truth and Reconciliation by creating opportunities to strengthen relationships with Indigenous communities.
- Promote community involvement through volunteer opportunities.
- Offer guided hikes and educational programs that promote physical and mental health while fostering an appreciation for the environment.
- Maintain a centralized calendar of events to keep the community informed about upcoming gatherings and activities.

2.3 Discovery

By preserving a variety of habitats, conservation areas offer insights into the functioning of different ecosystems and the species they support. Equally, it is important to consider opportunities for deepening our understanding of our properties as we look at land management options.

Conservation areas are invaluable to our scientific understanding of landscapes, serving as living laboratories where researchers can study ecological processes, biodiversity, and the impacts of climate change on natural environments. These protected areas provide critical baselines for ecological studies, allowing scientists to monitor changes over time and understand the complex interactions within ecosystems. This enhanced scientific knowledge is essential for informing effective management practices, as it helps us develop strategies based on scientific evidence.

Partnering with post-secondary institutions enhances the value of conservation areas by fostering collaborative research initiatives that leverage the expertise and resources of academic scientists. Universities and colleges can contribute cutting-edge research, innovative methodologies, and students eager to engage in fieldwork and data collection. These partnerships can lead to newfound discoveries and a deeper understanding of ecological dynamics locally, which in turn informs better management decisions. For example, research conducted in collaboration with academic institutions can identify new techniques for habitat restoration, more effective methods for controlling invasive species, and strategies for mitigating the impacts of climate change. By integrating academic research into conservation management, we can ensure that our approaches are continually refined and improved, leading to more sustainable and resilient conservation outcomes for future generations.

When considering guiding management objectives for discovery, we found that the criteria outlined on the following page were the most important to our community.



Figure 4 Ken Reid Conservation Area Fall Fest



Discovery Objectives:

Education and Community Engagement

- Incorporate educational components into community gatherings that focus on conservation and environmental stewardship.
- Collaborate with local schools and organizations to develop and deliver educational programs within the conservation areas.
- Offer volunteer programs for community members to participate in conservation projects.
- Incorporate interpretive infrastructure to support self-guided learning.
- Encourage community participation in research efforts through citizen science projects in conservation areas.

Scientific Research

- Provide controlled access to designated areas for researchers supporting scientific study.
- **Promote** research that focuses on biodiversity, ecosystem health and climate change impacts.
- Use scientific research findings to inform and refine conservation area management practices.

Environmental Monitoring

- Develop necessary infrastructure, such as monitoring stations, data collection tools, and observation areas to support environmental monitoring.
- Provide controlled areas within the conservation areas for long-term environmental monitoring.

Partnerships with Academia

- Foster partnerships with universities, colleges, and research organizations to encourage scientific data collection within the conservation areas

3.0 Land Use Categories

3.1 Passive Recreation Areas

Kawartha Conservation manages six properties within the watershed, either through direct ownership or leases. These properties are designated as Passive Recreation areas, meaning they provide habitat and flood/erosion protection while allowing limited public access. These conservation areas have paid parking.

According to Ontario Regulation 686/21 of the *Conservation Authorities Act*, these properties fall under Category 1, Mandatory Programs and Services. While these properties may feature amenities such as trails, signage, fencing, parking lots, washrooms, and picnic areas, they are not regularly staffed. Staff visits are conducted for maintenance and inspection purposes. These properties include:

- Ken Reid Conservation Area
- Pigeon River Headwaters Conservation Area
- Dewey's Island
- Windy Ridge Conservation Area
- Durham East Cross Forest Conservation Area
- Tuck'd Away Trail Conservation Area

3.2 Management Areas

Kawartha Conservation has some sections of Durham East Cross Forest that are not accessible to the public and are not managed for public access currently. These portions of property serve as agricultural fields and have no facilities, parking or trail networks.

According to the Ontario Regulation 686/21 of the *Conservation Authorities Act*, these lands fall under Category 1, Mandatory Programs and Services. Expenses for these parcels are funded through agricultural lease revenue.

3.3 Administrative Areas

Kawartha Conservation maintains an administration building, workshop and compound, and a field centre at Ken Reid Conservation Area. This portion of the property supplements the delivery of programs and services to our community, visitors, and stakeholders. All staff are based at this location.

According to Ontario Regulation 686/21 of the *Conservation Authorities Act*, this falls under Category 1, Mandatory Programs and Services.



4.0 Other Programs and Services

Kawartha Conservation provides various programs and services on Conservation Lands that are not directly tied to the properties. These programs fall among the Category 1, 2 and 3 programs as outlined in the *Conservation Authorities Act*. A summary of the types of activities that occur in our conservation areas which are tied to the different categories of programs and services across the scope of the organization's activities is provided below.

4.1 Category 1 (Mandatory)

These programs are funded through levy, self-generating revenues and grants where appropriate.

- Management, operation and maintenance of CA owned or controlled lands in support of passive recreation
- Facility maintenance activities
- Rehabilitation, restoration or management activities
- Flood monitoring (Ken Reid Conservation Area, Pigeon River Headwaters Conservation Area)
- Provincial Ground Water Monitoring Network (Durham East Cross Forest Conservation Area)

4.2 Category 2 (Municipal)

These programs are funded through self-generating revenues, grants, and MOUs with specific municipal partners.

- Demonstration restoration programs associated with the implementation of watershed management plans or lake management plans.
- Monitoring programs associated with the implementation of watershed management plans and lake management plans.

4.3 Category 3 (Other)

These programs are funded through self-generating revenues, grants, municipal levy and MOU's.

- Education and community engagement activities
- Community gatherings and festivals
- Land management activities associated with education and community engagement purposes

5.0 Conservation Areas Strategy Review

To keep this document up to date, the Conservation Areas Strategy will be reviewed every 5 years. Updates and public consultation will be required if significant changes are made to the overarching objectives and goals. If the Strategy is found to be current and accurate, the Board of Directors may approve it as is for the next 5-year cycle.





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