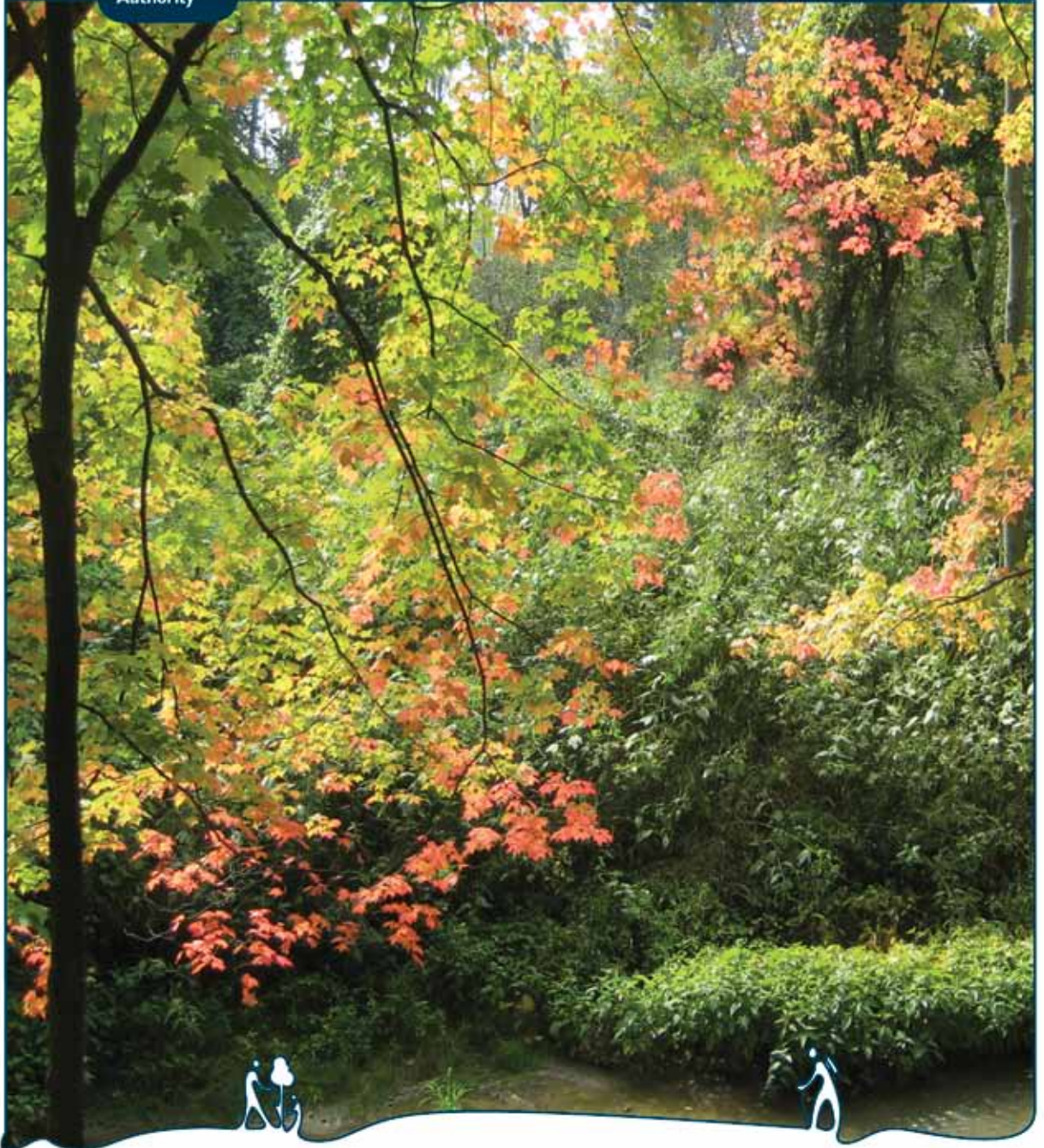




Essex Region  
Conservation  
Authority

# Annual Report 2013



## Our Vision for 2020

To achieve a sustainable environment with healthy watersheds, highlighted by clean creeks, rivers and Great Lakes, thriving natural areas, productive agricultural lands and vibrant places.



*Photo of bird - The Solitary Sandpiper (Tringa solitaria) is a smaller wading shorebird often seen at Hillman Marsh during migration.  
Front Cover photo -Botsford Conservation Area - the leaves of the black maple trees are just beginning to turn colour.*



## Message from the Chair and General Manager



*“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it’s the only thing that ever has.”*  
– Margaret Mead

Looking back over our past four decades of conservation - it’s almost impossible to imagine how far we’ve come. In 1973, tree cover in this region was less than 3.5%. No comprehensive program existed to ensure homes were protected from flooding and erosion. There were no conservation areas or greenways.

We were the second last of Ontario’s Conservation Authorities to be established, and by the time we were created, many of the other Authorities had already completed infrastructure works such as dams, flood control channels and dykes. We had a lot of work to do to provide those same services to our residents. Even before we could begin our shoreline protection program, we had a number of challenges to overcome. The science of the time was developed for valleys as a result of Hurricane Hazel, not our flat landscapes. Applying these standards would have meant no development would have been allowed. So, despite being almost the last Conservation Authority to be established, we were one of the first to develop comprehensive fill and floodline mapping for our shorelines to ensure that development could proceed – but in a sustainable way.

In 1974, we acquired our first conservation areas – Maidstone and Devonwood. Fast forward to today and we have protected more than 4,000 acres of natural habitat and provide 19 publicly accessible conservation areas and almost 100 km of trails for all ages to visit, enjoy and connect with nature.

In 1976 we began our tree planting program and planted 32,000 trees that first year. Now, with landowners and other partners, we plant around 150,000 trees annually and over four decades, we’ve added 6 million trees to the region. Through these efforts, we have increased our natural areas coverage to over 8.5%.

We began our Conservation Education program in 1980, and since then, have educated more than 300,000 students about the importance of conserving our environment and preserving our heritage. For many of these young people, our outdoor education program is their first interaction with nature.

In 1995, when the Province of Ontario cut funding to Conservation Authorities by 70%, we still hadn’t quite caught up to the rest of our Conservation Authority family, many of whom had reached full maturity in terms of their programming and infrastructure. We still had so much more to do.

Despite that setback, our Board of Directors at the time was truly visionary. While cutting programs would have been the easier choice, they chose to maintain existing levels of service, requiring staff to focus on revenue generation, implementing fee-for-service to those who benefit, and strengthening community and municipal partnerships. We became creative in finding ways to get our important work done, and aggressive about seeking special project funding on behalf of our municipal partners. In fact, it’s become



*Past and present staff of the Essex Region Conservation Authority*

very much part of ERCA's culture and helped to define our reputation over the decades: we are known for our ability to find innovative solutions, for at times, seemingly insurmountable challenges.

While we've said it before, none of these accomplishments were made in isolation, and it's truly amazing to see so many people gathered together who have had a hand in shaping the environment of Windsor, Essex County and Pelee Island. We thank every Mayor, Municipal Councillor and past ERCA Board Member who has embraced our regional approach to doing business, and has recognized that the environment does not respect political boundaries and that what's good for our region ultimately benefits our own municipalities.

It's also critically important to say 'thank you' to the many partners and volunteers who have helped us over the years. From everyone who has come to plant a tree or clean up a watershed, to those who help interpret the John R. Park Homestead, to our partners who help us in birding activities, and to everyone who has had a hand in the conservation of this region, we salute you.

We're all familiar with Margaret Mead's quote; that only a small, thoughtful group of committed citizens can change the world. It's so true, because together, we have made significant progress in changing and making better our corner of this world.

Sincerely,

**Joe Bachetti**  
Chair

**Richard Wyma**  
General Manager/Secretary-Treasurer



*ERCA is ensuring organizational sustainability as well as environmental sustainability. Photo: Eric Naylor*

## **Five Year Sustainability Plan**

While the Essex Region Conservation Authority has long been dedicated to improving the environmental sustainability of the region, this year, we also introduced a plan for organizational sustainability. The Five Year Sustainability Plan: A Way Forward considered budget reports, best practices from other similar agencies and municipalities, program reviews and input collected from Board, Staff and the public during strategic planning and stakeholder engagement sessions.

This plan allows us to continue our operations while focusing on some pressing issues such as capital infrastructure and reserves. Departments and their managers have been reduced from eight to four, and while the staff complement remains the same, a significant departmental restructuring has taken place. The new organizational structure provides clarity and further encourages collaboration and coordination, while allowing for succession and retention planning. The plan directs savings to core programs with significant ‘at risk’ sources, and better positions ERCA to respond to the next generation of conservation challenges – climate change, engineering innovation, and science and research. These changes have strengthened our organization’s ability to actively pursue and embrace new ways of doing business, become more engaged with our partners and better communicate with the communities we serve. As part of our 40th Year of Conservation, it seemed like an appropriate time to introduce changes that will help us move forward in strengthening our ability to implement the community’s conservation goals.

## **40 Years of Conservation**

Over the course of this year, ERCA invited the community to join us in celebrating our 40th Year of Conservation. We recognized 40 Conservation Champions, all of whom made significant contributions to the conservation movement in Windsor-Essex. We created a web-based timeline with highlights from each of the past 40 years. We hosted 40 community events, including a 40 acre restoration project, and a 40th birthday celebration for all partners, volunteers, educators, board members, staff and those with whom we’ve worked over the past four decades.



*MP Jeff Watson, Past Chair Ray Renaud, General Manager Richard Wyma and Conservation Champions Gerry Waldron and Phil Roberts.*

ERCA strives to connect people to our landscape, waterfronts and our Great Lakes and rivers with attractive natural areas, trails and Conservation Areas as part of a vibrant and sustainable community.

## Planting of our Six Millionth Tree

On September 25, National Tree Day, volunteers, partners and supporters gathered to celebrate the planting of ERCA's six millionth tree. When ERCA was established in 1973, less than 3.5% of the region was identified as forested lands. A recent mapping and calculation effort has identified that thanks to these efforts, forest coverage in the region now measures 5.4%, and that the percentage of total natural areas is 8.5%.

Thousands of volunteers and hundreds of private landowners contributed to this achievement. In fact, with most of Southern Ontario's land base held in private ownership, without these important partnerships, these strides towards sustainability would not take place.

Six Million Trees! That's enough trees to:

- Fill every seat in the WFCU Centre Arena 923 times
- Sequester more than 461,500 pounds of carbon from our atmosphere every single year
- Replace 500,000 tons of paper!



*Ken Schmidt, ERCF, TD's Philip Fernandes, Mayor John Paterson, Past Chair Ray Renaud and donor Mike Malone cut the ribbon for the Shorebird Viewing Shelter at Hillman Marsh*

## **Shorebird Viewing Shelter at Hillman Marsh Conservation Area**

A Shorebird Viewing Shelter was built at Hillman Marsh to provide birders and students with protection from wind and rain while viewing the beautiful birds that rest and feed in the world-renowned Shorebird Habitat. This habitat was created in 2003 and is unique in North America. It provides a migration stopover feeding and resting area for thousands of shorebirds migrating from South and Central America to the Arctic.

The shelter enables visitors, including many student groups, a closer and more interactive educational experience in the marshland habitat. It also provides important protection to expensive cameras, telescopes, binoculars and other tools that birders and students utilize. Most of all, it is another special amenity to complement the birding experiences

available in this region. Birding is one of the fastest growing recreational pastimes amongst the baby-boomer demographic and incredibly important to tourism here in our region. It's estimated that each spring, birding has a local economic impact of nearly \$15 million dollars. Project partners include Pelee Wings Nature Store, the Ontario Field Ornithologists, the Essex Region Conservation Foundation and the TD Friends of the Environment Foundation.

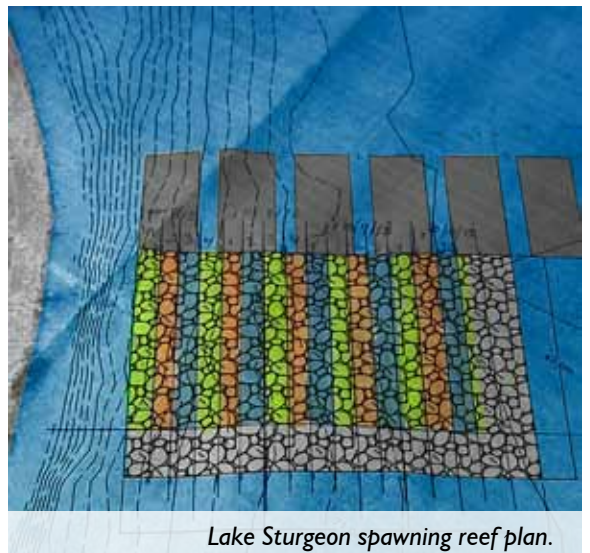
We also:

- Restored 115 acres of habitat, including an important project at Your Quick Gateway – The Windsor Airport, that connected two separate woodlots.
- Enhanced seasonal camping sites and temporarily suspended transient camping while important infrastructure improvements are underway at Holiday Beach Conservation Area.



*Architect's rendering of the new eco-washroom currently under construction at Holiday Beach.*

- Improved infrastructure at Conservation Areas, including boardwalk improvements at Hillman Marsh and breaking ground for the new eco-washroom at Holiday Beach Conservation Area, which will recycle and repurpose as many materials as possible into this state-of-the-art facility.
- Worked with the Conservation Areas Advisory Committee in drafting a Management Plan for Holiday Beach.
- Developed the Essex Region Natural Heritage System Strategy to increase protection of natural heritage features and recommend restoration opportunities as a background report for the County of Essex Official Plan, and worked with the County and all municipalities in finalizing the Plan with respect to natural heritage and natural hazards.
- Became the first Conservation Authority in Ontario to approve a smoke-free outdoor spaces policy, which will be implemented in 2014.
- Continued to participate in the County Wide Active Transportation initiative to create more cycle-friendly roads and trails in our community.
- Coordinated a bi-national partnership to create a second Lake Sturgeon spawning reef in the Detroit River for this endangered species.



*Lake Sturgeon spawning reef plan.*





**Essex Region Conservation Authority**

## Get Septic Savvy!

Many rural properties have septic systems, which are individual on-site sewage treatment facilities.

**Did you know...**

- That maintaining your septic system can be done for as little as a few hundred dollars every 3 - 5 years?
- That a little maintenance goes a long way in helping to extend the life of your septic system?
- That the cost of improper maintenance can add up to tens of thousands of dollars?

**Protect Your Investment & Your Family**

Septic care and water conservation will help to extend the life of your septic system. Improperly maintained septic systems are a risk to your health and the environment because they can contaminate local water sources. Maintain your septic system regularly to save you thousands of dollars in the future.

[www.erca.org](http://www.erca.org)

Engaging our community to increase awareness of conserving and enhancing our environment continues to be a focus.

### Septic Maintenance Outreach Strategy

ERCA launched a program aimed at helping landowners understand more about their septic systems, and partnered with local maintenance contractors to offer service discounts. Poorly maintained and faulty septic systems can negatively impact water quality and degrade habitat for fish and wildlife. This program responded to a Detroit River Canadian Cleanup survey which identified that some homeowners did not know that their sewage is serviced by a privately owned septic system, nor is there a clear understanding that these need to be regularly maintained.

Through this initiative, ERCA teamed up with septic maintenance contractors to offer a discount on maintenance costs. A list of contractors that

undertake this work was posted on ERCA's website, and a postcard to help landowners understand more about the dos and don'ts associated with prolonging the lives of their septic systems was mailed to approximately 10,000 homes within the Detroit River watershed. As well, a workshop with regional building inspectors was held for the purpose of an open exchange of information and ideas in order to encourage proper septic maintenance.

We also:

- Improved integration of Outdoor Education programs.
- Restructured our community outreach program to provide Friends of Watersheds groups more autonomy while enhancing opportunities to reach additional segments of our population.

# Engage



*Volunteer interpreters at the John R. Park Homestead.*

- Strengthened our Volunteer Program and formalized opportunities for interns and co-op students seeking work experiences.
- Streamlined office management, including implementing a web-based payroll system.
- Hosted 75 events including tree plantings, invasive species removals, active events to appreciate conservation areas, and nature and heritage events.
- Hosted a special evening at Holiday Beach Conservation Area to recognize and thank our many volunteers



*Volunteers continued to conduct stream cleanups.*



*Richard Wyma, Joe Bachetti and Dr. John Hartig sign collaborative agreements.*

Reaching out to engage existing and new stakeholders to create a partnership for a sustainable environment is another of ERCA's top priorities.

## Priority Natural Area Land Registry

In August, the Essex Region Conservation Authority and the US Fish and Wildlife Services signed agreements to ensure that lands on both sides of the border will be managed collaboratively in the spirit and intent of the 2001 Conservation Vision, the US Detroit River International Wildlife Refuge and the Western Lake Erie Watersheds Priority Natural Areas initiative. As part of this agreement, ERCA and its partners created a Canadian Registry of Lands. This registry does not result in a transfer of ownership, but instead, recognizes a voluntary commitment to manage lands that have been registered with conservation and habitat protection and restoration as top priorities. To date, 4778 acres of lands have been registered.

We also:

- Completed the Big Creek Watershed Plan with support from the Town of Amherstburg, Ministry of Environment, Ministry of Agriculture and Food, Environment Canada and others.
- Replaced the failing weir along the Grand Marais Drain with three rock steps to improve drain stability and flow. A planting strategy to re-grow grasses and select trees that will not impact flow within the channel or obstruct future City drain maintenance was also completed.
- Finalized the Shoreline Design Guidelines to provide guidance on environmentally sensitive shoreline engineering techniques and soft-shore treatments along the Detroit River corridor.
- Co-hosted a Bi-national workshop: Sharing Agricultural Science, Technology and Data for Improved Great Lakes Water Quality in partnership with Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food and other Conservation Authorities.



*The 2012 Watershed Report Card is released.*

ERCA also works at developing greater scientific knowledge of our region in order to adapt to climate change and respond to its impact on the safety, health and economic wellbeing of residents.

## **Watershed Report Card – A Snapshot of Watershed Health**

The Watershed Report Card measures watershed health across the region. It is intended to provide our community with information needed to protect, enhance and improve the natural resources of our watershed. Conservation Authorities across the province are utilizing standardized measurement protocols to ensure consistent reporting. The information is important because it measures environmental indicators to identify current conditions and changes to watershed health. It also helps us to guide our conservation and restoration efforts, and allows us to monitor progress.

We also:

- Worked with partner municipalities toward updating the Intensity-Duration-Frequency Curves (IDF) to ensure regional infrastructure is constructed to the appropriate design levels for long-term adaptability and resilience in the face of changing climate conditions.
- Conducted a workshop with landowners about the use and importance of Phosphorus (P) testing and reducing excess fertilizer use.
- Completed updates to Source Water Technical Studies and the Source Water Assessment Report.
- Initiated a tile drain water control structure best management practice (BMP) on a property in Essex to assess the reduction in phosphorus losses.



*Jesse Costa Gardner, Mayor Ron McDermott and Councillor Sherry Bondy help create the region's first rain garden.*

- Created the Harrow Rain Garden, a 'how-to' guide for landowners, and a video to engage others in implementing this low-impact stormwater management treatment.
- Became a member of the Ontario Climate Consortium to advance the focus on addressing climate change issues in the Essex region.
- Began a study to estimate phosphorus movement through surface overland and tile drain flows for a no-till farm in Essex.



*Phosphorus is identified as a significant contributor to blue-green algae.*



*Before and after: Butterfly garden restoration*

# Connect



	2011	2012	2013
Number of trees planted & distributed	170,500	146,700	137,760
Acres of habitat restored			
Detroit River Watersheds	57	54	32.5
Lake St. Clair Watersheds	21	8	4.5
Lake Erie Watersheds	64	77	78.85
Acres of natural areas acquired	81	0	26.5
Value of acquisitions by ERCA (fair market value)	\$225,000	n/a	203,657
Cost of ERCA's contributions	\$126,000	n/a	141,657
% of ERCA's contribution	56%	n/a	70%
\$ contributed to partnership acquisitions	\$343,000	n/a	62,000
Acres of land owned and managed	4039	4039	4073
Metres of Shoreline Stabilized and Enhanced	550	200	450
Kilometres of Trail owned and managed	79	79	79
Number of Visitors to John R. Park Homestead	15,591	12,918	12,100
Number of Day Use Visitors to Holiday Beach	8,142	6,724	5,667
Number of camping nights (overnight camping suspended in 2013)	1,273	1,251	185
Number of seasonal campsites purchased	46	44	54
Number of ERCA hosted special events	23	17	32



*Students working together to naturalize their schoolyard.*

# Engage



	2011	2012	2013
Watershed Population	338,595	333,529	332,734
Number of Students Participating in Outdoor Education Programs	7,631	7,358	6,492
Number of Volunteers	1,661	2,080	2,237
Number of Public Meetings/Workshops Hosted	3	15	16
Number of Friends of Watersheds Events	39	52	40
Number of Schoolyard Naturalization Projects Completed	11	9	6
Number of Local Committees, Boards and Advisory Panels with ERCA representation	14	17	17
Number of Provincial Committees, Boards and Advisory Panels with ERCA representation	11	9	12
Permanent and Long-term Contract Staff	29	29	28
Average Full-Time staff length of service	14	15	14
Seasonal and Short-term Contract Staff	15	16	12

# Collaborate



	2011	2012	2013
Number of Permits Reviewed, Processed and Approved	459	568	488
General Inquiries for Planning and Regulations	1567	1557	1478
Average Response Time for Permits: Minor Development (Single Family residential, clearances, etc.)	10.68 days	7.48 days	7.57 days
Average Response Time for Permits: Major Development (Requiring engineering or other detailed analysis)	33.23 days	29.32 days	29.58 days
Average Response Time for Permits: Alteration to Waterways (Requiring engineering/DFO/MNR approvals or analysis)	14.55 days	7.83 days	9.18 days
Number of Violations Issued	16	12	15
\$ Value of Water and Infrastructure Control Contributions to Municipalities	\$356,000	\$204,000	\$435,000
Number of Flood/Wind Advisories Issued	11	3	4



*BMPs like rock chutes help improve water quality.*



*Water quality monitoring is conducted year round.*

# Discover



	2011	2012	2013
Number of Water Quality Improvement Projects Implemented (rock chutes, buffer strips, etc).			
Detroit River Watersheds	13	13	13
Lake St. Clair Watersheds	4	8	4
Lake Erie Watersheds	16	11	16
Number of Surface Water Quality Sites Monitored	24	39	24
Number of Groundwater Quality Sites Monitored	8	8	8
Number of Stream Cleanups Conducted	3	5	5

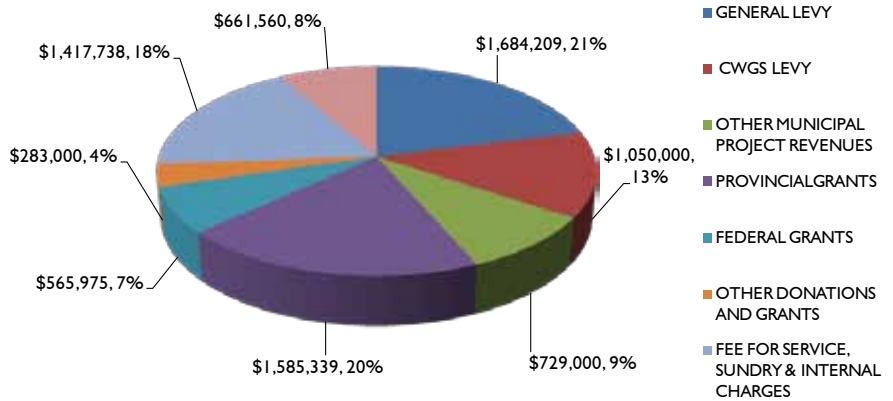


## 2013 Financial Review

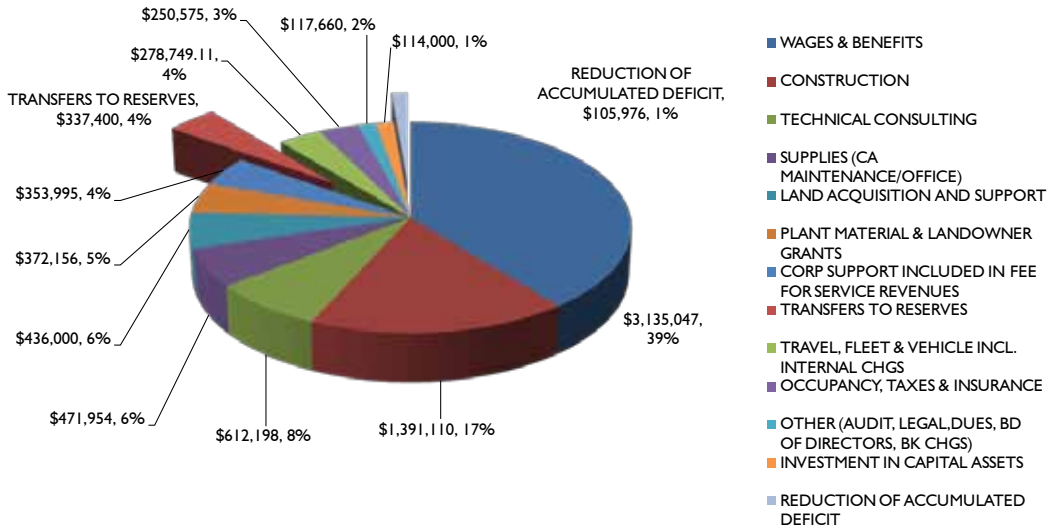
In accordance with the Public Sector Accounting Board PS 3150, ERCA incorporates tangible capital assets into the Financial Statements. Identifying assets and their limited useful lives increases our understanding of using capital assets in the delivery of services.

This information gives municipal councils and the public a better understanding of the true financial position.

## 2013 SOURCES OF FUNDS \$7,976,821

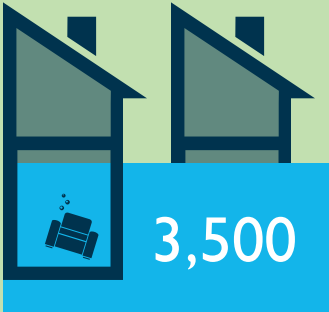


## 2013 USES OF FUNDS \$7,976,821



Note: The 2013 unaudited revenues and expenses are based on information available as of January 14, 2014 and as such the numbers are subject to change. These numbers also represent the information which will appear in the Statement of Operations, however due to the accounting for tangible capital assets (PSAB 3150) and non-cash items such as amortization, the Statements of Net Debt and Cash Flow should also be referred to in the audited Financial Statements. The projected surplus of ~\$106,000 will be used to reduce the accumulated deficit. The Audited Financial Statements will be available in June 2014 and include all Statements and Schedules as required by GAAP for public sector entities.

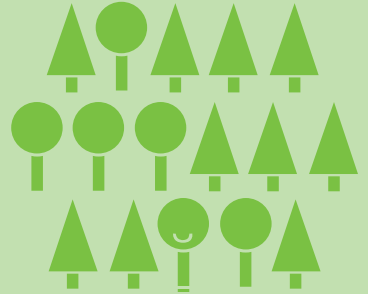
# 40 Years of Conservation!



3,500

Previously flood-prone homes and properties protected from flooding and erosion

## 6 MILLION Trees Planted



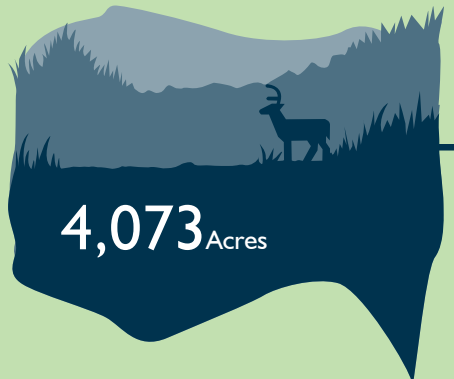
Sequestering more than **461,500** pounds of carbon from our atmosphere every single year!



## 25,000+ Volunteers



## 308,000+ Students Educated



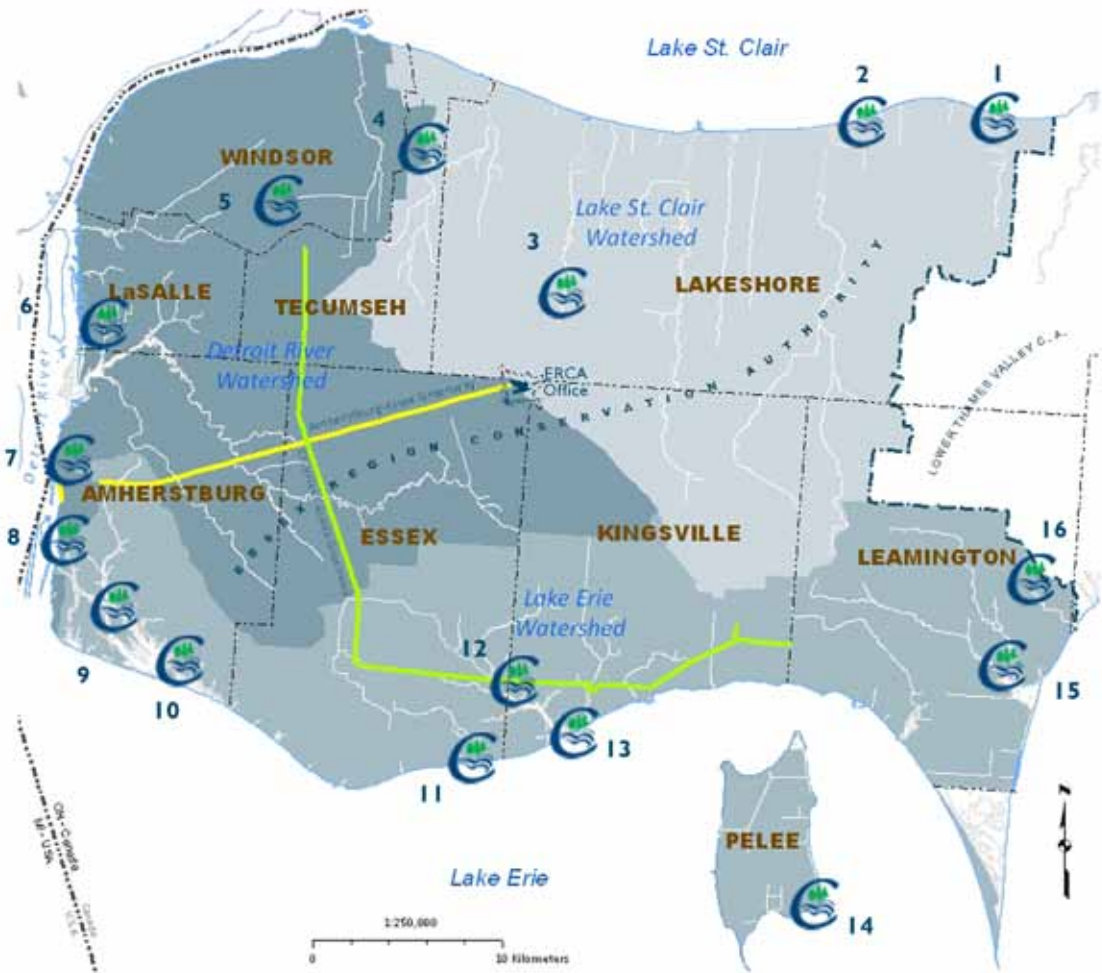
4,073 Acres

Natural areas protected



**104** kms  
of shoreline  
stabilized and  
improved

Make healthy and active lifestyles a priority for your family. Visit any of the region's conservation areas to hike, bike and enjoy nature and each other.



- |                    |                   |                            |
|--------------------|-------------------|----------------------------|
| 1. Tremblay Beach  | 6. Petite Côte    | 11. John R. Park Homestead |
| 2. Ruscom Shores   | 7. Crystal Bay    | 12. Cedar Creek            |
| 3. Maidstone       | 8. White Sands    | 13. Cedar Beach            |
| 4. McAuliffe Woods | 9. Big Creek      | 14. Stone Road Alvar       |
| 5. Devonwood       | 10. Holiday Beach | 15. Hillman Marsh          |
|                    |                   | 16. Kopegaron Woods        |





**Essex Region  
Conservation  
Authority**

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