



St. Clair Region Conservation Authority Meeting Highlights – December 7, 2023

Below is a list of highlights from the SCRCA board meeting held in December. For details, please refer to the entire meeting package which can be found at www.scrca.on.ca/about-us/board-meeting-packages.

Memorandum of Understandings for Category 2 and 3 Programs: SCRCA General Manager, Ken Phillips continues to engage with staff and councils of member municipalities to discuss and negotiate Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) and funding agreements for Category 2 and Category 3 programs and services as prescribed under O. Reg. 687/21 – Transition Plans and Agreements for Programs and Services under Section 21.1.2 of the *Conservation Authorities Act*. Recent discussions have taken place with staff from Plympton-Wyoming, Lambton Shores, and Chatham-Kent with reports expected to be sent to their respective councils shortly. To date, 9 municipalities have approved agreements with 5 finalized (i.e., signed agreements in hand).

2024 Budget: The SCRCA Board of Directors approved the 2024 Authority budget of \$11,231,089. The General Levy (matching and non-matching) of \$1,611,345 accounts for approximately 14% of the total budget. The remainder of the funds come from fundraising, government grants, and self-generated funds such as camping fees, and fees for services (e.g., tree planting, permits, education programs, etc.).

Watershed Conditions: The current flood threat in the St. Clair Region is low due to below average amounts of precipitation and greater water storage capacity throughout the watershed. As winter approaches, changing wind patterns, freeze-thaw events, rain on snow, and ice jamming can create potential flood concerns. Staff will be collecting snow samples throughout the winter to determine the depth of the snowpack and its water equivalents to estimate the run-off potential of the spring freshet. Great Lake water levels indicate a declining trend which is expected to continue over the next 6-month period.

Healthy Watersheds Program: The Healthy Watersheds program aims to minimize non-point sources of sedimentation, nutrient loading, and thermal changes in water bodies throughout the St. Clair Region through the implementation of Best Management Practices (BMPs) and organization of outreach events. Recent activities include:

- **2024 Agricultural Newsletter** – Staff are currently working on a 4-page agricultural newsletter that will be delivered to over 1,700 landowners in the watershed with properties greater than 2 hectares (5 acres). The newsletters provide information on agricultural stewardship and encourages on-the-ground action to maintain and improve local water quality.
- **Grant Applications** – Biology and stewardship staff have submitted five grant applications to various government agencies to support the Healthy Watersheds program (among others).

Planning and Regulations Activity: Between October 1st and October 31st, 2023, staff issued 16 permits and responded to 56 inquiries under O. Reg 171/06 – Development, Interference of Wetlands, and Alterations to Shorelines and Watercourses. Additionally, 32 permits were issued during the same timeframe under the *Drainage Act* and Section 28 Regulations Team (DART) protocol. Planning activity between October 1st and October 31st included the review and comment on 37 municipal plan input and review files, 3 environmental assessments, and 6 legal inquiries.

Conservation Education Program Update: Interest in the SCRCA's Conservation Education programs continue to be in high demand. Recent activities include:

- **Field Trips:** Outdoor field trips to the Lorne C. Henderson Conservation Area remain a popular option by teachers and students, alike. Over 1,500 students visited the Conservation Area during the months of September, October, and November. Secondary school bookings continue to increase with 530 secondary students participating in field trips this fall.
- **Nature in Your Neighbourhood Schoolyard Program:** Due to the cost and declining availability of bussing, some schools are unable to participate in field trips to the Conservation Area. The SCRCA education team is once again offering schoolyard programming for the 2023-2024 school year to help reduce this barrier, with 600 students participating this past fall.
- **Geocaching Event –** The annual “Geocaching Adventure” event was held on September 10th at the Lorne C. Henderson Conservation Area. Forty-one geocachers from all over Southern Ontario participated. The event takes geocachers throughout the Conservation Area to find hidden caches. The caches that were hidden during the 2023 event are available for one year to allow other geocachers to come and find before they are moved prior to next year's event.
- **Fall Fairs – Agriculture in the Classroom:** Throughout September and October, the SCRCA education team attended the Wyoming, Forest, and Brigden Fall Fairs. Staff introduced over 400 students and families to agricultural Best Management Practices and how implementing them can help both farmers and local species at risk.
- **Chatham-Kent and Lambton Children's Water Festival:** Once again, the SCRCA assisted the Lower Thames Valley Conservation Authority in organizing and overseeing the annual Children's Water Festival held at the C.M. Wilson Conservation Area near Chatham. Over the three-day event (October 3rd – 5th), 300 secondary school students attended as volunteer instructors, running water-themed activities for approximately 1,800 Grade 3-5 students.

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