

Watershed-Based Resource MANAGEMENT STRATEGY 2024 - 2026



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Background	3
Section 1: Watershed Characterization.....	4
Section 2: Vision, Mission, Ends and Objectives.....	10
Section 3: Service Area Three-Year Work Plans.....	11
Corporate Services 2024-2026.....	11
Flood and Erosion Safety Services (FESS) 2024 - 2026.....	12
Conservation Areas Services 2024 - 2026.....	14
Watershed Health Monitoring Assessment and Reporting 2024 - 2026.....	15
Watershed Stewardship Services 2024 - 2026.....	16
Drinking Water Source Protection (DWSP) 2024 - 2026.....	17
Section 4: Review and Update of Watershed Strategy.....	18
Section 5: References.....	18
Appendix A: Technical Studies and Assessment Reports.....	19
Appendix B: Terms and Definitions.....	19



BACKGROUND

Conservation Authorities are required to submit a watershed-based resource management strategy to the Ministry of Natural Resources by December 31, 2024.

Maitland Conservation has an agreement with its member municipalities outlining the services and programs provided. This agreement is in place until June 2026. This watershed strategy is based on Maitland Conservation's 2024-2026 work plan.

The watershed strategy has been developed to include an overview of how the watershed has changed over the past 200 years. This provides some context for the organization's services and programs.



SECTION 1: WATERSHED CHARACTERIZATION



In southern Ontario interest in conservation was indicated first by reforestation and woodland management, and more recently this has broadened out to include flood and pollution control, improved land use and provision of recreational facilities. While the progress in these activities has been steady up to the present, most of this progress heretofore were initiated by government departments. Recently, however, there has been a growing conception of personal obligation.....

Introduction to the Middle Maitland Valley Conservation Report, 1954

A river story

Every river has a story. This story flows from the waters of the river and up through its streams and creeks and into the surrounding farms, forests, and towns. Those waters become part of the story of the people and communities in the watershed (Figure 1, Box 1). The Maitland Valley watershed has a rich story that spans back for thousands of years to the Indigenous Peoples

that relied on these waters and lands for transportation, hunting, fishing, and farming. The original peoples of the Maitland Valley watershed called the river the Menesetung River, meaning “laughing waters” [1]. While the name was changed in the 1800s, the original name is still in local use, such as the Menesetung Bridge in Goderich.

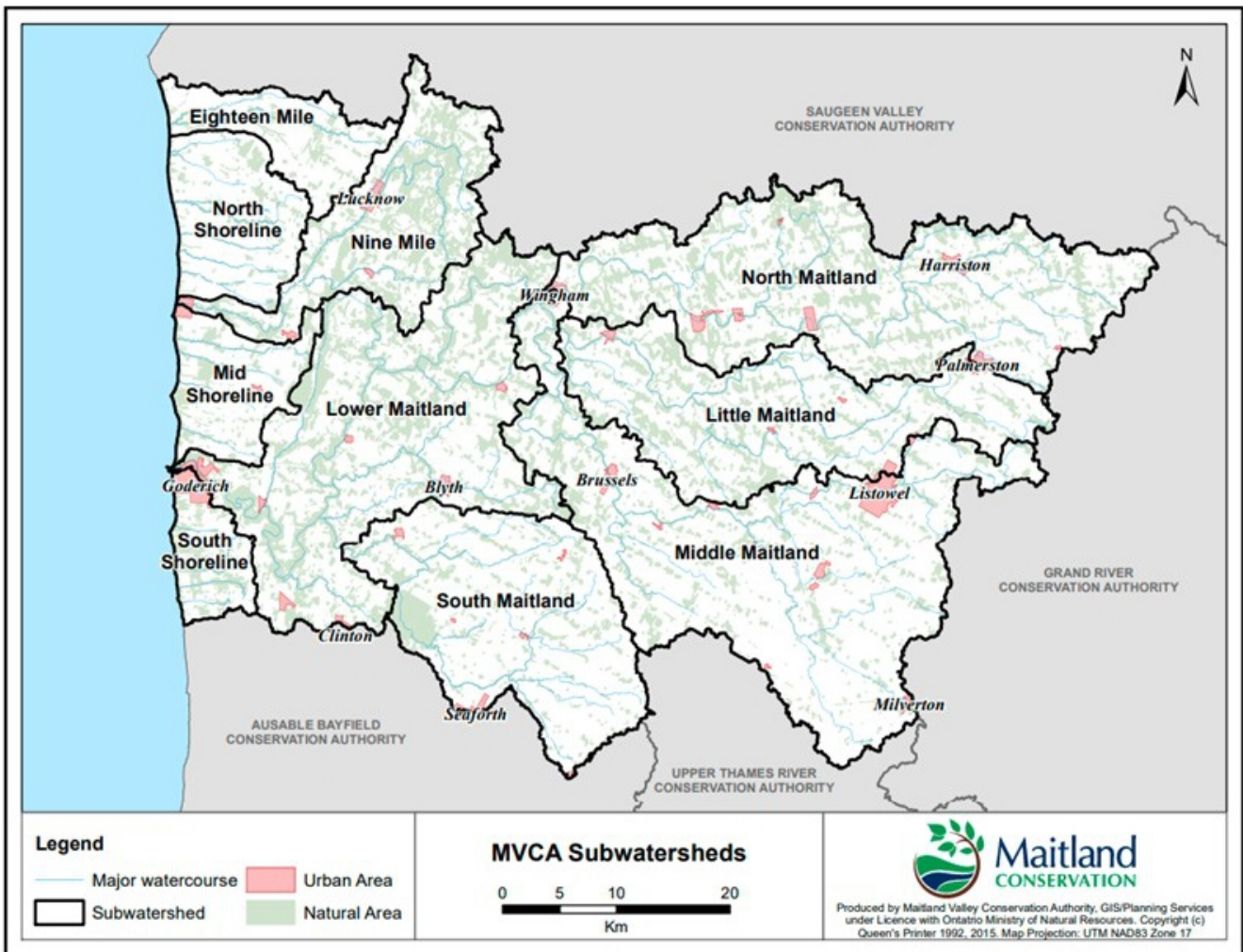


Figure 1: The Maitland Valley watershed is comprised of 15 smaller sub-watersheds.

Box 1: Maitland Conservation’s Watersheds, by the numbers

- Watershed area:** 3270 square km
- Length of the Maitland River:** 150 km
- Number of sub-watersheds:** 10
- Length of Lake Huron coastline:** 50 km
- Population:** 60,000
- Public Land:** 1%
- Private Land:** 99%
- Number of Counties:** 4
- Number of Municipalities:** 15



Figure 2: Fishing in the Maitland River near Ethel, 1912 (Huron County Archives) The waters, lands, and beaches of the Maitland Valley watershed have been used for recreation and tourism for over a century.

The first European settlers were also attracted to the region for the abundant natural resources in the Maitland Valley watershed. The vast forests of old-growth Sugar Maple, American Beech, and Eastern Hemlock provided both fuel and timber that supported early industries. Over sixty dams were built on the Maitland River and its tributaries to power sawmills, flour mills and wool mills [2]. The river and beaches along Lake Huron also provided recreation for residents and a growing tourism industry (Figure 2).

However, by the turn of the 20th century, deforestation and water pollution were beginning to take a toll on the health of the Maitland Valley watershed. Direct discharges of sewage and industrial waste into the river reduced water quality and fish habitat [3]. Increased erosion as a result of stripping the river and its tributaries of protective buffers and rapid deforestation across the watershed increased siltation of the once clean waters, threatened the productivity of farmland,



Figure 3: Many Conservation Area Forest Tracts and County Forests in the Maitland Valley watershed have been donated by landowners. Naftel's Creek Conservation Area was created through John Hindmarsh's generous donation of land.

and heightened the risk of flooding. Many of the dams that once powered industry became obsolete and a liability that both blocked the migration of fish and created large areas of stagnant water allowing the buildup of toxins, sediment, and increased water temperatures [4].

A century of community-based conservation

By the early 1900s forest cover in the watershed had dipped to under 10% and it was becoming increasingly clear that new approaches were needed to halt and reverse the declining quality of lands and waters in the Maitland Valley watershed. Reforestation programs began in 1905 to work with local landowners to increase forest cover, with a focus on areas along waterways and on marginal farmlands (Figure 3). Huron, Grey, and other counties passed by-laws under The Trees Act (1950) to support good forestry practices. Conserved tracts of forest were established, often through donations by private landowners (Figure 3).

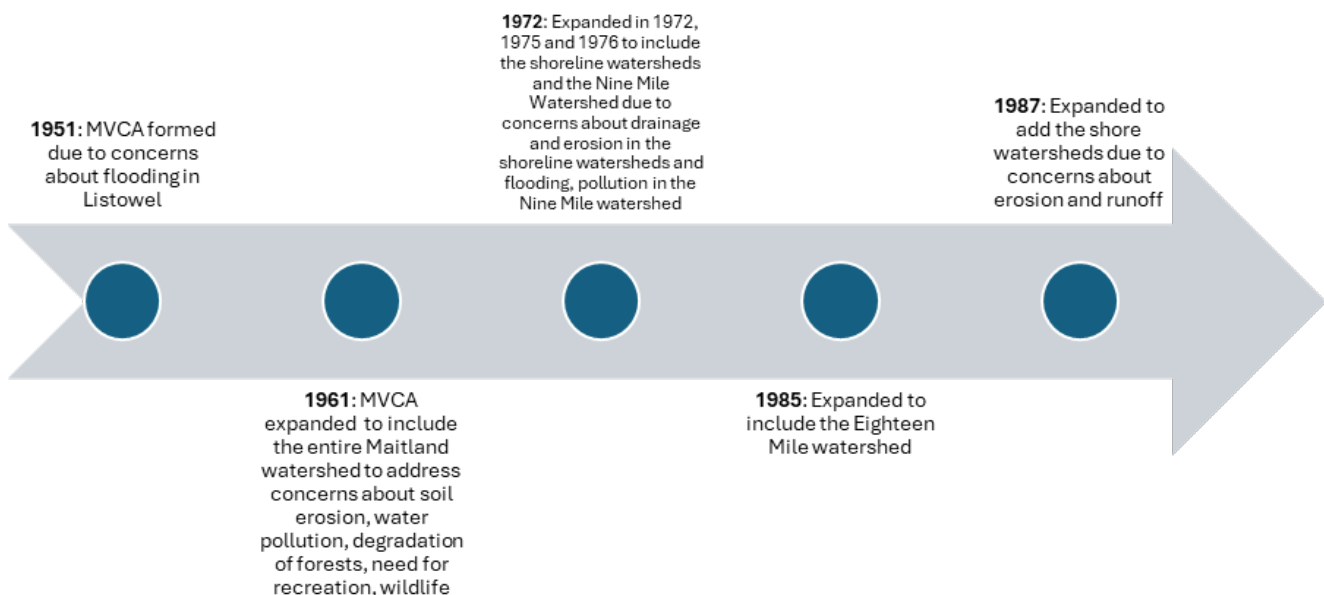
There was also increasing recognition that good stewardship of lands and waters needed a watershed approach. Formed in 1951, the Maitland Valley Conservation Authority (MVCA) emerged as part of a network of conservation authorities established across southern Ontario under the Conservation Authorities Act (1946). Enacted by the province of Ontario in response to concerns raised by agricultural, naturalist, and sports groups, the Act aimed to address the degradation of renewable natural resources in the province. These groups included the Ontario Conservation and Reforestation Association and the Ontario Crop Improvement Association, both established in 1937 to help restore lands and waters. Land and water degradation was primarily attributed to inadequate land, water, and forestry practices, such as grazing cattle in woodlots. This was exacerbated by droughts and deforestation, which resulted in widespread erosion of topsoil and flooding.

The rationale of establishing conservation authorities was the result of the growing recognition that healthy lands and waters were essential for any community to thrive, and that watershed protection needed to be coordinated and led by local residents [5]. Since its establishment almost 75 years ago, the Maitland Valley Conservation Authority has been working

with landowners, local governments, and residents to protect the quality of life in the watershed. Originally established as the Middle Maitland Valley, the Conservation Authority was expanded between 1961 and 1987 to include all the Maitland Valley watershed (Figure 4).

In addition to flooding and soil erosion, one of the major challenges faced in the Maitland River watershed in the 1950s was water pollution. The first water quality sampling in the Maitland Valley watershed began in the 1960s by the Ontario Water Resources Commission [3]. Back then only Listowel and Palmerston provided some treatment of sewage discharge, and it was recognized that untreated industrial and domestic wastewater was threatening activities such as swimming, fishing and boating. Sampling done at some locations in the 1960s shows that bacteria levels were over 400 times what is now considered safe for recreational use [3]. Water quality sampling has been continued by the Conservation Authority in partnership with the Provincial Water Quality Monitoring Network since 1964. Regular water sampling has proven to be critical in monitoring watershed health and directing stewardship activities to reduce loadings of nutrients and bacteria from runoff.

Figure 4: Timeline of the Maitland Valley Conservation Authority



Our conservation progress is at risk

Over a century of community stewardship activities have helped to protect the quality of life in the Maitland Valley watershed, but the health of our watershed remains at risk.

While public reforestation programs and the introduction of forest conservation bylaws led to an increase in forest cover from 10 per cent (1961) to 16 per cent [6], forest cover is again starting to decline as small family farms become industrialized and invasive species such as Emerald Ash Borer sweep through out woodlots. Today the forests of the Maitland Valley watershed are younger, second-growth forests that reflect the history of overharvesting. Healthy, diverse understory plant and forest bird communities are becoming increasingly rare in our forests (Figure 5). Emerging threats to forest cover and health include beech leaf disease and hemlock woolly adelgid [6].

In addition to land use changes, water quality in the Maitland Valley watershed is threatened by a changing climate. Extreme rainfall events are becoming more frequent, and what was once a hundred-year storm is happening every few years. Heavy rains, combined with less natural cover to hold and filter storm waters results in erosion, flooding and increased water pollution. These extreme rainfall events are also now accompanied by an increase in the frequency and duration of heat waves and droughts [7].

Declining water quality in rivers and streams also threatens drinking water from Lake Huron and its beaches. Increasing residential developments near the shoreline, aging infrastructure including septic systems and high amounts of agricultural activity further impact nearshore water quality [8, 9]. Rising water temperatures have also resulted in more ice-free days and greater lake-effect storms creating more erosion along the Lake Huron coastline [7]. The outcome has been an increase in algal blooms, increased turbidity, bluff erosion, warming surface water temperatures, and bacterial contamination leading to more beach closures to protect human health [7, 8].



Figure 5: Large healthy trees that are critical for forest regeneration are becoming less common in the woodlots of the Maitland Valley watershed as a result invasive species and poor forestry practices.





Figure 7: Solving the complex problems of land use change and climate change will require cooperation and coordination across the 15 member municipalities of the Maitland Valley watershed.

Our watershed, our future

The watershed health challenges in the Maitland Valley watershed are diverse and complex. They can't be solved only by a single organization or government agency, but by working together across communities of the 15 member municipalities and communities in the watershed (Figure 7).

Today our watershed challenges include a changing climate responsible for more frequent and intense storms that quickly flush soil and nutrients off the lands and into our waters. Invasive species including the Emerald Ash Borer, as well as a history of overharvesting woodlots, have resulted in declining quality and amount of forest cover. The loss of forests, wetlands, and buffer strips along waterways threatened fish habitats, water quality and the health of both the rivers and Lake Huron.

Fostering and supporting this 'watershed ethic' is an essential role of the Maitland Valley Conservation Authority and essential for the future of healthy lands and waters.

Box 2

“The more we can do to conserve water, to conserve the soil, it's going to lead to good production in the end. You're only given land once, we only have so much water, we have to take care of it.”

***Melanie Pitch, Murray Scott Farm
(source OMAFRA video on
Twitter/X)***

Maitland Valley Conservation Authority is continuing to play a role in coordinating and supporting our community to address these challenges and improve the health of our lands and waters for now and for future generations.

SECTION 2: VISION, MISSION, ENDS AND OBJECTIVES

Vision	Mission	Ends
<p>We're working for a healthy environment!</p>	<p>Maitland Conservation is a community-based organization dedicated to providing leadership to protect and enhance local water, forests, and soils.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. To protect life, property and prevent social disruption from flooding and erosion hazards;2. To protect water and related resources for present and future generations;3. To protect and expand natural areas.

OBJECTIVES

The management strategy focuses on the following objectives:

1. Helping our member municipalities reduce the potential for loss of life, property damage and social disruption in flood and erosion prone areas.
2. Assisting member municipalities and landowners to develop and implement soil and water conservation systems that will help keep soil and nutrients on the land and out of watercourses and Lake Huron.
3. Ensure that the management of our conservation areas sets high standards of conservation practices and are safe for the public to use.
4. Ensure a stable financial base for Maitland Conservation so that we can help our member municipalities to develop a healthy, resilient, and prosperous watershed.

SECTION 3:

SERVICE AREA THREE-YEAR WORK PLANS

CORPORATE SERVICES 2024 - 2026

Corporate Services is responsible for the leadership, governance, administration and financial management of Maitland Conservation.

Priorities for 2024-2026

Maitland Conservation has established the following priorities:

1. Renew our agreement for services and programs with all member municipalities by June 2026. The Ministry of Natural Resources requires conservation authorities to develop agreements with their member municipalities for all non-mandatory services. These services include watershed stewardship and watershed health assessment. MVCA recognizes that we can only achieve our Vision: Working for a Healthy Watershed by providing stewardship and watershed health services.
2. Contact First Nations and Métis Councils to determine if they are interested in developing an informal or formal working relationship with Maitland Conservation. First Nations and Métis Councils share an interest in some of the services and programs that the MVCA provides. Maitland Conservation is also interested in learning more about the treaties that cover the lands and waters within our area of jurisdiction and our responsibilities related to these treaties.
3. Continue to champion provincial and federal support and leadership for the Healthy Lake Huron collaborative. The health of Lake Huron cannot be improved without restoring the health of the watersheds that flow into the lake. The Healthy Lake Huron collaborative is a model for how governments and agencies can work together towards this goal.
4. Champion the inclusion of the Healthy Watersheds, People and Wildlife approach into the terms of reference and work plan for Healthy Lake Huron. Maitland Conservation recognizes that the health of people and wildlife is directly linked to the health of the forests, rivers, and soil in the watersheds within our area of jurisdiction.
5. Continue to lead the Carbon Footprint Initiative and encourage members to expand the framework for the initiative to include the Sustainable Development Goals developed by the United Nations.
6. Develop an asset management strategy for essential equipment and infrastructure. The asset management strategy will identify essential equipment and infrastructure. It will also outline the funding required to replace and/or maintain the equipment and infrastructure deemed essential.

FLOOD AND EROSION SAFETY SERVICES 2024 - 2026

The focus of Flood and Erosion Safety Services (FESS) is to ensure that both Maitland Conservation and our member municipalities with flood and/or erosion prone areas are prepared to deal with the increasing probability of major flooding, shoreline erosion, bluff collapse and gully erosion.

Along the 50 kilometers of the Lake Huron shoreline, there is \$750 million of assessed property (2023 values) located with the areas subject to shoreline, gully, or bluff erosion. The value of at-risk development on the shoreline has roughly tripled since it was last assessed in 2012. It is expected that at-risk development in urban flood damage centers has also tripled, which would bring the value to approximately \$500 million.

Priorities for 2024-2026

- a. Develop an ice management plan for areas prone to ice jamming. The plan will outline what measures will be undertaken if an ice jam occurs that may cause damage to development located upstream or downstream of the jam.
- b. Develop an asset management plan for flood and erosion control structures (Goderich Bluffs Stabilization Structure, McGuffin Gully Erosion Control Project and the Listowel Flood Control Structures). The plan will outline measures that need to be undertaken to operate, maintain, repair and decommission the control works.
- c. Develop a drought monitoring plan. This plan will identify when river levels are reaching critical levels and initiate communications in accordance with Ontario's Low Water Response guidelines.
- d. Develop an outreach and education plan related to natural hazards. The plan will outline the areas where natural hazards are located, the risks associated with natural hazards and how they may be impacted by climate change. It will also outline how the risks will be managed and promote public awareness of riverine and shoreline natural hazards.
- e. Identify new flood forecast monitoring network equipment: A significant component of a monitoring network that provides real-time meteorological and streamflow information is the data delivery system, which is referred to as telemetry. Our network uses a combination of satellite and radio telemetry, with satellite primarily servicing the streamflow gauging stations sending data on an hourly basis; and the radio servicing our 'Headwater Precipitation Monitoring Network (HPMN)' in the communities of Harriston, Listowel and Lucknow.

Radio telemetry is proven to be robust, relatively inexpensive and especially effective in our rural watershed which provides open areas and good line-of-site. Radio also provides much more frequent transmissions - sending and receiving data at ten-minute intervals, which is important for headwater communities that aren't afforded any upstream warning other than direct rainfall. Because of its affordability, it allows for the use of multiple units and a dense coverage area. Maximizing coverage and minimizing the time it takes to become aware of high intensity rainfall events in headwater areas is in some ways the most effective strategy in delivering timely flood forecasting and warning for these communities.

The current radio telemetry employed in the MVCA monitoring network is comprised of Adcon radio telemetry units (RTU's), which have recently been discontinued by the manufacturer. Further to that issue, it relies on a 3G cellular bridge, which service providers will be shutting down nationally by December 2025. Measures are currently underway to extend the life and use of our current equipment and function beyond the 2025 3G sunset date; however, finding a suitable replacement will be a priority over the next coming years.

- f. Update floodplain mapping for Lucknow in partnership with the Municipality of Huron-Kinloss
- g. Update flood hazard mapping along the Maitland and Nine Mile Rivers outside of villages and towns. This mapping will identify natural hazard areas within the river valleys.
- h. Lake Huron Shoreline Processes and Natural Hazards Adaptation Strategy: This project will develop strategies to maintain and improve natural shoreline processes within the littoral cell that forms the beaches along the Lake Huron shoreline and reduce exposure to the risks of flooding and erosion. This project will identify how to re-establish the flow of sand to the beaches located south of the Goderich Harbour increasing resiliency during lake level changes and restore natural sediment supplies.



Harriston, June 2017



Palmerston Precipitation Station



North Perth
Floodplain Mapping
Update Meeting, 2024

CONSERVATION AREAS SERVICES 2024 - 2026

Conservation Area Services is responsible for the management, development, and protection of significant natural resource lands, features, and infrastructure on MVCA owned property, as well as the management of the Authority's motor pool and equipment services.

Priorities for 2024-2026

1. Develop a Conservation Lands Strategy and Inventory by December 31, 2024, as required by the Ministry of Natural Resources. This strategy will outline key management and operational objectives to ensure our conservation lands remain protected while allowing for compatible recreational public use. In addition the strategy will provide guidance on land acquisitions and dispositions.
2. Maintain, decommission, and develop priority Conservation Areas infrastructure based on the needs and resources of the Authority. Priorities will include repairs and accessibility renovations to the Administration building and infrastructure that supports recreational use at designated Conservation Areas. Surplus structures at Maple keys Conservation Area will be decommissioned to reduce liabilities and expenses.
3. Implement best management conservation practices on MVCA owned lands to ensure we lead by example in the protection and restoration of environmental resources. This will be accomplished by managing invasive species at several properties and by completing forestry harvesting and management identified in approved forestry management plans. "Low maintenance" Conservation Areas will also be developed to reduce the amount of vegetation maintenance required and to increase species diversity in traditional turf grass areas.
4. Ensure that Conservation Areas are maintained to allow for public use. Hazards including dead trees and trail surface issues will be identified during inspections and removed or repaired. Essential infrastructure including signs and roadways will be repaired to provide continued access and to keep users informed while using our properties.
5. Implement Maitland Conservation's carbon footprint strategy to reduce the use of fossil fuels. A focus will be to replace vehicles and equipment with electric options as well as to sequester carbon on MVCA lands through tree and shrub planting in Conservation Areas.



WATERSHED HEALTH MONITORING, ASSESSMENT AND REPORTING 2024 - 2026

Watershed Health Monitoring, Assessment and Reporting is responsible for evaluating the terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems within the Maitland Valley watershed, identifying threats to these ecosystems, and providing recommendations to service areas and partners.

Priorities for 2024-2026

1. Continue to collect long-term data on water quantity and quality for rivers and groundwater in partnership with the Province of Ontario. We recognize that our rivers and aquifers contribute to the health of people and wildlife. Contributing to long-term, provincial datasets helps us understand how our water is changing locally, and informs provincial and Conservation Authority programs.
2. Communicate the results of the forest health assessment. This assessment included forest birds, bees and spring flowers. Data collected in previous years will be circulated internally and to external partners. The MVCA recognizes that our forests contribute to a resilient landscape and are complex ecosystems that encompass more than just trees. Providing decision makers, land managers and woodlot owners with information on the health of their forests will assist them in making informed decisions and help us to design more effective stewardship services.
3. Evaluate aquatic ecosystems using a suite of indicators to assess the physical processes, channel structure and biology of the rivers and streams in local watersheds to determine their health. The MVCA understands that healthy rivers and streams contribute to the health of people and wildlife. Healthy rivers and streams are also the foundation for tourism and recreation in the watershed. Understanding their condition and stressors will allow us to design effective services and restoration projects that maximize the cost benefits and promote healthy and resilient river systems.
4. Expand citizen science programs to help the MVCA fill in gaps in knowledge about the health of rivers and forests. Promoting citizen science programs, such as the Forest Bird Monitoring Protocol, enables us to partner with landowners to collect environmental data that can be used to supplement more formal assessments.
5. Collaborate with experts and stakeholders to establish science advisory committees for aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems and develop a Healthy Watershed, People and Wildlife approach within the MVCA. We are part of a complex natural system and there are many challenges to protecting and expanding natural areas. Science advisory committees can help guide our assessments to ensure indicators, collection methods and analysis are appropriate. They can also act as a sounding board for new ideas and concepts. Stakeholders can help disseminate information and validate recommendations. Initiatives, such as Healthy Watershed, People and Wildlife can foster an understanding that our collective health depends on the health of the environment. These advisory committees can also help MVCA to determine how to improve our services and outcomes.

WATERSHED STEWARDSHIP SERVICES 2024 - 2026

The focus of Watershed Stewardship is to assist landowners and municipalities to restore the health of rivers, wetlands, soils and forests as well as to implement rural stormwater management systems and soil conservation projects. Maitland Conservation provides technical advice, project planning and assistance with funding applications.

Priorities for 2024-2026

1. Promote and implement projects that will restore the health and resiliency of rivers, wetlands and forest ecosystems. This includes projects such as fragile land retirement, stream buffering, rural stormwater management, wetlands, barrier removals and cover crops. MVCA will continue to source local, provincial and federal grants to assist stakeholders in implementing projects. We will also provide technical guidance to develop and design these projects for stakeholders.
2. Review MVCA's restoration approaches and seek to incorporate a greater understanding of ecosystem restoration principles and climate change science to ensure our stewardship approaches will have the most benefit and highest chance of success. For example, are there certain tree species we should be planting in lieu of others, which will fare better with the changing climate.
3. Develop the capacity to deliver pro-active stewardship in priority areas including the Middle Maitland watershed and North Shore sub-basins. Maitland Conservation will do this by continuing to source external funds to support restoration projects and staffing to implement these projects.
4. The MVCA will also continue to implement the current priorities outlined in the work plan that Healthy Lake Huron has developed and assist the steering committee to develop the 5-year work plan for 2025-2029.



DRINKING WATER SOURCE PROTECTION (DWSP) 2024 - 2026

Priorities for 2024-2026

1. Amendments to the Maitland Valley Source Protection Plan and associated assessment report, to incorporate regulatory changes. Technical assessment completed for new and expanding drinking water systems. This includes 2024 updates to wellhead protection areas for the Lucknow and Century Heights municipal water supply systems, plus anticipated updates to the Minto systems.
2. Implementation of Source Protection Plan policies where applicable and review local applications and planning proposals in vulnerable areas to meet the annual reporting requirements and ensure source protection is considered in the development application.
3. Issue confirmation notices to municipalities for new or altered drinking water systems and new wells for Harriston and Palmerston drinking water systems to meet the requirements of the Clean Water Act O. Reg. 287/07 and ensure the source for new municipal wells or intakes are protected.
4. Review technical information received regarding changes in vulnerable areas for source water, to determine if Source Protection Plans should be revised. This ensures that changes on the landscape, such as new transport pathways in wellhead protection areas (WHPA) and Intake Protection Zone (IPZ), are incorporated in source protection documents.

DWSP Funding:

This program is funded by the Ministry of Environment, Conservation and Parks.



SECTION 4:

REVIEW AND UPDATE OF WATERSHED-BASED RESOURCE MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

Maitland Conservation will review and update its watershed strategy annually to ensure that we are always planning three years ahead.

The Watershed-Based Resource Management Strategy will be circulated to our member municipalities to obtain their comments. The strategy will also be published on our website for public review and comment.

SECTION 5:

REFERENCES

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2. Hazlitt, J. and T. Turner, *The power of the Maitland: powering pioneer settlement in an Ontario watershed*. 2011: Possibilities Publishing.
3. Quance, R., *Water pollution survey of the Maitland River 1960 to 1963*. 1963.
4. Environment and Climate Change Canada and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, *State of Great Lakes 2019 Technical Report*. 2021. p. 663.
5. Barnes, A. and A. Richardson, *Conservation by the People*. 1974: University of Toronto Press, Scholarly Publishing Division.
6. Gouthro, E. and M. Shakespeare., *Forest health study 2021-2022: vegetation survey*. 2023, Maitland Valley Conservation Authority.
7. Great Lakes Integrated Sciences and Assessments Centre. *Lake Huron climatology*. Lake Huron Climatology 2024 [cited 2024; Available from: <https://glisa.umich.edu/sustained-assessment/huron-climatology/>].
8. Environment and Climate Change Canada, *Lake Huron Canadian nearshore assessment, 2021 highlights and results report*. 2022, ECCC. p. 71.
9. Luinstra, B., Snell, L., Steele, R., Walker, M., Veliz, M. , *Watershed characterization Ausable Bayfield Maitland Valley source protection region*. 2008.
10. Morrison, K., et al., *Ecohealth and watersheds: Watersheds as settings for health and well-being in Canada*. 2012, International Institute for Sustainable Development: Winnipeg.

Appendix A:

Technical Studies and Assessment Reports

The following is a list of technical studies and reports by MVCA that were referenced in the body of this watershed strategy:

- Gouthro, E., & M. Shakespeare. 2023. Forest health study 2021-2022: Vegetation survey. Maitland Conservation.
- Maitland Valley Conservation Authority Lake Huron Hazard Mapping – December 15, 2023 - MVCA 1061.01 MVCA Lake Huron Hazard Mapping; prepared by: Zuzek Inc. in association with SJL Engineering & DHI
- North Perth Flood Hazard Mapping Project Hydraulic Modelling Report – February 29, 2024 – Project Reference 67308; prepared by: Aquafor Beech Limited
- Drinking water source protection plan

Appendix B: Terms and Definitions

- Health: occurs when an ecosystem has reached a stable state where it can maintain its composition, structure and function, as well as demonstrating resilience when facing disturbances
- Watershed: area of land that drains water into a specific waterbody
- Sub-watershed: portion of a watershed that drains over a specific area
- Riparian: the area directly adjacent to a watercourse such as a river

QUESTIONS?

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Contact information is posted on our website at:

<https://mvca.on.ca/about-us/board-of-directors/>