

# A STRATEGIC PLAN for the COUCHICHING CONSERVANCY

2014-2019

## **Mission**

Protecting the special natural features of the Couchiching region for future generations

## **Mandate**

- To preserve, protect, restore and improve the natural environment of the Couchiching-Severn region.
- To encourage and foster an understanding and awareness of the natural environment and its value in enhancing our quality of life.
- To acquire, maintain and preserve lands, or interests in land, of ecological, recreational, scientific, scenic or open space values.
- To promote and undertake research and data collection on the natural environment, and to distribute the findings to the public.

- Objects of incorporation, 1993

## **A vision of the Couchiching Conservancy in 2019**

*In 2019, the Couchiching Conservancy (CC) has significantly increased the amount of land under protection, particularly in areas of high priority, and is managing those lands effectively.*

*The Conservancy views these lands as one of the core sanctuaries for biodiversity in the province and takes a leadership role in protecting biodiversity in the region.*

*The Couchiching Conservancy continues to provide strong leadership in its quest to secure and environmentally manage land as outlined and described in the current Natural Heritage Action Plan.*

*The Couchiching Conservancy is widely respected for its collaborative approach, its effectiveness in influencing public approaches to environmental protection, and its involvement of volunteers and the public.*

*Excellence in carrying out the CC's commitments continues to be a top priority. In support of this vision, by 2019 the CC has accomplished the following:*

- Twenty-five hundred additional acres are now under protection and managed effectively and efficiently. The CC is known and respected as an effective, well-managed, ethical and financially sound organization, with capable, dedicated staff and a plan for the future.
- The Couchiching Conservancy Heartwood Fund has pledges of \$5 million and is growing to cover the core operating budget. Stewardship funds are adequate to pay for property maintenance and legal action to protect land.
- The Couchiching Conservancy continues to effectively use the traditional media, internet and social media to promote the necessity of preserving and protecting biodiversity and to deliver its mission, goals and information to the community at large.
- The CC is known within the land trust movement for its training, use and recognition of volunteers. Trained, capable and committed volunteers are monitoring and managing land. Volunteers are also organizing and leading projects and activities for other volunteers and members and/or for the public.
- The public is welcomed to a number of educational activities conducted on a variety of CC-protected properties.
- Strong links have been established with educational organizations, and partnerships, enhancing the CC's capacity to learn from and educate others about the habitats we steward and strengthening bonds with young people in the area and beyond.
- The CC continues to provide strong leadership, collaboration and alliances with other land trusts and nature organizations, as well as with other groups with whom it shares common interests and can pool resources effectively.
- The CC is pioneering innovative approaches to land protection and is supporting positive changes in government policy at the provincial and federal levels.

## **Goals for 2014-2019**

### **1. Manage Land Base**

Monitor and manage effectively lands owned or under the protection of the CC.

### **2. Maintain an Effective Organization**

Maintain an ethical, fiscally sound and well-managed organization.

### **3. Revise and Update the Natural Heritage Strategy to 2014-2019 context.**

#### **4. Grow! Protected Lands, Projects and Support Base**

Protect additional high-priority properties, particularly within defined focus areas.

Build a loyal CC membership and a strong volunteer base.

#### **5. Leadership and Education**

Stimulate public interest and engagement in land conservation.

Encourage sound public policy in support of natural heritage protection.

### **Objectives to meet goals for 2014-2019**

#### **1. Manage the Couchiching Conservancy Land Base**

- 1.1 Ensure that each property has a management plan based on current science and methods including stewardship activities that are necessary for the excellent maintenance of the property. New properties should have a management plan within a year of obtaining each new property securement. Review the management plan for each property every five years to update activities as needed.
- 1.2 Ensure effective monitoring and maintenance of protected properties by volunteer teams supported by staff, maintaining procedures for documenting visits, communicating issues and providing information to the Board, and evaluating the effectiveness of monitoring annually. Carry out regular property visits, twice a year or more as needed. Ensure that information is transmitted to partner organizations in a timely manner.
- 1.3 Maintain a pooled stewardship fund sufficient to provide funding for maintenance of CC properties (based on no less than 10% of their value at the time of acquisition) to ensure preservation of ecological values, protection from liability and capacity to respond to contraventions of conservation easements.
- 1.4 Develop and implement a conflict resolution framework to maintain and improve relationships with neighbours of CC properties.

#### **2. Maintain an Effective Organization**

##### **2.1 Human Resources**

- 2.1.1 The Conservancy is committed to ensuring that appropriate human resources are in place with the right expertise to oversee and deliver effective programs and services related to existing and emerging areas in support of the organization's mandate. The Conservancy continues to support ongoing development of staff to carry out the work of the organization efficiently and effectively.

## **2.2. Revenue Generation**

- 2.2.1 The Conservancy supports innovative and creative approaches to revenue generation to enhance land protection and sustain effective stewardship programs, innovative projects and efficient operations over the long-term.
- 2.2.2 The CC's Past Presidents' Council continues to lead in growing the Heartwood Fund to generate sufficient income to support the core operating budget.
- 2.2.4 Run major fundraising "signature events" in the spring and fall each year, aligned with the Couchiching Conservancy mission and directed at its primary constituents.

## **2.3 Governance**

- 2.3.1 The Board of Directors continues to provide strong leadership and support to the organization. Membership on the Board will continue to reflect the regions and diversity of population in the Conservancy's geographic area.
- 2.3.2 Standing committees of the Board will be enhanced and developed to support the work of the Executive Director and the staff. The Board will use committees to support membership growth, revenue generation and public education.
- 2.3.3 The Conservancy continues to review and update its policies and by-laws in compliance with related legislation, in alignment with OLTA, and in support of emerging areas of interest and responsibility in order to support the work of staff and volunteers by providing clear direction and guidelines.

## **3. Revise and Update the \Natural Heritage Strategy to 2014-2119 Context**

- 3.1 Renew the Natural Heritage Action Plan
- 3.2 Develop a Private Land Stewardship strategy building on the Carden Conservation Strategy model.

## **4. Grow! Protected Lands, Projects and Support Base**

- 4.1 Protect an additional twenty-five hundred acres by 2019 in partnership with other organizations when possible, through donation and purchase, with the intention of increasing the size of already protected parcels and adding properties in high priority focus areas. Continue proven techniques such as contacting landowners in these key

areas to make them aware of our interest in their property, with the aim of protecting clusters of properties, corridors and significant wildlife habitat.

- 4.2 The Conservancy will grow the Grant's Woods Headquarters to meet increasing demands, through the renovation of building, parking lots and road access, to accommodate quality working, meeting and educational space and facilities for its staff and volunteers. To further support the staff, it will provide the tools, software, office equipment, furnishing etc in order to facilitate workplace efficiency, accessibility and effectiveness for all users of Grant's Woods. The renovation to be carried out utilizing the latest in "Green" technology when possible, working toward a carbon neutral footprint.
- 4.3 Increase the number of both individual and corporate supporters. Establish a partnership arrangement for memberships with at least one other organization. Use the internet and personal networks for membership development.
- 4.4 Create a volunteer development program that includes: recruitment by people currently involved in the Conservancy, systematic orientation, training and recognition of volunteers, and volunteer activities such as: property monitoring, organizing and leading hikes and workshops, organizing and leading public events etc.
- 4.5 Develop and implement a plan to involve at least 200 youth (people between 16 and 25 years old) in Conservancy activities over the planning period.

#### **5. Provide Leadership and Education**

- 5.1 Organize and promote public education and opportunities to provide greater access to selected NCC/CC properties, by inviting the public to participate in activities such as interpretive walks, outdoor education programs, for all age groups.
- 5.2 Develop a Speaker's Bureau of current and past Board members and selected volunteers to speak and present to various organizations about the work of the Conservancy.
- 5.3 Continue to develop the Conservancy Web Site and explore and utilize existing and future developments in social media information delivery.
- 5.4 Continue to work in partnership with other groups to build widespread recognition of the CC's mandate and programs.
- 5.5 Continue to provide support to OLTA and CLTA and to play an advisory role in the development of land trusts across Ontario.
- 5.6 Provide strategic input to municipal official plans and similar provincial plans with the intent of supporting and strengthening their environmental protection provisions.