



CONSERVATION AREA STRATEGY

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Mattagami Region Conservation Authority
100 Lakeshore Road, Timmins, ON P4N 8R5



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Purpose 3

Legislative Background 3

Land Acknowledgment 3

About the Mattagami Region Conservation Authority..... 4

Objectives in land ownership..... 4

Land Acquisition and Disposal 5

Land Use Categories..... 5

Landholdings for Public Use..... 6

 Gillies Lake Conservation Area6

 Mountjoy Historical Conservation Area 6

 Hersey Lake Conservation Area 7

 White Waterfront Conservation Areas 7

Programs and Services on MRCA owned lands 7

Public Engagement and Consultation 8

Periodic Review..... 8

Purpose

The purpose of the Mattagami Region Conservation Authority (MRCA) Conservation Area Strategy is to provide a clear set of objectives to inform decision-making related to the lands owned or controlled by the MRCA. This document will also establish land use categories that will inform the associated Mattagami Region Conservation Authority Land Inventory, where detailed information on each land holding can be found.

Legislative Background

The *Conservation Authorities Act (CA Act)* is designed to provide for the organization and delivery of programs and services that further the conservation, restoration, development and management of natural resources in watersheds in Ontario. The *CA Act* and accompanying regulations have been amended by the Province of Ontario since 2017, including the following updates made in 2021. Conservation Authority programs and services are categorized as follows per legislation:

- General Functions: Corporate-wide services that support several/all program areas
- Category 1: Mandatory programs and services
- Category 2: Municipal programs and services provided on behalf of a municipality
- Category 3: Programs and services advisable by the Conservation Authority to implement in the Authority's jurisdiction.

Ontario Regulation (O. Reg.) 687/21 and Section 21.1.2 (2) and 21.1.4 of the *CA Act* establish a requirement for Transition Plans including an inventory of the authority's programs and services, and Agreements to carry out the authority's programs and services.

O. Reg. 686/21 sets out the mandatory programs and services which must be delivered by Conservation Authorities in Ontario. Specifically, Section 9 (1) 1 of the regulation requires all Conservation Authorities to prepare a Conservation Area Strategy for all lands owned or controlled by the authority. Sections 10 (1)-(3) of O. Reg. 686/21 set out the required components to be included in the Conservation Area Strategy.

Land Acknowledgment

The Mattagami Region Conservation Authority respectfully acknowledges that the lands on which we gather, and the entire Mattagami Region Watershed, are on Treaty 9 land. Indigenous Peoples have called this land home since time immemorial. Today, our watershed is home to many First Nations, Metis and Inuit people. The MRCA acknowledges our shared responsibilities and obligations to preserve and protect the land and water, and we are grateful to have the

opportunity to meet and work in this territory. We commit to improving our own understanding of local Indigenous people and their cultures while actively working toward reconciliation.

About the Mattagami Region Conservation Authority

The Mattagami Region Conservation Authority, previously known as the Mattagami Valley Conservation Authority, was formed under the *Conservation Authorities Act* of Ontario in 1961 at the request of its member municipalities. Through the amalgamation of the members, the MRCA currently serves one (1) member municipality, the City of Timmins, with a population of approximately 45,000, within the Upper Mattagami River and Frederick House River watersheds. The MRCA is the only Ontario Conservation Authority located within the Arctic Basin and lies entirely within the Boreal Forest region dominated by coniferous trees and scattered hardwood stands. Existing land use in the MRCA watershed is predominantly wilderness, supporting logging, mining and outdoor recreation activities.

Most of the approximately 432 hectares of land owned by the MRCA was purchased with provincial support for the purpose of flood and erosion protection.

Our Vision: A healthy, safe and sustainable environment.

Our Mission: We manage the conservation, protection and restoration of our watershed.

Objectives in Land Ownership

- Conserve, protect, rehabilitate and manage natural heritage features and functions on MRCA lands.
- To protect hazard lands and mitigate flooding and soil erosion.
- To provide nature appreciation and active and passive recreation opportunities to the public.
- Ensure all infrastructure meets current safety standards including facilities and trails.
- Ensure properties are in compliance with the *Conservation Authorities Act* and all other municipal, provincial and federal regulations that govern the ownership of property.
- Continue with the formal and informal municipal partnerships with the City of Timmins.
- Continue to promote partnerships with local community investors for upgrades and improvements.
- Update the Authority's policies governing land acquisition and disposition.
- Ensure all present and future land holdings contribute to the goals and objectives of the MRCA.

Land Acquisition and Disposal

As part of the MRCA 2020-2023 Strategic Plan, staff developed, and the Board approved, a Land Management Policy which provides guidelines with respect to the acquisition, retention and disposition of MRCA owned land. Key factors that will be used in determining whether lands are appropriate holdings for the MRCA will include:

- Compatibility with mandate;
- Potential positive impact to watershed;
- Acquisition, ongoing and maintenance costs; and
- Availability of outside funding sources specific to the land.

The original MRCA land acquisition programs were informed by the following reports:

- 1963 Mattagami Valley Conservation Report, Department of Lands and Forests
- 1971 Proposed Gillies Lake Conservation Area
- 1977 Hersey Lake Acquisition Brief
- 1979 Mattagami Region Conservation Report, Ministry of Natural Resources
- 1980 Porcupine Flood Abatement Program

Land Use Categories

Conservation Ontario, in an effort for consistency, established four land use categories for the purpose of classifying lands based on the types of activities that occur on each parcel or other matters of significance related to the parcel. These categories are intended to be used for the purposes of satisfying requirements under Ontario Regulation 686/21: Mandatory Programs and Services. In many MRCA areas, the land use categories overlap on a single property representing an integrated approach to management.

Active Recreation lands provide natural habitat protection and flood protection while remaining open to the public. While MRCA properties offer no staffed recreation services, these properties are distinguished from Passive Recreation lands in that directly supervised activities take place through short- or long-term agreements between the MRCA and an individual, league or business. Active recreation areas are complimented with MRCA managed trails, signage, washroom facilities and parking lots.

Properties in this category include:

Mountjoy Historical Conservation Area

Gillies Lake Conservation Area

Passive Recreation lands provide habitat protection and/or flood protection while permitting public access on a passive basis. These lands include MRCA managed parks, trails, signage,

washroom facilities and parking lots. These lands are not staffed, but rather visited by staff for maintenance, inspections and other programming.

Properties in this category include:

White Waterfront Conservation Area

Hersey Lake Conservation Area

Management Areas are all open to the public but there are no facilities. They are managed as natural assets. They include natural hazard lands and environmentally sensitive lands. These properties have no staff presence aside from basic monitoring.

The MRCA's sole **Administration Area** is an administration building within the Gillies Lake Conservation Area.

Landholdings for Public Use

MRCA maintains four conservation areas within the City of Timmins, each of which is open to the public with no user fees. MRCA offers no staffed recreation services.

Gillies Lake Conservation Area

The Gillies Lake Conservation Area is located in the heart of the City of Timmins and is home to the most popular recreation trail in the community. Acquired in 1983, the area has benefitted from substantial environmental restoration over the years. The Conservation Area offers visitors a variety of things to do and see in a unique urban wilderness setting. It features a 200m waterfront boardwalk, a waterfront promenade, public washrooms, picnic facilities, a recreation field and several volunteer-maintained gardens. The conservation area abuts a municipally owned park with playground equipment and a supervised beach area. The Gillies Lake Trail was developed as part of a lake rejuvenation project in 1986. It features lighting, seating areas and is regularly groomed throughout winter months for year-round access. Educational storyboards explaining the lake's unique natural and cultural history can be found along the 2.5 km trail. The Gillies Lake Trail is the hub for a community trail network that links all four Conservation Areas.

Mountjoy Historical Conservation Area

Completely within the floodplain of the Mattagami River, the Mountjoy Historical Conservation Area was developed after the MRCA acquired properties removed after severe flooding in the 1960s. It provides 7 hectares of greenspace alongside the Mattagami River featuring level walking trails, footbridges, public washrooms, a lit baseball diamond, sun shelters, outdoor stationary exercise equipment and access to the Mattagami River for non-motorized water sports. Future opportunities to develop interpretive signage for public education around the Indigenous history and flooding history of the area may be pursued if funding opportunities present.

Hersey Lake Conservation Area

Situated in the beautiful jack pine forests at the north end of Timmins, the 226-hectare Hersey Lake Conservation Area is a year-round passive recreation area. It offers a large unsupervised beach area, numerous trails, picnic facilities, public washrooms and a large parking area. Boardwalks and lookouts allow users access to natural areas and interpretive signage and online trail guides offer education about the natural heritage of the area. 16.5 km of trails are maintained, with several being winter groomed for year-round walking.

White Waterfront Conservation Areas

The MRCA property is integrated with municipal parklands to form the White Waterfront Conservation Area which offers scenic greenspace along the shores of Porcupine Lake.

Programs and services provided on MRCA owned lands

Category 1: Mandatory Programs and Services

Regulation	Details	Funding Source
O. Reg 686/21 s.4	Implementing ice control measures. Regular monitoring for ice thickness and potential jamming.	Municipal Levy—70% Provincial TP—30%
O. Reg 686/21 s.5	Maintenance of flood and erosion control structures	Municipal Levy—80% Provincial TP—20% Provincial / Other (WECI)
CA Act c.29(1) O. Reg 688/21	Conservation areas enforcement and compliance Legal expenses for regulation and compliance	Municipal Levy—90% Provincial TP—10%
O. Reg 686/21 s.9(1)2	Maintenance of four passive recreation areas including trail maintenance, risk management program, hazard tree management, gates, fencing, signage, brochures, communications, pedestrian bridges, trails, parking lots, washrooms, pavilions, roadways, stewardship, restoration, and carrying costs such as taxes and insurance.	Municipal Levy—97% Self-Generated—3%
CA Act c.21(1)d	Management of current and future land leases and property agreements. These leases and agreements help drive land-based revenues to offset the costs associated with management and maintenance of MRCA land holdings	Self-generated—100%
O. Reg. 686/21 s.12(1)1	Water sampling for groundwater level and quality monitoring.	Municipal Levy—90% Provincial TP—10%

Public Engagement and Consultation

To ensure our participating municipality, Indigenous Communities, stakeholders and the public are consulted during the preparation of this Strategy, MRCA will undertake the following:

1. Provide the member municipality (City of Timmins) with a draft of the Strategy and a 30-day comment period;
2. Upload the draft Strategy to the MRCA website with an option for public questions and/or feedback within the same 30-day comment period, publicizing the opportunity via social media; and
3. Compile feedback received, incorporating changes to the Draft Strategy as appropriate.

Periodic Review

The Conservation Area Strategy will be formally updated at minimum every 10 years or as legislatively required. MRCA staff will continue to work towards addressing local and current issues through the multi-year strategic planning exercises. Garnering financial support within the community is required for any expansion of this strategy beyond basic risk management and maintenance.