



# Fact Sheet

## Ontario's Conservation Areas

Ontario's 36 Conservation Authorities collectively own and operate over 500 Conservation Areas with a total area of 145,357 hectares. More than 270 of these areas are publicly accessible.

These Conservation Areas play an important *environmental, educational and recreational* role in Ontario and contribute to the physical and mental wellbeing of almost seven million people who visit them each year.

### **The Environmental Role of Conservation Areas**

Conservation Areas play an important role in Ontario by protecting our environment, our lands and our ecosystems. They do this through soil conservation, as well as flood plain, forest and wildlife management.

Conservation Areas protect forests, wetlands, plant life and wildlife and improve the overall health of our watersheds, including the quality and supply of our water resources such as recharge areas.

### **The Educational Role of Conservation Areas**

Conservation Areas act as living classrooms bringing people and nature together. They help teach the public about the importance of our environment and how it is impacted by our activities and lifestyles.

Conservation Authorities operate a total of 35 permanent Interpretive Centres, 23 Seasonal Centres, and include many interpretive trails and heritage features.

In 2010, over 4,400 schools and 470,000 students participated in environmental education programs run by Conservation Authorities at their Conservation Areas, which included programming for 59 distinct school boards, which is more than half of the province's 105 school boards.

### **The Recreational Role of Conservation Areas**

Ontario's Conservation Areas include more than 8,400 campsites and 2,400 km of trails. Almost seven million campers and day users visited a Conservation Area in 2010 alone.

Conservation Areas encourage people to get outdoors and be active, as well as enjoy and appreciate nature. They provide year round facilities and outdoor recreational opportunities for people of all ages and a range of abilities, including picnicking, boating, camping, swimming, hiking, fishing, cycling, snowshoeing, downhill skiing, cross-country skiing and even more extreme recreational opportunities such as snowboarding, rock climbing and ice climbing.

Although some Conservation Areas have limited access in order to protect sensitive lands and/or wildlife, many provide important public recreational opportunities at low or no cost.

### **How and when did Conservation Areas first get established?**

The first Conservation Authorities were formed when the Conservation Authorities Act was established in 1946. Conservation Area land use hasn't changed much since the beginning – these lands are used for specific resource management purposes such as flood control, floodplain management, forestry, natural area preservation and to provide recreational and educational opportunities.

Outdoor recreation and environmental education has been an important component of Conservation Authority operation since the 1950s.

### **Conservation Ontario**

Conservation Ontario is a network of 36 Conservation Authorities, local resource management agencies working on a watershed basis. Conservation Authorities protect people and their property from natural hazards of flooding and erosion; protect natural areas and open space, restore and protect aquatic and natural habits; and provide recreational and educational opportunities to local residents.

More than 11 million people, approximately 90 per cent of Ontario's population live in the watersheds managed by Conservation Authorities.

**[www.ontarioconservationareas.ca](http://www.ontarioconservationareas.ca)**

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