

# Water Management

A recent report into the effects of climate change has revealed that in 2024, the area of land surface affected by extreme drought has tripled globally since the 1980s. Forty-eight percent of the Earth's land surface had at least one month of extreme drought, up from an average of fifteen percent during the 1980s. Almost a third of the world (30%) experienced extreme drought for three months or longer in 2023. In the 1980s, the average was five percent.

The causes of localized droughts can be complicated, since there are many factors that affect the availability of water from unpredictable natural weather events (no rain), to altered land use practices (deforestation). Climate change is shifting rainfall patterns globally, making some areas more prone to drought. Globally, the increase in droughts has been exceptionally severe in other parts of the world relative to Southwestern Ontario. Drought kills trees that have a role to play in stimulating microenvironments, which create essential micro-ecosystems that combined, create larger ecosystems and environments, which in turn create the biodiversity required for healthy flora and fauna conditions. Drought disrupts delicately balanced, environmentally sensitive wetland areas creating a reactionary loop leading to possibly worsened future drought conditions with extremely low to no hydrological recharge.

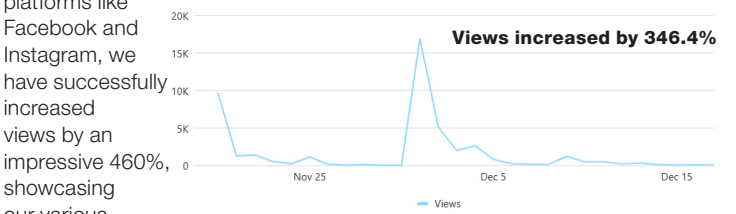
Simultaneously, as large areas have been drying up, extreme rainfall has increased in other regions. Globally, in the past ten years, sixty-one percent of the world saw an increase in extreme rainfall. The link between droughts, floods and, over-all warming is multifaceted. Hot weather increases the evaporation of water from soil, which makes periods when there is no rain even drier, due to any remaining moisture uptake by the natural and agricultural flora of the area. Simultaneously, climate change is changing global and local rainfall patterns. As the Great Lakes warm, more water evaporates into the air. At the same time, the air is also warming which means it can hold more moisture. When this increased moisture capacity moves over land and/or converges into a storm, it generates more intense rain.

The aforementioned measurables are in line with the term "Climate Change" commonly recognized as notably critical changes in climate conditions. Locally, this may include, but not be limited, to extensive warming. At the beginning of this change, the winters will most likely increase snow cover in our region due to the lack of freezing/ice accumulation on the Great Lakes, and over time a year-on-year decreased snow cover due to increased temperatures. This results in a reduced amount of long-lasting available seasonal water infiltration/groundwater recharge (wetlands and swamps). Consequently, it results in a reduction in the amount of available ground water during low water conditions. An increase in the number of temperature extremes and increases in the intensity of localized storms results in torrential precipitation and unmanageable soil infiltration. Rainwater will not penetrate dry soil easily, resulting in greater amounts of runoff and possible localized extensive flooding coupled with agricultural field soil erosion.

Generally, periods of dry weather/drought have been relatively uncommon in Southwestern Ontario. Recent effects on changing weather patterns indicate that low water levels are becoming more common locally. These water levels are compounded by cumulative climate change effects and by the constant increase for water requirements (urban, rural, industrial etc.).

# Communications

The communications aspect of Catfish Creek Conservation Authority (CCCA) has seen remarkable growth and engagement over recent months, reflecting our commitment to connecting with our community and promoting environmental stewardship. Through our active presence on social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram, we have successfully increased views by an impressive 460%, showcasing our various conservation initiatives, local wildlife, and educational programs. Posts that highlight our beautiful landscapes and seasonal events have resonated with the public, driving a substantial uptick in interest and interaction. The vibrant images and informative content shared with our 2.6k followers have not only attracted attention, but have also fostered a greater sense of community among those who care about the conservation of our natural resources.



Ontario Regulation 686/21, Made Under the Conservation Authorities Act, September 29, 2021, defines the responsibilities for Conservation Authorities concerning drought or low water response. Generally, an authority shall provide programs and services to support its functions and responsibilities to facilitate drought and low water forecasting and warning as set out in subsection (2), O. Reg. 686/21, s. 3 (1).

Ontario Low Water Response (OLWR) is structured to preserve the increasingly fragile provincial water resources and is equipped with legislative tools to respond to low water conditions. OLWR is based on existing legislation and regulations. This plan has been developed using existing science, data collection networks, and analysis. It can be implemented under established legal authorities.

Drought is generally defined but not limited to as being characterized by one or more of the following:

- a) Below normal precipitation for an extended period.
- b) Streamflows are at the minimum required to sustain aquatic life.
- c) Socioeconomic effects occurring on individual properties and extending to larger areas of a watershed or beyond.

In 2024, CCCA staff finalized and the Board approved the updated report and floodline mapping, Report 2882-021, Port Bruce Riverine and Coastal Floodplain Mapping, Catfish Creek Conservation Authority, TRUE Consulting, April 2024 for the Hamlet of Port Bruce, which identifies areas of potentially high impact flooding and allows for improved urban planning standards within the area.

CCCA staff completed the following water resource required Conservation Authority manuals and plans as outlined in O. Reg. 686/21: Mandatory Programs and Services.

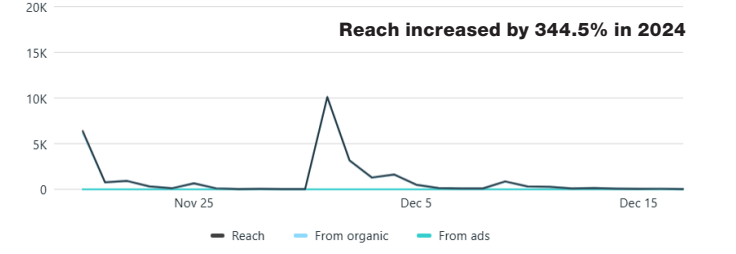
*Catfish Creek Conservation Authority, Low Water Response Manual.*  
*Catfish Creek Conservation Authority, Flood Watch and Warning Plan.*  
*Catfish Creek Conservation Authority, Ice Management Plan.*

CCCA staff is currently examining/assessing the establishing a HEC-HMS (Hydrologic Engineering Centre-Hydrologic Modeling System, a section of the United States Army Corp of Engineers) designed to simulate the complete hydrologic processes of a watershed network, to develop and use as a tool for CCCA flood forecasting.

In 2024, the Catfish Creek Conservation Authority issued seven (7) Lake Erie Watershed Condition Statements, eleven (11) Water Safety Watershed Condition Statements and two (2) Flood Watch Watershed Condition Statements.

The Catfish Creek Conservation Authority along with its member municipalities and local interest groups continue to take steps to strive and minimize the impacts of growth through the adaptation of innovative water management approaches.

Alongside our boosted viewership, our outreach efforts have also skyrocketed, demonstrating a 424.9% increase in engagement metrics. This surge is reflected in our rising contact interactions, which have jumped by 109.1% in 2024 alone. Through engaging posts that invite questions and comments, and by actively responding to inquiries, we are building meaningful connections with our audience. We have also been promoting local events, workshops, and volunteer opportunities that encourage participation and involvement. This approach has not only broadened our reach, but has also strengthened our relationship with the community, illustrating the vital role we play in promoting conservation and awareness throughout the region.



## Mission Statement

***“To communicate and deliver resource management services and programs in order to achieve social and ecological harmony for the watershed”***

The **CCCA** is a non-profit organization that needs your financial support and volunteerism to ensure locally driven environmental initiatives continue in the future. All donations are used for programs and projects within the Catfish Creek watershed.

**YES, I would like to demonstrate my devotion and vision for a healthy environment by donating \$ \_\_\_\_\_ in support of the following initiative(s):**

Protection & Preservation of Conservation Lands    
  Youth Environmental Education    
  Wildlife Habitat  
 Springwater Forest Preservation/Management    
  Commemorative Forest Program    
  Wetlands Restoration

Official tax receipt will be issued for minimum donations of \$50.00. **Commemorative gifts and land donations graciously received.**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Address: \_\_\_\_\_ Postal Code: \_\_\_\_\_

**Payment in Cash, Visa, Mastercard, or Debit will gladly be accepted at the CCCA Office or please mail a cheque to:  
 CATFISH CREEK CONSERVATION AUTHORITY, 8079 Springwater Rd., R.R.#5, Aylmer, ON N5H 2R4**

## 2024 Partners/Donors/Volunteers

*(please notify our office of any errors or omissions)*

<p><b>A1 Unique Installations</b> Aaroc Aggregates ALUS Elgin Ambrose Plumbing Aylmer &amp; District Horticultural Society Aylmer Express Aylmer Optimist Club Bachner, Katharina Baillargeon, Mariette Battson, Rick Blake, Helen Bob Bishop - Thunder in the Valley Bode, Paul - Edward Jones Investments Bode, Paul &amp; Margo Boersman, Debra &amp; Mike Booy, Murray Bossuyt, Blair and Jackie Brooks, Cathy Buchner, Paul &amp; Ruth Cam's Heating and Air Conditioning Canada Helps ORG Campbell, Bill Canada Summer Jobs Canadian Chestnut Council Canadian Online Living Foundation Carr, Stephen Casier, Ron City of St. Thomas</p>	<p>Clarke, Kimberly Conservation Ontario County of Elgin Csoff, Joe C's Bowling Lanes Cyril J. Demeyere Limited Debrabender Farms Limited Debraker, Sue Depuydt, Christine Dentlarder, Sandra Dickhout, Irene Doug Tarry Limited Dowler-Karn Ducks Unlimited Dugit, Justine Eco-Canada East Elgin Concrete East Elgin Environmental Leadership Program Edward Jones Elgin Chrysler Elgin Clean Water Program Elgin Stewardship Council Enbridge Inc. Eyre, Dean - MTGF Fick, Don and Rosina Finn, Richard Flick, Margaret Forests Ontario Foster, Beth Giguere, Darlene Gillespie, Nancy</p>	<p>Grand River C.A. Graves, Wendell and Cindy Green, Connie Greenwood, Marilyn Griffin, Shirley Gubbels, Matt &amp; Maria H.A. Kebbel Funeral Home Henderson, Debra &amp; Alan Herrington, Victor Hertner, Wendy Hill, Thomas Holmes, Mike &amp; Tracey - MTGF Holmes, Tracy Horning, Jeff &amp; Anita Hoyer, Bernie Huron Tractor IGPC Ethanol Inc. Inwood, Shauna Irwin, Bobbi Irwin, Sylvia Jakob, Joseph John B. Wilson &amp; Son Well Drilling Jones, Ella Jones, Jesse K&amp;K Locksmiths Kebbel, Deneen Kerr, Wayne Kettle Creek C.A. Kielstra, Henry Killough, Larry &amp; Judy Kitts, Dean (Gotzmeister hunting group)</p>	<p>Koolen Electric Kyle, Susan Laemers Excavating Lampman, MaryJane Lang, Erika Learn, Donald Lenane, Penni - MTGF Long Point C.A. Lowe, Jeff Lounsbury, Anne Luksys-Vinnai, Loretta Manning, Lloyd Martel, Maria Martin, Shannon Martyn, Sally McConnell, Elizabeth McIntyre, Nathan McLachlin, Ian and Anne McLean, Mary McQuiggan, Tim &amp; Mary Merteens, Ron Miernicki, Tracy Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry Municipality of Central Elgin Neville, Belinda Ontario Police College - Path of Honour Order of Good Cheer O'Reilly, Harper O'Reilly, Lillie Oswell, Mark and Linda Polland, Thom</p>	<p>Post, Geoff Porter, Michelle Reid, Sheila Regional Municipality of York Richer, Gerry Rieger, Karen Rieger, Tracy Rimnyak, William and Linda Rimnyak, Karin Rooyakers, Ron Scott Lewis Auto Seely, Rebecca Sharpe, Allen Shackleton, Ron Sharpe, Allan Sheppard-Veldhuizen, Kim and Art Sheppard, Robert &amp; Gloria Simmons, Mark Simmons, Taylor Smale, Kim &amp; DJ Smit, Maureen and Pete South Simcoe Police Services Southwest Ontario Tourism Corp. Springwater Mills Stacey, Elizabeth Stafford, Jason Steelway St. Thomas Field Naturalists Tenhoor, Henry Thames Valley District School Board</p>	<p>The Springwater Whites - White-Annaert, Laura Thompson, Ron Toth, Michale &amp; Michele Town of Aylmer Township of Malahide Township of South-West Oxford Tri-County Travellers Trojek, Bernadette Vandervect, Linda VanFest Vanhoucke, Margaret &amp; Raymond Vannoord, Jack &amp; Barbra Vanvelzer, Kristen Vinnai, Jesse Wagler Mini Barns Wallace, Ruth Weisler, Jaimie Wildeman, Alan Williams Funeral Home Willock, Kim Wilson Well Drilling Wilson, Todd &amp; Laurie - MTGF Wiltsie Thoonen Veterinary (Dr. A. ) Windam Farms (Ian Begg) WJ Roofing Ltd. Wright, Jodi Yake, Richard Allen Yarmouth Group Inc. Zaps Tree Service</p>
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Photo Trisha Snider

# 2024 Annual Report



## Chairperson's Message

Another year has come and gone. Where did the year go? As I prepare to turn over the Chair of Catfish Creek Conservation Authority as mandated by the province, it is time to reflect on the past but look forward to the future.

The start of the year was a continuation of the uncertainty of how to balance new mandated programs with no increase in government funding, trickling down from the top levels. This led us to having to rely more heavily on our municipal partners and scrambling to access any and all grant funding we remotely might qualify for. A great thank you to our General Manager Dusty Underhill and staff for navigating through this maze and completing all the required reports and mandated programs on time.

It has been a busy year with hydro upgrades to more East Campground, new accessibility ramps for the main office and the schoolhouse. A new roof for the schoolhouse and pump building on the west side of Springwater Conservation Area campground, as well as revamping the washrooms. A new digital sign for communication pertinent information to our watershed residents and upcoming events as well as installing WIFI availability through an new tower in partnership with Uplink Communications for our campground.

A big shout out to Al, Thom, Brittany, Noah, Victor and the summer staff for keeping Springwater campground and all our trails in tip-top shape all summer long. August was especially trying for them as a storm with heavy winds roared through the area. It took down numerous trees in the Jaffa Tract as well as the

east end of Springwater Campground. In three days, working overtime, the trails were reopened, and a large number of logs were salvaged which helped offset the overtime.

On top of this they hosted numerous large events over the summer as well as bringing back summer camp, utilizing the Concession Booth for more events at the beach and continued to maintain the Path of Honour at the Police College. I can't wait to see what they tackle next year.

In closing it was an honor to be at the opening of our newest addition to Catfish Creek Conservation Authority in October of the Tisdale Conservation Area. This addition was possible only by the generous donation of Dr Ian Begg and Family. With Catfish Creek Conservation Authority being one of the smallest Conservation Authorities in Ontario, it is only through donations like these that we can continue to grow.

**Paul Buchner,  
CCCA Chairperson**




2024 ELP Class



ELP students helped with cleanup in Catfish Creek

## Conservation Lands

In 2024, the Catfish Creek Conservation Authority (CCCA) focused its conservation lands efforts on the enhancement of our Conservation Area's with a focus on initiatives promoting accessibility, awareness, and appreciation of nature on all lands owned and managed by the Conservation Authority.

Throughout the watershed, improving ecological health, curating an appreciation for nature, and ensuring our lands are protected and enhanced is always at the forefront of our activities. Thanks to the generous financial support from different local and private organizations, government agencies, and our many community partners, the following was undertaken on CCCA owned lands in 2024.

Completed two (2) job placements through Canada Summer Jobs. One Metis Grant student placement. Co-operative education placements were provided to students from East Elgin Secondary School. The CCCA has long standing relationships with its local secondary schools fostering an excellent coop placement experience & 25yrs working with the Environment Learning Program (ELP).

Several Special Events were held at the Springwater Conservation Area in 2024: Trout Derby, operated April through May with 3 tagged trout worth \$100 each recognizing Zaps Tree Service for the support of the \$2000 donation towards the Trout stocking at Springwater CA, volunteering efforts provided with thanks by: Tri County Travellers. Vanfest Canada's Largest Premier Van and Truck Show held in June saw attendees come from across Canada and the United States. Springwater has taken on working with the London Canine Association as their venue for a dog show. Persistence Racing holds an annual cross country racing event. The Christmas Spirit Walk was held in December, with assistance from the Elgin Hiking Trail Club. The Day Use Area also hosted numerous weddings, family picnics and company events.

Continual support was provided to the Memorial Path of Honor at the Ontario Police College. There were 17 Sycamore trees planted at the site this year, some were replacing dead trees onsite.

CCCA continued to grant research permits for work in our various Conservation Areas to such organizations as The University of Guelph, Ministry of Natural

Resources and Forestry (MNR) and Bird Studies Canada, Tick Dragging conducted by South Western Public Health.

Signage was installed at Tisdale Conservation Area for our soft grand opening on October 17 2024. We also continued some additional assessments with the understory and flora inventory as well as a forest stand inventory.

CCCA planted 4 Memorial Trees in for our Commemorative Forest program. Staff will be installing 1 donor/ memorial bench at Archie Coulter Conservation Area.

Attended the Aylmer District Trappers Workshop, which was held at the East Elgin Sportsman Club, spoke with landowners about programs we offer here at the CCCA.

The new pay station, which was installed at the East Campground entrance to allow patrons to enter and access our day use area throughout the year is working very well which has boost revenue for day passes which wasn't an option before. The CCCA has worked with Uplink Communications to move forward with phase 2 for internet services being installed for our seasonal and transient campers also including optional access to Wi-Fi for events being held here at Springwater CA, the project should be wrapped up by spring 2025.

Numerous workdays were organized with the Environment Learning Program (ELP) class they participated in removing invasive trees/ shrubs from the berm, so the integrity of the berm is not compromised at the Yarmouth Natural Heritage Area (YNHA) as well as Phragmites seed heads to slow down the seed dispersal.

- Hosted woodlot management with EESS ELP class at Archie Coulter, in our White & Red Pine plantations located on 46900 Brouwers Line.

- Additional ELP workday was completed for preparation of the Spirit Walk and Maple Syrup Festival, including firewood cleanup with the ELP students

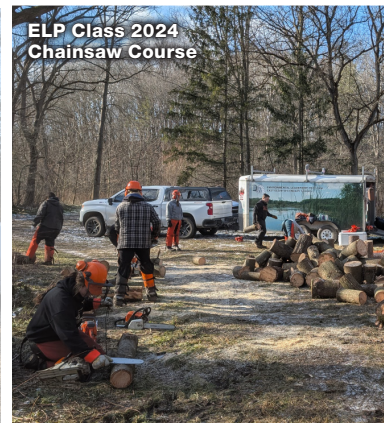
Hazard tree removal and inspections were carried out along with trail maintenance through our conservation areas to keep our trails safe for our users.



Students attended MarshQuest at the Herb Kebbel Marsh at the Yarmouth Natural Heritage Area



ELP Class 2024 Chainsaw Course



ELP Class 2024 Chainsaw Course

## Stewardship Services

The CCCA undertook four restoration projects in 2024 on three private landowners' properties. Projects consisted of wetland habitat restoration and erosion control. The CCCA worked with federal organizations like Environment and Climate Change Canada, and other local and private organizations such as the Elgin Stewardship Council, Ducks Unlimited, ALUS Elgin and the Elgin Clean Water Program. CCCA also worked with two (2) landowners by providing letters of support to protect and conserve over six acres of grassland habitat. An invasive species removal project was completed at the Yarmouth Natural Heritage Area in conjunction with the Environmental Leadership Program.



Concluding the Establishment of the Private Landowner Wetland Habitat



Successful Completion of Private Landowner Wetland Creation Project



Completed Wetland Habitat Featuring Snapping Turtle

## Environmental Education

Environmental educators finished their first complete full year of programming since the pandemic. The Authority saw a variety of ages and grades come through our programs. Offered on a fee for service basis, the most popular programs were: Exploring the Aquatic World, Adventure Hike, and the greatly appreciated Maple Syrup Program.

- In 2024, Maple Syrup Festival had 2,292 attendees for 2024. The Authority staff culminated 10 days (1 being a rain day) of elementary school programming (TVDSB and LCDSB) which brought us a total of 659 students from JK - Grade 4.

- St. Thomas YMCA continued to host their summer camps at Springwater Conservation Area for two separate weeks in the summer. Roughly 20-25 children attended per week.

- The CCCA also hosted two separate summer camps in July & August with a total of 33 youth that attended Springwater Conservation Area where they learned about the outdoors throughout the two weeks



Canadian Chestnut Council, Conservation Award Winner for 2023



Kid's First Day, in Partnership with Investing in Children was a hit in 2024



Makaela Gilbert, 2023 Conservation Scholarship Winner

## Environmental Planning

In 2024, a new Ministers regulation (Ontario Regulation 41/24 'Prohibited Activities, Exemptions and Permits') under the Conservation Authorities Act was approved by the province. This regulation revoked the 36 individual Conservation Authorities regulations and consolidate them into a single province wide regulation. As CA's pivoted to the new regulation, we also continued to define roles and responsibilities with member Municipalities to meet the needs of watershed residents as a local, environmental resource management agency.

## Reforestation

Through reforestation, the Authority in association with our municipalities, residents; and special interest groups coordinate to provide direction for the enhancement of interior forest habitat and extend natural heritage corridors throughout the Catfish Creek watershed.

The opportunity to collaborate with government agencies and local interest groups for watershed forest cover enhancement projects along with landowner

- CCCA hosted school groups from three different school boards for various outdoor educational programming with 233 students participating.

- Hosted the East Elgin Secondary School (ELP) Chainsaw Certification, which continues to assist with firewood production within CCCA owned lands for the Springwater Conservation Area Campground.

- Marsh Quest Festival saw 500 students from grades 4-6 which was held at YNHA in collaboration with EESS ELP and Thames Valley District School Board

- Springwater Conservation Area hosted the Carolinian Forest Festival for another year seeing 2,000 Grade 7-8 students attend over the four-day program. This initiative was completed in collaboration with multiple community partners, Conservation Authorities and Thames Valley District School Board.

## Corporate Services

The activities of the Catfish Creek Conservation Authority are governed by a Board of Directors comprised of five (5) members appointed by the five (5) participating municipalities of the Catfish Creek watershed.

**Current Board Member Municipality**  
Paul Buchner ..... Township of South-West Oxford (Chairperson)

Morgaine Griffin ..... Municipality of Central Elgin (Vice-Chairperson)

Arthur Oslach ..... Town of Aylmer

Scott Lewis ..... Township of Malahide

Gary Clarke ..... City of St. Thomas

**Current Staff Member Position**  
Dusty Underhill ..... General Manager / Secretary-Treasurer

Susan Simmons ..... Financial Services Coordinator

Al Bradford ..... Conservation Areas Supervisor

Brittany Bell ..... Communications/Program Support Assistant

Gerrit Kremers ..... Resource Planning Coordinator

Peter Dragunas ..... Water Management Technician

Thom Polland ..... Conservation Areas Assistant

Noah Pineau ..... Field Technician

Jennifer McDaniel ..... Customer Services Outreach Clerk

And our many seasonal staff, summer students and volunteers.

## Departed Staff Members in 2024

Shelby Martin ..... Customer Services Outreach Clerk (departed August 2024)

## Achieving Compliance and Enhancing Conservation Strategies

In compliance with the Mandatory Programs and Services Regulation (O. Reg. 686/21), Catfish Creek Conservation Authority successfully met all deliverables by the December 31, 2024 deadline. Our dedicated staff worked diligently to develop a series of essential documents, including a Conservation Area Strategy outlining objectives for land use and conservation, and a Watershed-Based Resource Management Strategy guiding the sustainable management of our watersheds. We also created an Ice Management Plan to address safety and operational procedures related to ice conditions, as well as a Natural Hazard

Infrastructure Asset Management Plan to assess and prioritize maintenance of our key assets. Additionally, an Operational Plan for Natural Hazard Infrastructure defines our day-to-day practices, while the Flood and Erosion Infrastructure Asset Management Plan ensures the resilience of our structures. Finally, the Flood and Erosion Infrastructure Operational Plan outlines our approach to managing flood risk and erosion in the region. Each of these documents reflects our commitment to effective environmental stewardship and community safety.

Catfish Creek Conservation Authority & Springwater Conservation Area [www.catfishcreek.ca](http://www.catfishcreek.ca)

@catfishcreekca @catfishcreekca

Catfish Creek Conservation Authority