

UPPER THAMES RIVER  
CONSERVATION AUTHORITY

# Strategic Plan

## 2025-2030

December 2025



# Upper Thames River Conservation Authority Strategic Plan, 2025-2030

(December 2025)

## Table of Contents

The Watershed and Traditional Territory.....	2
Acknowledgements.....	2
About the UTRCA .....	3
Watershed Management: An Integrated Approach .....	4
Current Operating Environment.....	5
Strategic Planning: Grounded in Purpose, Guided by Strategy .....	6
Vision, Mission, and Values.....	7
Strategic Priorities.....	8
Priority: Environmental Health .....	9
Priority: Watershed Resilience.....	10
Priority: Engagement and Collaboration .....	11
Priority: Organizational Excellence .....	12
Developing the Strategic Plan.....	13



## **The Watershed and Traditional Territory**

We acknowledge that the Upper Thames River watershed is within the traditional territory of the Attawandaron, Anishinaabeg, Haudenosaunee, and Lunaapeewak peoples, who have deep, longstanding, and intrinsic relationships to the land, water, plants, and animals of southwestern Ontario.

We acknowledge the First Nation communities within the Thames River watershed who are connected to and by the Thames River. These nations include Chippewas of the Thames First Nation, Oneida Nation of the Thames, Munsee Delaware Nation, and Delaware Nation at Moraviantown. In the region, there are 11 First Nation communities and a growing and diverse Indigenous urban population.

We acknowledge and respect local and regional First Nations as original, contemporary, and future caretakers of this watershed, and we are committed to working alongside Indigenous peoples from across the region and Turtle Island to strengthen relationships, honour treaty rights, and improve watershed health.

## **Acknowledgements**

Strategic planning is both a reflection of where we are and a vision of where we are going. The Upper Thames River Conservation Authority's (UTRCA) new plan is the result of a collaborative process enriched by those who live, work, and steward this watershed.

We extend our sincere thanks to all who participated – municipal partners, partner organizations, non-governmental organizations, community members, land development groups, other conservation authorities, school boards, and, of course, UTRCA employees, managers, and Board members past and present. We appreciate that you shared your experiences and perspectives. Together, you have helped chart a grounded and forward-focused course for UTRCA's future built on our shared vision for the local environment.





## Watershed Management: An Integrated Approach

Ontario's 36 conservation authorities are governed by the *Conservation Authorities Act*, which is administered by the Ministry of Environment, Conservation and Parks (MECP). The purpose of the Act is "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" (*Conservation Authorities Act*, R.S.O. 1990, c. C.27). The Act was originally enacted in 1946, as conservation authorities began to be established, but has undergone amendments since then.

Since its inception in 1947, the UTRCA has continued to provide a wide range of programs and services to support local environmental needs, legislative requirements, and municipal and public demands for service. The key areas of focus include:

- **Flood Forecasting, Warning, and Protection** - Monitoring and mitigating flood risks to safeguard communities and infrastructure.
- **Drinking Water Source Protection** - Ensuring the long-term safety and sustainability of local drinking water supplies.
- **Watershed Health, Science, and Monitoring** - Recommending and implementing science-based actions to maintain and improve watershed health.
- **Natural Areas and Recreation** - Preserving green spaces and promoting public access to nature for recreation and well-being.
- **Landowner Stewardship and Grants** - Supporting landowners with resources and funding to enhance environmental practices.
- **Environmental Education and Community Engagement** - Fostering awareness and participation through educational programs and public involvement initiatives.
- **Planning Review, Permitting, and Mapping for Safe Development** - Reviewing planning applications, issuing permits, and producing maps to guide and facilitate development that is safe, sustainable, and environmentally responsible.

These programs and services fall within three categories, consistent with Section 21 of the *Conservation Authorities Act* and as required by the Mandatory Programs and Services Regulation (Ontario Regulation 686/21):

- **Category 1** - Mandatory programs and services defined in regulation that may be funded with municipal levy.
- **Category 2** - Programs and services delivered at the request of a municipality, with funding secured through an agreement with the requesting municipality.
- **Category 3** - Other programs and services that the UTRCA determines are advisable to implement within our watershed jurisdiction. These programs and services are funded through cost apportionment agreements with participating municipalities and self-generated funding sources such as user fees, government and other agency grants, donations, etc.



## Current Operating Environment

The UTRCA's new Strategic Plan considers the environmental needs of the watershed and the priorities of communities and interest holders, while complying with legislative requirements and restrictions. It also addresses a range of complex and often conflicting influences shaping the organization's current operating environment, including:

- Ongoing and frequent changes in the legislation that governs conservation authorities.
- Funding uncertainties and limitations.
- Provincial downloading onto municipal governments, intensifying pressure on local budgets.
- Population growth, urban development, and the housing crisis.
- Economic instability and geopolitical uncertainty.
- Increasing impacts of a changing climate and extreme weather on the environment, communities, and natural hazard management.
- Growing demands on UTRCA-owned lands and evolving expectations for how they are managed.
- Changing demographics, especially in urban areas, and the need to increase inclusion, diversity, equity, and accessibility.
- The need to respond meaningfully to the Calls to Action from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.
- The transformative influence of social media and artificial intelligence on how people access information, form opinions, and make decisions.



## **Strategic Planning: Grounded in Purpose, Guided by Strategy**

The UTRCA's work takes place within complex and ever-evolving environmental, social, and policy landscapes. To remain effective, forward-thinking, and responsive to change, the Authority has invested in strategic planning to guide the organization's efforts.

The strategic plan begins at the headwaters of who the UTRCA is - vision, mission, and values. These foundational elements shape the direction and flow of the work. As the plan progresses downstream, it defines clear priorities, goals, and actions that align programs, partnerships, and resources with meaningful impact.

By bridging the UTRCA's organizational roots with its aspirations for the future, this plan ensures next steps are grounded in purpose. It empowers the UTRCA to act collaboratively and effectively, while remaining flexible and responsive to emerging community and watershed needs.

# Vision, Mission, and Values

Vision, mission, and values form the foundation of an organization, providing it with clarity, purpose, and direction.

- The vision outlines the organization’s long-term aspiration—what it ultimately seeks to achieve,
- The mission defines its core purpose and the work it does to bring its vision to life, and
- The values express the guiding principles and beliefs that shape its decisions, culture, and behaviour.

Together, they align the team, inform strategic priorities, and build trust with partners and the public by clearly communicating what the UTRCA stands for and where it is headed.

- **Vision:** Communities engaged in a healthy, resilient environment.
- **Mission:** To conserve and protect the watershed through science, education, policy, action, and experiences in nature.
- **Values:**
  - Leadership - We model and encourage sustainable, innovative stewardship of the watershed.
  - Collaboration - We partner to protect and promote a healthy environment and resilient communities.
  - Integrity - We act with transparency and accountability and root our work in science.



## Strategic Priorities

The UTRCA's new strategic priorities are based on extensive input from our partners and interest-holders, and reflect the evolving needs of the watershed and its communities. As environmental challenges grow more complex, it is essential to focus our efforts where they can make the greatest difference. Together, these four new strategic priorities represent our collective vision in action, ensuring our efforts remain focused, collaborative, and responsive as we conserve, protect, and steward the natural systems that sustain the region.





## Priority: Environmental Health

**Goal:** To build a thriving, healthy ecosystem by gathering and utilizing knowledge of the natural environment to guide the UTRCA's work and inspire action.

### How we will pursue this goal:

- Strengthen environmental monitoring, data collection, and other ways of knowing to inform decision-making and action.
- Improve access to and understanding of environmental information through communication and education.
- Enable rural and urban stewardship by informing and supporting actions that protect and improve watershed health.
- Protect the watershed's ecological integrity by building connected natural systems and enhancing the UTRCA's network of lands.



## Priority: Watershed Resilience

**Goal:** To enhance the watershed's resilience and the ability of urban and rural communities to adapt to a changing environment.

### How we will pursue this goal:

- Build watershed resilience by taking action that supports both the environment and local communities in the long term.
- Proactively identify and manage natural hazards to protect people, property, and ecosystems while supporting safe development.
- Identify and manage threats to municipal drinking water sources.
- Model sustainability and resilience on the UTRCA's lands.



## Priority: Engagement and Collaboration

**Goal:** To strengthen relationships with watershed interest-holders and enhance environmental knowledge and understanding to inspire action on shared goals.

### How we will pursue this goal:

- Deepen relationships and improve communication with municipalities, Indigenous communities, the agricultural community, partners, newcomers, and other watershed residents.
- Enable local environmental action and volunteerism by facilitating community-led efforts and sharing expertise.
- Provide environmental education, including hands-on, outdoor experiences, to foster a conservation ethic in young people.
- Connect people with nature and green space to promote environmental awareness, education, appreciation, and action.



## Priority: Organizational Excellence

**Goal:** To be a creative, adaptable, and trusted Conservation Authority.

### How we will pursue this goal:

- Practice good governance through transparent decision-making, effective communications, and accountable results.
- Ensure long-term financial sustainability through sound fiscal practice, asset management, and diversified funding.
- Attract, develop, and support passionate, skilled employees in an inclusive, diverse, and collaborative workplace.
- Deliver high quality service and client-centred engagement.
- Strengthen communication and transparency in regulatory decisions to support a more responsive process for municipalities, developers, and watershed residents.
- Modernize digital tools to improve efficiency and make information and services easier to access for staff and the public.

## Developing the Strategic Plan

Developing a strategic plan that reflects the priorities, values, and realities of the Upper Thames River watershed requires listening, discernment, thoughtful planning, and wide engagement. From the outset, the UTRCA committed to a robust, transparent, and collaborative approach to strategic planning. The goal was to ensure that the voices of those connected to the watershed—including staff, municipalities, Board members, partners and interest-holders, and members of the public—were meaningfully reflected as we discerned the organization’s future direction.

The process unfolded over two phases—internal engagement and external engagement—and was structured to build understanding, foster consensus, and translate insights into strategic direction. More than 200 people provided input through focus groups, interviews, and online surveys. Participants included internal teams—employees, managers, and current and former members of the Board of Directors—as well as external interest-holders such as municipal partners, non-governmental organizations, partner agencies and organizations, school boards, land development representatives, conservation authority colleagues, and community members.

It should be noted that formal engagement efforts did not specifically include Indigenous communities as the UTRCA recognizes the importance of first developing a comprehensive Indigenous engagement strategy. The UTRCA is working with Indigenous consultants to undertake sensitivity training for staff and Board members, to be followed by the development of a respectful engagement strategy. In the meantime, informal discussions are ongoing through established partnerships and relationships with Indigenous communities and individuals, including through the Shared Waters Approach initiative.

The strategic planning process began in Fall 2024 with an internal analysis of the UTRCA’s operating environment, strengths, and areas for improvement. This phase included focus groups and surveys with staff, management, and the Board of Directors. It culminated with a planning workshop where Board members and the leadership team refreshed vision, mission, and values statements. These foundational elements were formally approved by the Board in December 2024.

Spring 2025 focused on external engagement. Through interviews and surveys, we gathered feedback from interest-holders across the watershed on UTRCA’s performance, opportunities for growth, and aspirations for the future. This listening phase brought forth new data for managers and program supervisors to examine as they met to determine the UTRCA’s strategic priorities and goals. The data and analysis affirmed that fostering environmental health, enhancing watershed resilience, strengthening collaboration and engagement, and encouraging organizational excellence are vital to our continued success.

Now, with Board approval of the new Strategic Plan, the UTRCA is shifting to implementation. Our strategic priorities and goals align with our legislative requirements, mandate, vision, mission, values, and capacity. They also align with the UTRCA’s Watershed Strategy (2024) as well as the Conservation Areas and Lands Strategy (2024). Strong operational plans will be developed, incorporating the work undertaken as part of these strategies. The plans will define specific activities, timelines, leaders, and success measures, ensuring we remain focused, agile, and accountable in supporting a healthy, resilient watershed for all.



**UPPER THAMES RIVER**  
CONSERVATION AUTHORITY

1424 Clarke Road, London, ON N0M 1P0  
519-451-2800 [thamesriver.ca](http://thamesriver.ca)

Facilitated by:

**PLATINUM  
LEADERSHIP**



*Choose Excellence™*

[platinumleadership.com](http://platinumleadership.com)