

Upper Thames River Conservation Authority

# Conservation Areas and Lands Strategy (2024-2033)

Draft, June 2024



UPPER THAMES RIVER  
CONSERVATION AUTHORITY

## The Watershed and Traditional Territory

The Upper Thames River watershed is within the traditional territory of the Attawandaron, Anishinaabeg, Haudenosaunee, and Lunaapeewak peoples, who have longstanding relationships to the land, water, and region of southwestern Ontario.

The local First Nation communities of this area 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 Indigenous urban population.

We value the significant historical and contemporary contributions of local and regional First Nations and all of the Original peoples of Turtle Island (North America).

### **Upper Thames River Conservation Authority Conservation Areas and Lands Strategy (2024 – 2033), published by:**

Upper Thames River Conservation Authority, 1424 Clarke Road, London, Ontario, N5V 5B9 (phone 519-451-2800, email [info@thamesriver.on.ca](mailto:info@thamesriver.on.ca), website [www.thamesriver.on.ca](http://www.thamesriver.on.ca))

For more information or for a copy of this guide in an alternative format, please contact the UTRCA at 519-451-2800 or [info@thamesriver.on.ca](mailto:info@thamesriver.on.ca).

### **Cite as:**

Upper Thames River Conservation Authority. 2024. Upper Thames River Conservation Authority Conservation Areas and Lands Strategy (2024 – 2033).

# Table of Contents

The Watershed and Traditional Territory .....	i
Table of Contents .....	ii
Figures and Tables.....	ii
1.0 Introduction.....	1
2.0 Overview of UTRCA Lands .....	2
3.0 Lands Strategy: Guiding Principles, Goals and Objectives .....	3
Guiding Principles .....	3
Goal 1. Environmental Protection and Natural Hazard Management.....	3
Goal 2. Sustainable Land Management Practices .....	4
Goal 3. Natural Spaces and Recreational Opportunities.....	4
Goal 4. Support UTRCA’s Strategic Directions, Programs and Services.....	4
4.0 Land Use Categories.....	6
5.0 Land Acquisition and Disposition.....	8
Land Acquisitions.....	8
Land Dispositions.....	8
6.0 Lands Strategy Consultation and Updates .....	10

# Figures and Tables

Table 1. Land Use Categories.....	6
Map 1. Land Use Categories.....	7

# 1.0 Introduction

The Upper Thames River Conservation Authority (UTRCA) inspires a healthy environment through a wide range of conservation initiatives, including protecting the community from flooding, enhancing natural heritage through restoration, protecting water quality and soil health, and providing environmental education to the public of all ages.

UTRCA's programs and services focus on five key areas:

- protecting people and property from flood and erosion hazards and supporting safe development,
- delivering landowner stewardship,
- providing natural spaces and recreational opportunities,
- making science-based decisions, and
- empowering communities and youth.

The UTRCA has prepared the Conservation Areas and Lands Strategy ("Lands Strategy") to meet the requirements for a strategy for conservation area owned or managed lands, as set out in the Conservation Authorities Act and Ontario Regulation 686/21 (Mandatory Programs and Services). The UTRCA is also preparing two other mandatory documents tied to the Lands Strategy, namely a Land Inventory and a Land Acquisition and Disposition Strategy.

The Lands Strategy provides the UTRCA's guiding principles, goals, and objectives for UTRCA owned or managed lands, which include conservation areas as well as other categories of lands. It builds on an internal document (UTRCA draft 2024) that provides details on the Land Inventory and will guide strategy implementation for the next 10 years.

The Lands Strategy involves a multi-faceted approach that integrates conservation, sustainable land management practices, and community engagement. It will be a valuable resource for the UTRCA and will provide clarity to watershed municipalities, residents, partners, and other interest holders regarding the UTRCA's vision for our lands for future generations.

## 2.0 Overview of UTRCA Lands

The UTRCA owns approximately 5,959 ha (14,700 acres) of land and water, largely within three large multi-use conservation areas, wetlands, hazard lands, and other natural areas (e.g., conifer stands, forested lands/woodlands, meadows, etc.) (see Map 1 in Section 4.0). The lands were acquired through recommended actions to reduce the threats from flooding and improve environmental and watershed health. Acquisitions were outlined in the following historical reports:

- Thames Valley (Above the City of London) Report 1946,
- 1952 Upper Thames Valley Conservation Report, and
- 1975 the London Valley Lands Study.

Historically, the primary goals of acquisition were to:

1. retain the flood plains and wetlands for flow and storage of flood water, and
2. preserve valley lands for conservation and recreation uses for the enjoyment of future generations.

Today, land holdings operate for various activities including water management, passive and active conservation areas (recreational use), and for natural heritage protection, providing natural assets and mitigation to climate change. Often, several of these uses overlap on a single land holding, therefore representing an integrated approach to land management.

## **3.0 Lands Strategy: Guiding Principles, Goals and Objectives**

### **Guiding Principles**

The Upper Thames River Conservation Authority will:

- Protect life and property from flooding and erosion, and develop sustainability and resilience in the natural heritage assets within our conservation lands,
- Develop and nurture relationships with all who seek to connect with the lands and water,
- Offer visitors to our public spaces a wide range of recreational opportunities, health benefits, and tourism options, and
- Inspire future generations through educational experiences at our conservation areas.

The following goals and objectives support UTRCA's strategic directions and inform decision-making related to UTRCA lands, including land acquisition and disposition. Objectives are applicable to all UTRCA lands and will be implemented according to annual work plans and budget.

The following goals and objectives may be refined as the UTRCA's Strategic Plan is updated and input is received through the consultation process.

### **Goal 1. Environmental Protection and Natural Hazard Management**

Provide environmental protection and natural hazard management to mitigate hazard risk to communities and protect the natural environment.

#### **Objectives**

- Ensure that current and future land holdings contribute to or support the UTRCA's goals and objectives and support an integrated watershed management approach.
- Protect the ecological integrity of the lands within the UTRCA watershed, maintain and enhance a connected natural heritage system, and recognize cultural heritage features within conservation areas.
- Actively manage UTRCA lands to ensure that properties remain valuable assets for the community and can adapt to external pressures and challenges such as population growth and climate change.
- Incorporate climate change adaptation and mitigation as key elements in all UTRCA land management activities.

## **Goal 2. Sustainable Land Management Practices**

Be a leader in landowner stewardship by demonstrating sustainable land management practices that mitigate climate change and build resiliency.

### **Objectives**

- Raise awareness about the importance of conservation and engage the public in stewardship activities.
- Research, monitor, and evaluate the natural heritage system (including health). Compile and organize information to identify gaps, strengthen understanding, and develop recommendations.
- Support demonstration activities of sustainable land uses, including forest and wetland management projects, and provide sites for other ecosystem restoration techniques and research activities.
- Provide a land base to effectively sequester carbon and reduce climate change impacts.

## **Goal 3. Natural Spaces and Recreational Opportunities**

Meet the current and future needs of local communities for natural spaces and recreational opportunities.

### **Objectives**

- Where appropriate, increase and/or improve public access to UTRCA owned and managed lands and develop land management opportunities to expand public access to natural areas on behalf of our municipal partners.
- Expand education and outreach opportunities on UTRCA owned and managed lands.
- Advance inclusion, diversity, equity, and accessibility on UTRCA owned and managed lands.
- Engage with Indigenous communities to better understand local needs and explore opportunities to develop relationships and shared initiatives.

## **Goal 4. Support UTRCA's Strategic Directions, Programs and Services**

Permanently secure lands that support the UTRCA's strategic directions and contribute to the delivery and sustainability of UTRCA programs and services.

### **Objectives**

- Identify and secure lands that will support UTRCA programs and services to protect people and property from natural hazards.

- Conserve natural resources for economic, social, and environmental benefit, and that are well-integrated into our communities.
- Identify opportunities to augment natural heritage within the watershed and/or to integrate with other provincially or municipally owned lands or other publicly accessible lands.
- Dispose of lands only as needed and when there is no negative impact to provincially significant conservation lands or ecologically significant lands.
- Property holdings may assist in providing a source of revenue to fulfill UTRCA's objectives through lease agreements, provided that the use does not conflict with the objectives of the Authority.
- Utilize income generated from UTRCA land or natural resources, to offset lands management operational expenses.

## 4.0 Land Use Categories

The Province directed that all conservation authorities utilize the following high-level land-use categories, based on public access and staffing requirements, to support a consistent and comparable set of data with respect to classification of conservation authority lands:

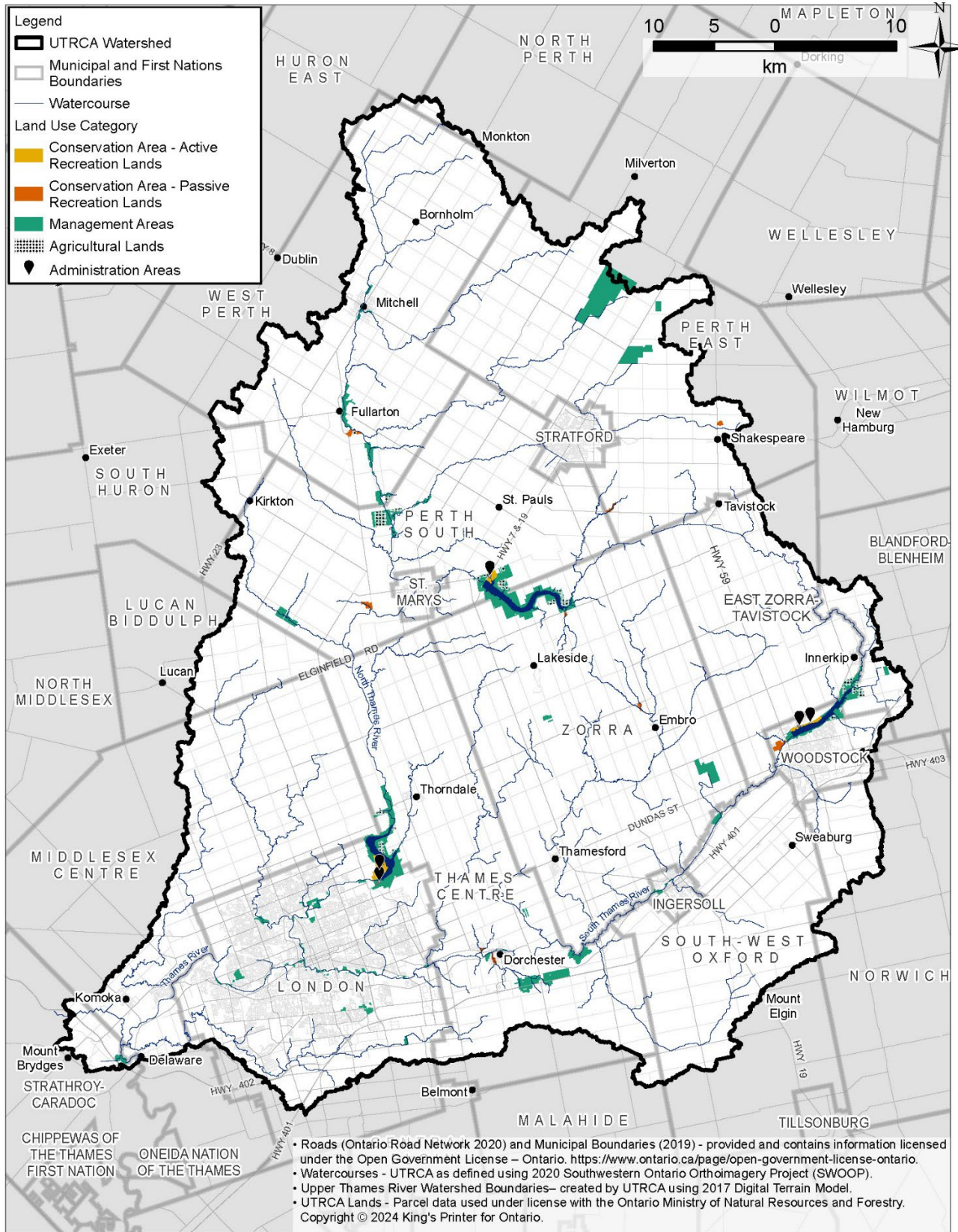
- Conservation area – active recreation land,
- Conservation area – passive recreation land,
- Management area,
- Administration area.

Table 1 provides an overview of the four land use categories and UTRCA staffing requirements, public accessibility, and examples of engaged in on each parcel of land.

**Table 1. Land Use Categories**

Land Use Category	Public Access and Staffing Requirements	Description	UTRCA Examples
Conservation Area - Active Recreation Lands	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accessible to the public</li> <li>• Direct staff support / supervision</li> </ul>	Fee charged for access, program, or activity (e.g., camping, trail use, facility use, land lease, etc.)	Fanshawe, Wildwood, and Pittock CAs used for camping, day use, canoe rentals, trails, etc.
Conservation Area - Passive Recreation Lands	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accessible to the public</li> <li>• No direct staff support / supervision</li> </ul>	No fee for most activities (e.g., trail walking, picnicking, etc.), hunting by permit only on some properties	Day-use conservation areas (e.g., Embro, Harrington), Cade Tract
Management Areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limited public access</li> <li>• No direct staff support / supervision</li> </ul>	Lands for natural heritage, hazards, flood control, low flow augmentation, or forest management, as well as water management areas, environmentally sensitive lands Portions may include agricultural lands	Limited access areas of Dorchester Swamp, Ellice Swamp, Fanshawe, Wildwood, and Pittock Conservation Areas, Lowthian Flats
Administration Areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Direct staff support / supervision</li> </ul>	Small parcels where UTRCA offices are located	Watershed Conservation Centre, field offices at Fanshawe, Wildwood, and Pittock CAs

# Map 1. Land Use Categories



## **5.0 Land Acquisition and Disposition**

UTRCA has focused its efforts on securing greenspaces that support the organization's strategic directions. An acquisition and disposition policy will be developed that will be informed by input from the Land Strategy. Any future property acquisition or disposition should be considered on a case-by-case basis by the Board of Directors through a staff report and recommendation.

### **Land Acquisitions**

Property acquisition is of interest to UTRCA when there is no net burden placed on the authority's finances.

Through the land acquisition process, the UTRCA may seek land donations or may pursue land purchases where funding sources are available to cover the costs associated with the transaction.

The priorities for land acquisitions will be as follows:

1. Land parcels adjacent to properties already owned by the UTRCA.
2. Parcels with significant natural features or restoration potential.
3. Parcels identified as natural hazard areas.
4. Parcels adjacent to another public body's or non-government organization's holding that provide linkages to greenspace (e.g., provincial park or land trust nature reserve).
5. Land parcels large enough to support UTRCA's land management goals and objectives.

### **Land Dispositions**

Staff will consider a land disposition to a public body (e.g., public agency, member municipality, or Crown), subject to the UTRCA's land management goals and objectives and/or an appropriate land tenure agreement, if required, and shall not inflict a financial burden on the UTRCA.

Any land disposition to the public will go through a public tender process. The cost of the disposition should be borne by the proponent and shall not inflict a financial burden on the UTRCA.

Generally, any disposition requires an appraisal of the value, a legal survey, and public notification including the Minister. Any funds resulting from a disposition should be allocated toward property management activities including further property acquisition, inventories, stewardship demonstrations, boundary surveys, signage, or other such activities on the existing land holding.

As such, the priorities for land dispositions will be as follows:

1. Properties that do not meet the UTRCA's organizational objectives.
2. An easement or right-of-way over UTRCA property in the interest of a municipality.
3. Parcels not eligible for inclusion in a tax incentive program (e.g., Managed Forest Tax Incentive Program or Conservation Land Tax Incentive Program) due to small size or lack of ecologically sensitive features.
4. An easement or right-of-way over UTRCA property in the interest of a private landowner when aligned with UTRCA's goals and objectives.

## **6.0 Lands Strategy Consultation and Updates**

The UTRCA is developing the Lands Strategy with engagement and input from municipalities, interest holders, and the public. This outreach includes:

- Notifying watershed municipalities, Indigenous communities, and interest groups of in person and online engagement opportunities,
- Presenting the draft Lands Strategy to municipal partners,
- Using a public engagement website to generate effective community feedback on the strategy,
- Using social media and traditional news media to highlight the strategy and encourage feedback.

The Lands Strategy will be reviewed every five years and updated as needed. First Nations, other partners, and interest holders will be engaged in future updates to the Strategy. Prior to publication of any updates to the Strategy, interest holders and the public will be consulted in a method that is appropriate at the time of the update.