



A Strategic Plan for The Couchiching Conservancy 2020 - 2025

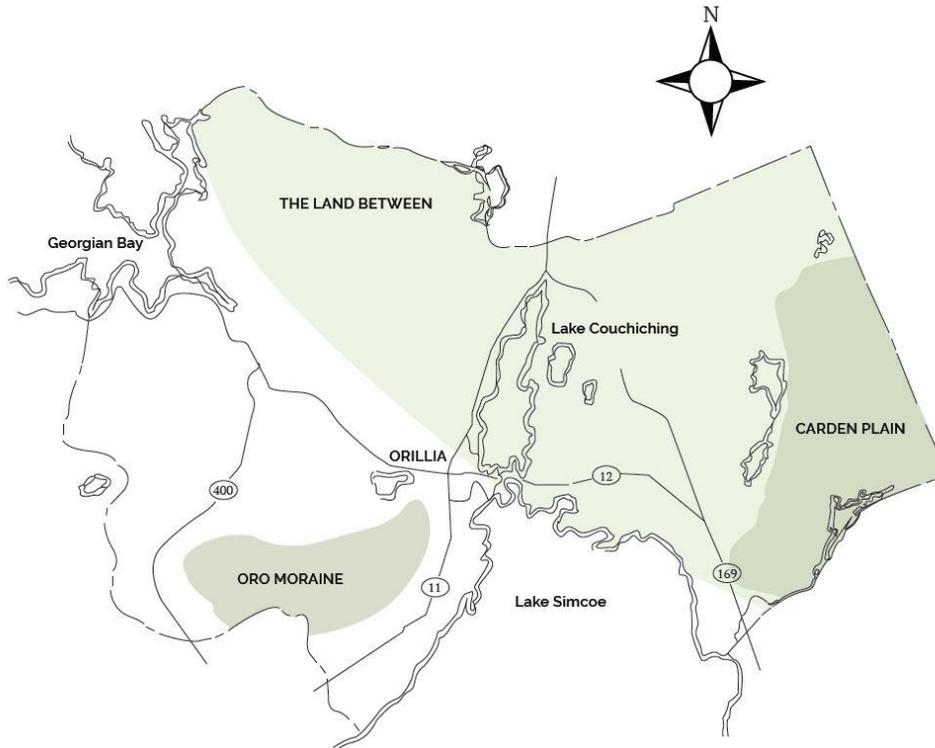
Declaration of Shared Principles

1. Credible science demonstrates that society's behaviour and actions need to change to avoid ecological, economic and social ruin on a scale unprecedented over the span of human history.
2. We believe in the power and value of local action to solve global problems.
3. We hold that every individual has a responsibility to shift away from behaviour that treats nature as a resource to be consumed toward behaviour that treats as sacred the healthy natural systems upon which we depend for our existence.
4. We foster a respect for all living things and acknowledge the right they have to exist without utility for humankind.
5. We seek a reciprocal, respectful and protective relationship with the land that provides us health and wellbeing. We recognize that we are of nature, not external to it.
6. We recognize that The Couchiching Conservancy operates within the territory of the Indigenous Peoples of Treaty 18, Lake Simcoe – Nottawasaga and The Williams Treaties. Understanding our connection to community, the land and the meaning of our historical agreements through treaty is an ongoing process to which we are committed.
7. We recognize that we are all accountable to future generations for our choices and actions. This moment demands we invest in nature to support all life on earth.

The Couchiching Conservancy Geographic Area of Interest

The geographic focus of The Couchiching Conservancy (the Conservancy) extends from Barrie in the west, over the top of Lake Simcoe and Lake Couchiching, continuing east to the City of Kawartha Lakes (Fig.1). It includes the municipalities of Oro-Medonte, Orillia, Severn, Ramara and portions of Barrie, Muskoka and the City of Kawartha Lakes.

Figure 1: Area of The Couchiching Conservancy Interest (Couchiching-Severn region)



Mission:

Protecting the special natural features of the Couchiching region for future generations.

(Articles of Incorporation, 1993)

Mandate:

- To preserve, protect, restore and improve the natural environment of the Couchiching-Severn region.
- To encourage and foster an understanding and awareness of the natural environment and its value in enhancing our quality of life.
- To acquire, maintain and preserve lands, or interests in land, of ecological, recreational, scientific, scenic or open space values.
- To promote and undertake research and data collection on the natural environment and to distribute the findings to the public.

The Couchiching Conservancy Vision

We envision a mosaic of inter-connected wild spaces protected sufficiently to ensure the Couchiching-Severn region retains, nourishes and enhances its remaining natural riches through a changed relationship with the land in keeping with our shared principles. Our relationship with the land is built on respect, responsibility and reciprocity toward the earth.

By 2025, we envision the following:

- Spurred on by the climate emergency, the Conservancy has accelerated the pace of acquisition and protection to the extent of its capacity using the current natural heritage strategy as a guide. The focus on capacity to steward protected properties at the highest standard remains important, but is subordinate to the imperative to bring threatened land under ownership or conservation agreement.
- Under the guidance of staff, the Conservancy is a conservation leader in the engagement of educated, empowered volunteers to steward the land under its protection. Recruiting, training and deploying volunteers to monitor and manage the land are key activities essential to achieve our stewardship goals and engage the general public in our work.
- The Conservancy is financially sound and well supported by generous donors, strong governance, programming and initiatives to ensure long-term financial stability and independence. This strength is built on the highest standards of ethical behaviour and transparency as identified in The Canadian Land Trust Standards and Practices.
- Built on the foundation of a well-supported staff, the Conservancy is a people-focused, volunteer-based organization with a rich culture of inclusiveness and empowerment of its volunteers and supporters. It is governed with the assumption of goodwill, collegiality and respect that allows for expression of competing ideas and opinions without undermining the central goals of the organization. Volunteers are highly trained, accountable and supported by staff in the field, in the office, and in public. Supporters are engaged and growing in numbers through programs such as Passport to Nature and other similar programs. All participants feel a sense of ownership and joint accomplishment.
- Collaboration with organizations, governments, Indigenous communities, educational institutions and other partners remains a key to our success. Such collaborations are tightly focused on The Couchiching Conservancy goals and used to amplify the impact of our organization while avoiding duplicating efforts.

- The Conservancy supports positive changes in government policy where it aligns with our mission and mandate. The Conservancy will comment according to our Advocacy Policy alone or in concert with relevant partners.

Couchiching Conservancy Goals for 2020-2025

- 1.0 Acquire and Protect Habitat**
- 2.0 Steward the Land Under Protection**
- 3.0 Build and Maintain Financial and Human Resources**
- 4.0 Communicate, Collaborate and Celebrate**

Goal Specifics:

1. Acquire and Protect Habitat

- 1.1. Accelerate the pace of acquisition and protection guided by our current natural heritage strategy. By 2025, the Conservancy will play a role in protecting an additional 4,000 acres in our region of operations through ownership, easements, stewardship agreements and other innovative methods by working collaboratively with our partners.
- 1.2. While focusing on capacity to steward protected properties at the highest standard remains important, it is subordinate to the imperative to bring threatened land under ownership or conservation agreement.
- 1.3. Strike an ad-hoc Committee to develop a framework by 2022 to make decisions regarding the correct balance of public access and environmental protection.
- 1.4. Engage landowners in focus areas identified in our natural heritage strategy to encourage good stewardship and identify opportunities for land protection. As identified in our natural heritage strategy, retaining and restoring habitat connections is vital as species shift their ranges to respond to shifting climatic conditions.

2. Steward the Land Under Protection

- 2.1. Effectively monitor and adaptively manage all lands under the protection of The Couchiching Conservancy. Ensure that each property has a management plan based on current science as well as an ecological survey and stewardship activities that are appropriate to sustain or enhance the natural heritage features of the property. New properties will have a draft management plan within the first 12 months of acquisition.

All management plans will be reviewed every five years to update activities and status. Ensure EcoGift compliance on EcoGift properties.

- 2.2. Maintain the highest standards for monitoring easements, maintaining records and nurturing strong relationships with landowners through a minimum of semi-annual contact.
- 2.3. By 2025, all properties owned by the Conservancy will have active volunteer components of Citizen Science and other engagement programs to ensure effective monitoring and maintenance of properties with staff oversight in accordance with Property Management Plans.
- 2.4. Maintain an endowed stewardship fund sufficient to provide funding for maintenance of Conservancy properties. This will be based on a target of 15% of the value of the property at acquisition, judged on a case-by-case basis. This is to ensure preservation of ecological values, protection from liability and capacity to respond to contraventions of conservation easements. In the case of a crucial acquisition, however, acquiring the property quickly may be more important than having the stewardship funds on hand at transfer time.
- 2.5. Be prepared to use all available legal tools to protect Conservancy lands or adjacent lands as the situation demands as per our Advocacy Policy. Maintain accessible stewardship funds to defend against property incursions and provide capacity to respond to contraventions of conservation easements.
- 2.6. Comment on municipal, provincial and federal policies and plans in a non-partisan way when relevant to our work.

3. Build and Maintain Financial and Human Resources

- 3.1. Maintain an ethical, transparent and well-managed organization supported by highly trained and empowered staff, volunteers and informed supporters.
- 3.2. Engage the Board, staff and volunteers fully to accelerate the pace of fundraising to meet existing and future needs. We will focus on the resource engines listed in the table below, or their substitutes if program evolution is required. This acceleration will include the creation of a Fundraising Committee in early 2020 to focus on generating operating dollars.

3.3. Resource engines and targets (acquisition not included)

Resource Engine	5 Yr. Revenue Target 2020-2025
Staff-driven projects, donations & grants	\$1,026,330
Investment income (excluding Heartwood Fund and President's Reserve)	\$250,000
Heartwood Fund/Past Presidents Council (bequests and legacy giving)	Operating income generated: \$107,000 Increase pledges by \$2,600,000
Volunteer Committees (large operating gifts and foundations)	\$958,330
Events	\$220,000 (net)
Passport to Nature	\$100,000 (net)
Total operating income target 2020-2025	\$2,661,660

- 3.4. Maintain a salary grid for all full-time staff that makes the Conservancy competitive with comparable organizations. Review the grid every two years using appropriate benchmarking tools and local labour conditions.
- 3.5. The Board of Directors will ensure appropriate human resources are in place with the right expertise and technical support to oversee and deliver effective programs and services relating to our core mandate of protecting habitat. Staff workloads will be appropriate to ensure optimal performance, job satisfaction and staff retention.
- 3.6. By 2025, the Board of Directors will implement improvements to existing benefits for full and part-time staff through the fledgling Common Good initiative for non-profits, or another appropriate vehicle, ensuring any plan is sustainable for the organization over the long-term.
- 3.7. The Board of Directors and staff will create a succession plan, which will be in place by the end of 2020. This will include a review of Board and staff responsibilities to ensure clarity and alignment with succession planning and staffing changes as the organization evolves.
- 3.8. By 2025, the Conservancy will increase the number of volunteer hours by 25% over 2019 levels in keeping with a commitment to engage the community at a higher level in order to increase our support base.
- 3.9. All Conservancy policies will be current by the end of 2020 and reviewed on a 5-year cycle thereafter. Policies and bylaws will be in compliance with related legislation, in alignment with the Canadian Land Trust Standards and Practices, and in support of emerging areas of interest. The work of staff and volunteers will be supported by clear direction and guidelines.
- 3.10. Our record-keeping policy will be updated by the end of 2020. It will contain a plan to archive corporate memory in a secure manner with current data sets and other information identified by the administration.

- 3.11. By the end of 2021, the Conservancy will develop new ways to support the engagement of youth volunteers, aged 18 to 35.
- 3.12. The Board of Directors will strive to ensure Board membership retains gender parity and also reflects the changing nature and diversity of the population in the Conservancy's geographic area.

4. Communicate, Collaborate and Celebrate!

- 4.1. Create opportunities to share and develop joint systems, tools, protocols and training with our partners that will respond to the climate emergency and contribute to the acquisition and protection of natural heritage in the Couchiching-Severn region. Our Annual Report will include an updated list of our many partners and describe the outcomes of these essential alliances.
- 4.2. A Committee will be struck in 2020 to create and implement a plan outlining The Couchiching Conservancy goals for Indigenous engagement. The plan will be created in consultation with Indigenous People in the Couchiching-Severn region and with reference to the United Nations Declaration for the Rights of Indigenous People, the Pathway to Canada Target 1, Indigenous Circle of Experts, The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada and other relevant documents. During the process, the Conservancy will consider the role of Indigenous Knowledge and Indigenous Cultural Practices on the landscape.
- 4.3. Update the Conservancy's website by the end of 2020 with particular attention to using industry best practices for layout and design, and making it "mobile-friendly" and responsive. The website will be a source of up-to-date news and will enable us to celebrate our collective successes.
- 4.4. Continue to strengthen our engagement methods. Create a plan by 2021 that will help guide strategic content on our website, e-newsletter and social media channels. Other engagement opportunities will be explored for residents and visitors. One of the goals of these actions is to share our collective successes and celebrate our community of supporters.
- 4.5. In support of Canada's biodiversity target to conserve and protect 17% of terrestrial areas and inland water, staff or volunteers will include all Conservancy lands that meet the Canadian Protected and Conserved Area Database criteria by the end of 2020.
- 4.6. Celebrate successes at the Annual General Meeting, honour volunteers and staff at special events such as the Heartwood gathering, and recognize special achievements and milestones.