



AUSABLE BAYFIELD
CONSERVATION

CREATING AWARENESS | TAKING ACTION

THE PATH FORWARD

Your Community Conservation Strategy
for Ausable Bayfield Watersheds

MISSION

Protect, improve, conserve, and restore the watershed
in partnership with the community

VISION

Healthy watersheds where our needs and the needs
of the natural environment are in balance



This image is the logo wordmark for Ausable Bayfield Conservation, showing a Black Cherry Leaf, a wave, and our motto of Creating Awareness, Taking Action.

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History

The former Ausable River Conservation Authority was Ontario's first conservation authority. It was created in 1946. The Bayfield River watershed and smaller streams were added in 1971.

Local municipalities and the Province of Ontario formed Ausable Bayfield Conservation Authority (ABCA) to prevent the loss of important local ecosystems, to protect life and property through flood management, and to build a healthier natural environment on a watershed scale.



Before photo shows a local property before a project to reduce sediment, bacteria and nutrient-loading.



Present-day photo shows erosion control, livestock fencing and tree planting to improve water quality.

A local mandate

A conservation authority is a local conservation organization that operates in accordance with the *Conservation Authorities Act*.

The objects of the *Conservation Authorities Act* in Ontario have remained constant since it was first enacted. A conservation authority is to establish and undertake, in its area of jurisdiction, a program designed to further conservation, restoration, development and management of natural resources (other than gas, oil, coal and minerals).

Ausable Bayfield Conservation Authority (ABCA) has a local board of directors selected by 12 member municipalities. The members are usually elected representatives but municipalities have the option of selecting a representative from the community. The board, with community input, determines the local mandate.

Watershed residents support ABCA through municipal levies and individual donations. Local support from the municipal levy makes it possible to bring in additional financial resources from private sources and different levels of government.

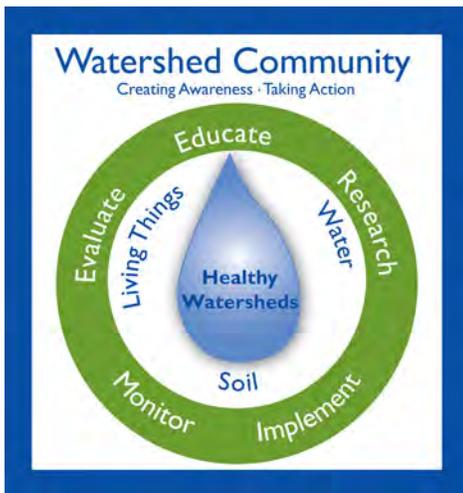
Almost three-quarters of funding for conservation in this watershed comes from sources other than municipal levies. The combination of municipal, provincial, federal, and private support helps to protect and enhance water quality, plant trees, create habitat, enhance wetlands, and increase biodiversity.

What is a conservation strategy?

A conservation strategy is developed by people from the watershed community to define the vision, mission, and goals of the Ausable Bayfield Conservation Authority.

A diverse community group of 34 contributors participated in meetings in 2010 and 2011. Their work has resulted in *The Path Forward: Your Community Conservation Strategy for Ausable Bayfield Watersheds*.

This plan will guide the direction of the local organization's board of directors and staff in the coming decades.



This diagram represents your community representatives' vision of how to create a healthy watershed.

How will we create awareness?

Here are just some of the ways ABCA can create environmental awareness:

Educate:

- People about safety around high water in the springtime
- Landowners and watershed residents about planting of native trees, shrubs and grasses
- Young people through programs such as the Sylvan Conservation Program

Promote:

- Positive actions that are working
- Good forestry practices to landowners, municipalities
- Well and septic improvements, fencing projects, runoff and erosion control, windbreaks, manure storage
- Ausable Bayfield Conservation Foundation and programs like Commemorative Woods
- Ethical practices for fishing and for hunting on permitted lands
- Alternatives to harmful chemicals

Encourage:

- Best management practices to preserve soil, improve water and air quality, preserve water quantity, increase habitat, protect species-at-risk, and mitigate and adapt to changes in our local climate
- Proper disposal of hazardous wastes such as batteries, paints, and chemicals
- Reduced use of harmful chemicals
- Positive individual actions through stewardship guides for farm, shoreline, and rural non-farm residents
- Protection of Lake Huron-Georgian Bay Watershed; support for Great Lakes Charter
- Responsible actions on conservation lands (e.g., no use of off-road vehicles in prohibited areas)

How will we measure success?

Evaluate:

- Rate effectiveness of different kinds of best management practices
- Assess effectiveness of programs to prevent erosion, sediment, water quality degradation
- Assess how to best protect and restore natural areas damaged by erosion
- Determine if ABCA *Business Plan* and other policy documents reflect recommendations of new Conservation Strategy

Monitor:

- Water quality indicators such as pathogens and benthics
- Ensure buffer areas are effectively maintained

Establish:

- Baseline data for forest conditions, water quality, water quantity
- Targets for water quality, forest cover

Observe:

- Changes in forest conditions, water quality and quantity
- Impacts of climate change

Research:

- Continue water sampling with sufficient frequency and detail to detect changes
- Assess barriers that discourage landowners from starting projects
- Identify incentives that encourage landowners to pursue projects
- Investigate opportunities for carbon credit generation

Update:

- Watershed Report Cards
- ABCA climate change actions and knowledge

Implement:

These are just some examples of positive actions that can be taken by Ausable Bayfield Conservation, working with public and partners, to create healthier watersheds:

- Continue tree planting program and stewardship services
- Encourage biodiversity through creation of habitat
- Work in partnership with the community: residents, contractors, municipalities, public
- Collaborate and integrate programs with agencies, ministries, and other partners
- Pursue funding programs which provide incentives for beneficial projects by watershed residents

- Enact and enforce regulations as set out in the *Conservation Authorities Act* and the *Regulation of Development, Interference with Wetlands and Alteration to Shorelines and Watercourses*
- Improve water quality and reduce flooding through effective best management practices and creation, protection, restoration and effective management of wetlands
- Acquire conservation lands strategically in order to conserve healthy habitat, forest conditions, water quality, water quantity
- Raise awareness of the conservation authority's regulatory responsibilities through partnerships with planning agencies and municipalities
- Deliver watershed-scale planning advice and technical and environmental review services for governments, municipalities and organizations as appropriate

Protect:

- Water quantity through Low Water Response Team
- Life and property through flood forecasting, warning, prevention, awareness, flood plain management and regulations
- Areas of environmental significance

Create:

- Accessible trails and conservation lands to preserve ecosystems and educate about nature
- Recreational opportunities for healthier watersheds and healthier communities

Healthier watersheds can be created through positive environmental actions by organizations, communities ... and you.



Our thanks go to the 34 people who took part in the community team that developed the Conservation Strategy in 2010-2011. Thanks also go to the residents and other ABCA partners for their ongoing work to create healthier watersheds. This plan was approved by the team on September 14, 2011 and approved by ABCA Board of Directors on December 15, 2011. Visit abca.ca for a full list of those who helped write this plan.



Individuals like you have been actively involved in protection and improvement of Ausable Bayfield watersheds.

Our goal:

We want to work with you to create awareness and take action to improve watersheds for healthier communities and healthier people.

Take action! What you can do:

Here are just some of the ways people like you can help to improve your property and your watershed community:

- Plant a tree ... or several trees
- Decommission unused wells
- Have your septic system inspected, pumped out regularly, and upgraded as necessary
- Volunteer on a trail or watershed committee
- Visit a conservation area to experience nature or learn about watershed issues
- Donate to local trails and conservation efforts
- Consult ABCA about grants or technical expertise for your beneficial projects
- Participate in a conservation education program
- Create a wetland with technical help from ABCA
- Implement an Environmental Farm Plan
- Consult a stewardship guide to improve your home, farm, business, or municipality
- Be a citizen ambassador: set a positive example
- Create a local initiative of your own — visit abca.ca ... and let us know about it!

Community Action:

Here are just some of the ways local communities and groups, made up of landowners and residents like you, are working to create healthier watersheds:

- Creating and implementing plans to protect local watersheds
- Finding new ways to protect local water quality
- Conserving water supplies through the Water Response Team
- Restoring fish habitat
- Providing opportunities to experience nature through accessible trails
- Sponsoring and publishing water quality testing of Lake Huron beaches and other watercourses
- Protecting water near sinkholes and other areas where water is highly susceptible to contamination
- Taking part in conservation education programs

Serving on:

- Management committees for conservation areas, museums
- Community groups supporting local trails
- Working groups
- Local watershed plan steering committees

A map of the Ausable Bayfield Conservation Authority (ABCA) Watershed Area.



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