



## Backgrounder

For over 60 years, the Nottawasaga Valley Conservation Authority (NVCA) has provided watershed residents with services such as flood management, development planning in flood plains and ecologically sensitive areas, providing recreational opportunities as well as educating our youth and communities about nature.

In the proposed changes to the *Conservation Authorities Act (CA Act)*, municipalities can opt-out of non-core services. Watershed residents are encouraged to [comment on the proposed changes](#) to help ensure there is adequate funding for important services that NVCA provides.

Below is a summary of some of these non-core services and how removing funding for them will directly impact our watershed residents and municipalities.

### Hiking trails and recreation

NVCA has the responsibility to conserve land in order to protect natural areas and their ecosystem functions. For example, wetlands help improve water quality and control flooding. Clean rivers and streams help provide fish habitat for popular sports fishery such as rainbow trout and Chinook salmon.

Currently, municipalities are required to provide levy to help maintain conservation areas so residents and visitors are able to enjoy recreational opportunities in these natural areas. Through experiencing nature first hand, and with the help of interpretive signage, visitors develop appreciation of the ecological integrity of nature and the importance of preserving this precious resource.

Some NVCA conservation areas include the Tiffin Conservation Area, Nottawasaga Bluffs Conservation Areas and the Minesing Wetlands.

### How municipal levy helps

A combination of municipal levy and user fees help NVCA maintain our conservation areas, including removing hazardous trees, keeping emergency routes open for first responders, allowing Provincial Offence Officers to protect NVCA properties, enhancing or restoring wildlife habitat and installing interpretive signage.

Without municipal levy, visitors may have to pay higher fees when visiting conservation areas to help with maintenance and upkeep. NVCA may also have to

make the difficult decision to shut down or reduce service in some conservation areas.

## **Education**

Over the last 30 years, NVCA's Education Program has delivered high quality, hands on, environmentally based outdoor education. Thanks to a long-term partnership with the Simcoe County District School Board, NVCA's educators work with students at their schools or at the Tiffin Centre for Conservation to help them connect with local natural environments. During the COVID-19 pandemic, our education team developed online programming to continue this work.

NVCA also offers secondary school programming including several Specialist High Skills Major certificate programs for high school students focused on their next steps at post-secondary school.

Other programs delivered through our Education Program includes Camp Tiffin, programming for homeschooling families, cultural festivals and evening/weekend workshops for our communities.

## **How municipal levy helps**

Municipal levy helps fund the development of NVCA's education programs. Each year, the Manager of Education assesses the needs of our schools and communities and develops programs to meet those needs. Without municipal funding, schools, communities and residents would have to pay additional fees to access these programs and services.

## **Environmental Restoration**

Healthy streams and rivers provide clean water for drinking and cooking, agricultural irrigation, waste water dilution, and recreational enjoyment.

When spending time outdoors, residents prefer clean rivers, lush forests and areas with abundant wildlife. Exercise, recreation, fishing, boating, hiking and bird watching are best enjoyed in healthy environments. A healthy Nottawasaga Valley watershed also provides habitat for a variety of fish, including prized sports fish such as rainbow trout, Chinook salmon, walleye, pike and bass.

There are a variety of land uses throughout the watershed that can impact our water resources. NVCA's Watershed Monitoring Program has identified areas with degraded rivers and streams throughout the watershed through data collection and analysis. This information helps our Stewardship and Forestry Programs work together in large and small restoration projects to improve both rural and urban environments.

Environmental restoration projects can take years to plan and complete. Our Watershed Science Program monitors the completed projects for effectiveness and sustainability. These programs are a required component to ensure the watershed remains healthy, especially in this rapidly growing watershed.

### **How municipal levy helps**

NVCA's 18 municipalities contribute seed funding for environmental restoration projects. The stewardship team uses these funds to help leverage additional funding from external grants like foundations, private donors and the provincial and federal governments. Every dollar contributed by municipalities results in six dollars of external funding!

Each year, the return on investment to our municipalities is many times more than the amount contributed. Our 18 municipalities are connected by streams, rivers and groundwater systems. Repairing degraded upstream streams and rivers also greatly improves the water quality downstream.

Under the proposed changes to the *CA Act*, municipalities are only mandated to fund environmental restoration projects on NVCA owned land. Municipalities will need to enter into agreements with NVCA to provide seed funding for environmental restoration on private land. However, in the Nottawasaga Valley Watershed, most rivers and streams pass through private land.

Without the seed funding, NVCA will no longer be able to access grants, meaning the years of planning for many projects may become fruitless.

### **Tree Planting**

NVCA has been offering subsidized tree planting services to NVCA residents since 1964. Every spring, NVCA's Forestry Program plants over 100,000 trees throughout the watershed.

As the trees mature, they will help with flood management. As the snow melts in the winter, the snow under the trees will take longer to melt, and their roots also help water go into aquifers, helping to refill groundwater. Trees also help stop soil erosion, put nutrients back into the ground and create habitat for wildlife.

### **How municipal levy helps**

Like NVCA's stewardship program, our Forestry Program uses municipal levy as seed funding to apply for grants in order to offer tree planting services at a discount to residents in the Nottawasaga Valley Watershed.

Without this funding, it is estimated that NVCA can only plan 50,000 trees each year, half of what is currently being planted each year.

## **Watershed Monitoring**

The Nottawasaga Valley Watershed is one of the fastest growing watersheds in Ontario. A healthy watershed not only helps protect and enhance our natural areas, but also ensures our health, economy and society can thrive.

For example, agriculture is the economic engine of the Nottawasaga Valley watershed and relies on clean water for irrigation, and healthy soils and pollinators to grow crops. Urban development also relies on healthy environments as it provides healthy neighbourhoods with access to greenspaces. Clean rivers also have better capability of diluting and carrying away the water from wastewater treatment plants. Our strong tourism industry also relies on a healthy environment.

NVCA's watershed monitoring team collects information about the health of our rivers, streams, groundwater and wetlands to determine the impacts of climate change, urban growth, land use change and other stressors on these areas. This information is also used to measure effectiveness of environmental restoration projects.

NVCA participates in MECP's provincial stream and groundwater monitoring programs, where water samples are collected for chemistry analysis. This provides an excellent snapshot of stream health conditions and allows NVCA us to identify potential causes of poor stream health.

Watershed science staff also collect data on fish, water temperature, stream flow and benthic macroinvertebrates (small animals that live on the bottom of water courses). These methods are more cost efficient and helps NVCA gain a more comprehensive understanding of stream health.

### **How municipal levy helps**

In the proposed legislation, municipalities would be required to provide funding for provincial stream and groundwater monitoring programs. However, municipalities will have to enter into agreements with NVCA to provide funding for the other components of monitoring.

Without municipal levy, the opportunities to collect information from multiple sources is impacted. For example, as our land use changes, the biological, chemical, and physical characteristics of our rivers and streams also change. NVCA's Watershed Science Program uses cost effective methods to detect these changes and summarizes this information in Watershed Health Checks. When tracked over long periods of time, this data is extremely valuable for NVCA and municipalities to make decisions regarding changes to land use.

## **Commenting on the proposed changes**

Residents in the Nottawasaga Valley Watershed are encouraged to submit comments to [Environmental Registry of Ontario](#) to ask the Minister of Environment, Conservation and Parks to reconsider dividing conservation authority's services into core and noncore.

Members of the public are welcome to submit comments until June 27, 2021.