



2024

Annual
Work Plan



Since our formation in 1966, the RVCA has worked with our municipal partners to deliver programs and services that protect the Rideau watershed for the benefit of everyone. Our goal is to ensure actions upstream don't have detrimental impacts downstream.

Municipalities understand that it takes a healthy watershed to support local economies, protect public health, reduce flooding, droughts and erosion and protect communities against climate change. In 2024, we continue on this path as we work to conserve our shared watershed.

Our Legislative Mandate

To provide programs and services designed to further the conservation, restoration, development and management of natural resources in the Rideau watershed (*Conservation Authorities Act*).

Our Vision

A thriving watershed with clean, abundant water, natural shorelines, rich forests and wetlands, diverse habitats and sustainable land use that is valued and protected by all.

Our Mission

To understand, manage, protect, restore and enhance the Rideau watershed through science, stewardship, education, policy and leadership.

Our Priorities

Our Strategic Plan outlines a number of key priorities. Many are now complete, while others will be achieved this year and are highlighted in our "Special for 2024" boxes.



2024 Budget Summary

RVCA's proposed budget for 2024 is \$12.6 million. This will enable the RVCA to continue meeting the needs of our municipalities and watershed residents while completing critical priorities including new provincial deliverables due December 31, 2024.

Throughout this work plan, you will see projects highlighted in boxes marked "Special for 2024." These boxes highlight both capital projects and operational priorities to be initiated or completed next year. Our proposed budget for 2024 can be broken into:

- **\$0.99** million for capital projects
- **\$11.6** million for operations

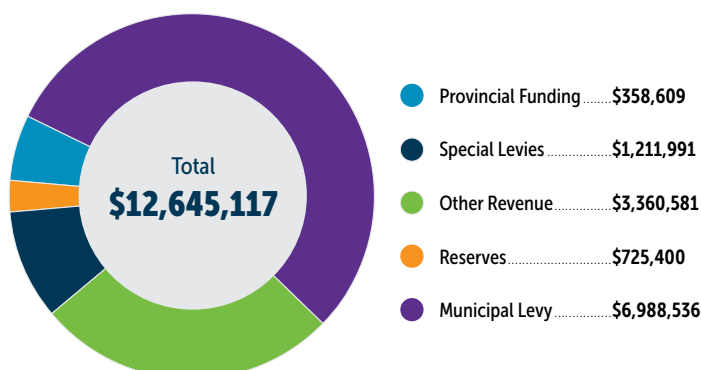
Expenditure Highlights

- The draft budget for 2024 reflects an overall decrease of 1.19 staff positions to enable the reallocation of funds. Staff time has also been reallocated amongst programs and departments to best reflect priorities and workload and better serve municipalities and residents.
- Like our member municipalities, salary costs are an expenditure that increases annually. Benefit contribution rates are expected to rise next year while payroll taxes should remain relatively steady. The budget also accommodates a cost-of-living increase of 3 percent, which is slightly below Ontario's Consumer Price Index, but enables RVCA to retain staff while remaining fiscally responsible.
- A number of capital projects are also planned for 2024, most replacing dated assets and aging infrastructure. RVCA's contributions for these projects will be taken from reserves so additional pressure is not put on the municipal levy.

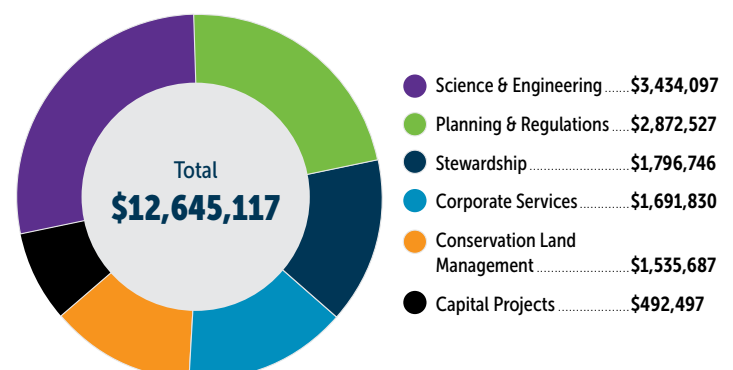
Revenue Highlights

- Provincial funding remains largely unchanged over last year and is projected to be \$358,609.
- Special levies to the City of Ottawa also remain largely unchanged at \$1,211,991.
- As always, the RVCA works to maximize other revenues including user fees, grants, self-generated revenue and fundraising which is projected to be \$3,360,581 for next year. This includes a 3 percent increase to development review fees to keep pace with cost of living and the exploration of additional partnerships, grants and donations.
- An additional \$656,500 is also budgeted to come from reserves for capital projects and \$68,900 for operational needs.
- This leaves the municipal levy which is budgeted to be \$6,988,536 for 2024. This represents a 2.5 percent tax increase for municipalities as 1.5 percent will come from assessment growth. This modest increase in light of continued inflation, reflects budget direction received from our Board of Directors and is in keeping with City of Ottawa budget direction. Based on assessment value, the City of Ottawa will pay 91 percent of RVCA's levy in 2024. This amounts to \$6.3 million leaving our other 17 municipalities to share the remaining \$651,145. Levy costs for these municipalities range from \$1,900 to \$121,308 depending on their assessment.

Where does the money come from?




Where does the investment go?



Municipal Levy

Being a municipally-based organization, the foundation of our budget is the municipal levy. However, we are committed to minimizing pressure on the tax base, so despite record-high inflation the RVCA has kept its municipal levy increase to a 2.5 percent tax increase plus growth by reducing costs, finding efficiencies and maximizing other revenue sources. While the levy remains the foundation of our budget, other sources make up approximately half our revenue in any given year. This means that for every dollar invested through the municipal levy, the RVCA is able to double that investment to deliver a variety of programs and services in the Rideau watershed. Our other revenue sources include:

- Charging fees for education programs, conservation areas, permits and planning comments
- Getting grants for special projects, students and interns
- Fundraising through our Foundation
- Special levies for specific projects that benefit a particular municipality
- Joint programming and staff sharing with neighbouring conservation authorities
- Landowner contributions for services they receive

 Through the RVCA, municipalities and residents have access to expert staff who develop a strong understanding of our local watershed and share their knowledge, expertise and skills with our partners.

RVCA Services: Serving our Municipalities and Residents

RVCA staff work closely with municipal staff because our work is so interconnected. In fact, it's hard to find a municipal service that our programs don't support either directly or indirectly! For example, our work supports municipal development review, emergency management, water and sewage services, tourism and recreation and of course economic development. And the benefit of a conservation authority is that these programs are delivered consistently across the watershed at a fraction of the cost because our staff are shared among 18 municipalities and sometimes neighbouring Conservation Authorities. This saves money and avoids duplication. RVCA's programs also serve a wide range of public interests and needs benefiting local watershed residents from lake country to agricultural areas to urban communities.

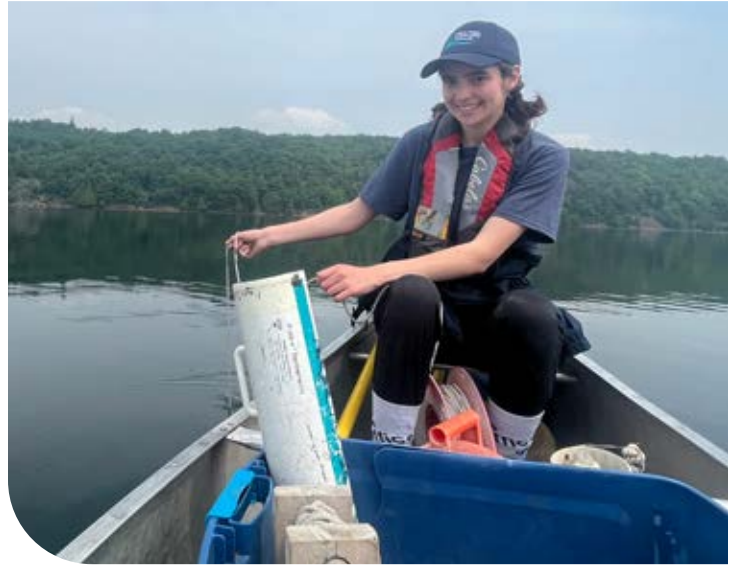
Through the RVCA, municipalities and residents have access to expert staff who develop a strong understanding of our local watershed and share their knowledge, expertise and skills with our partners. In the following pages, you will find information about all of RVCA's programs and services organized into five key areas:

- Watershed Science and Engineering Services
- Planning Advisory & Regulatory Services
- Stewardship Services
- Conservation Land Management Services
- Corporate Services

Watershed Science & Engineering Services

RVCA collects, monitors and analyses watershed data to gain a better understanding of natural hazards and the health of our watershed. This includes understanding local flood, erosion and slope stability hazards as well as the condition of local lakes and streams, forest and wetland cover as well as fish and aquatic communities.

This knowledge enables RVCA, municipalities and other partners to make informed decisions about how best to manage our shared natural resources, protect people and property from natural hazards and tailor programs and services to meet the evolving needs of our watershed. This information and data are shared with municipalities, partners and the public through online tools, maps, reports, presentations and other accessible means.



Special for 2024

- Complete RVCA's new watershed model that will support flood forecasting and warning and enable climate change assessments of the watershed
- Improve network of flow gauges across the watershed and pilot a new real-time water level gauge tailored for areas with limited internet connectivity
- Initiate natural hazard mapping on Faulkner Drain, Sawmill Creek, Lower Rideau Lake, Big Rideau Lake, Upper Rideau Lake, Wolfe Lake, Westport Lake and Sand Lake
- Prepare a Watershed-Based Resource Management Strategy that will identify priority actions to address natural hazards and protect and enhance the watershed
- Introduce a new public platform for accessing monitoring data as part of RVCA's new website
- Redesign monitoring programs to better align with natural hazards, understand climate change impacts, integrate water quality and flow data and improve overall program efficiency
- Prepare an updated operational plan for all water and erosion control infrastructure
- Complete an updated water budget for the Mississippi and Rideau watersheds through the Drinking Water Source Protection program

WATERSHED SCIENCE & ENGINEERING SERVICES INCLUDE:

Watershed Reporting

- Report on the health of the watershed through user-friendly, accessible analysis of the RVCA's extensive monitoring programs.
- Identify concerns, trends and priority areas for action at both a subwatershed and catchment scale.
- Engage with municipalities, watershed residents, NGOs and government agencies to focus watershed management actions where they are needed most.

Drinking Water Source Protection

- Administer the province's Drinking Water Source Protection Program under the *Clean Water Act* in the Mississippi and Rideau watersheds.
- Help protect present and future sources of municipal drinking water from contamination and overuse.
- Work with municipalities, provincial ministries, property owners, businesses, health units and others to implement source protection policies.

Surface Water Quality Monitoring

- Provide a consistent baseline dataset that can provide a general indication of water quality within the watershed.
- Assess water quality within tributary streams and how they impact conditions in the Rideau River and upper watershed lakes.
- Monitor ambient water quality conditions at locations on major tributaries, streams and watershed lakes.
- Involve local lake residents in monitoring to increase the extent of monitoring activities and provide training to develop consistent methods to ensure data integrity.

Hydrometric Monitoring and Forecasting

- Collect, manage, analyze and disseminate data and information about the abundance or scarcity of surface water resources within the watershed.
- Issue flood and drought advisories and warnings as needed.
- Expand data availability through the RVCA website.



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Flood and Hazard Mapping

- Study and map hazard lands as defined by the MNRF such as floodplain, steep slopes and unstable soils for effective administration and enforcement of regulations under Section 28 of the *Conservation Authorities Act*.
- Support municipalities with up-to-date mapping of hazard lands for Official Plan and Zoning By-law schedules.
- Refine RVCA's numerical watershed modeling system for use in floodplain hydrology and hydraulic analyses for ungauged watersheds and for investigating the potential impacts of land use and climate change on a watershed scale.

Aquatic & Terrestrial Habitat Monitoring

- Sample bottom-dwelling bugs (benthic invertebrates) to determine water quality and habitat conditions using a biological method that complements water chemistry sampling programs.
- Undertake Ontario Stream Assessment Protocol at special Habitat Restoration project sites as a tool for post effective monitoring.

Habitat and Wetland Restoration

- Create, restore and/or enhance fish and wildlife habitats in the watershed.
- Use watershed monitoring data to identify opportunities and at-risk areas.
- Partner with like-minded organizations to secure funds and complete restoration work.
- Conduct post-construction monitoring for five years to measure project success.

City Stream Watch

- Monitor, record and report on the health of creeks and streams within the City of Ottawa.
- Collect information on the physical and biological attributes of surveyed creeks and streams (habitat surveys, fish sampling, thermal regime) through the Stream Characterization program.



- Gather information on headwater drainage features through a rapid assessment method characterizing the amount of water, sediment transport, and storage capacity within headwater drainage features.
- Inventory detailed land cover information to help facilitate land use planning and regulations, ecosystem management and conservation objectives for the RVCA and member municipalities.
- Gather information using a robust network of trained volunteers.
- Use data to guide rehabilitation and enhancement projects.

Water, Flood and Erosion Control Structures

- Operate and maintain water, flood and erosion control structures (berms, dams and weirs).
- Determine whether to maintain, rehabilitate or decommission existing structures.
- Work with municipalities interested in constructing or replacing structures to alleviate flooding or erosion concerns.

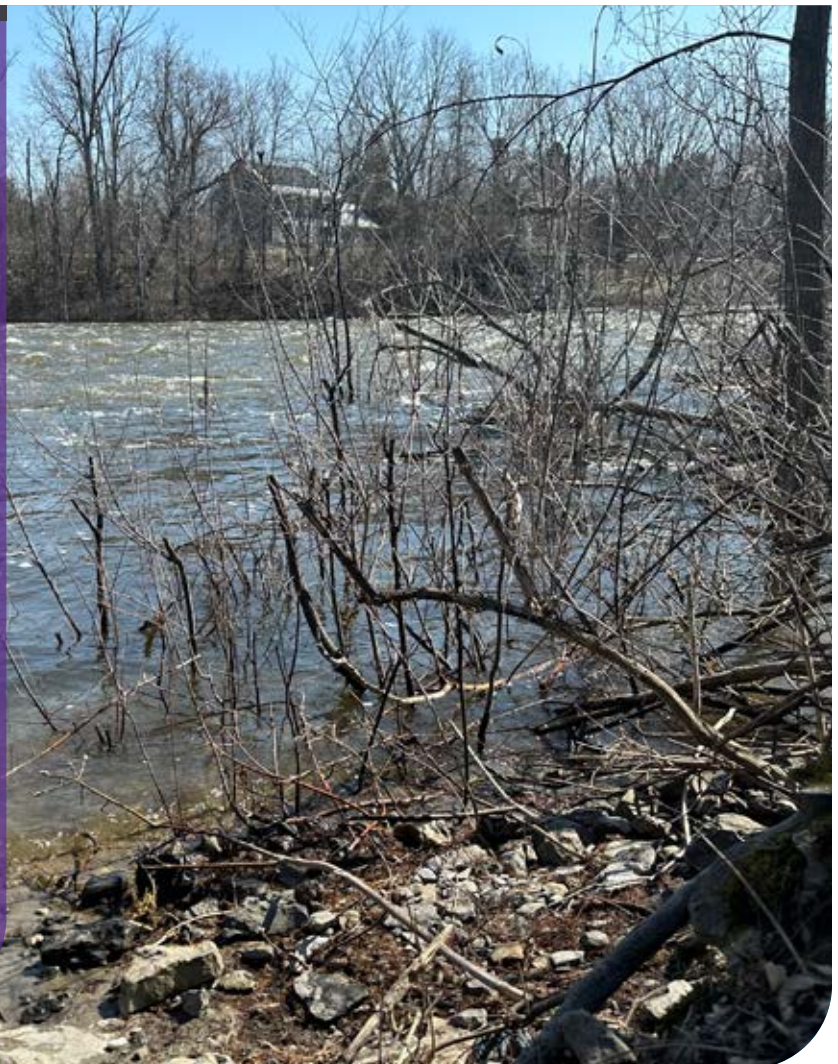
Planning Advisory & Regulatory Services

RVCA plays a key role in development review to help municipalities and the province meet their legislative responsibilities of providing safe drinking water and protecting people from natural hazards. Our role includes providing comments to municipalities on *Planning Act* applications and municipal planning documents; issuing permits for development in areas vulnerable to flooding, erosion or unstable slopes or near wetlands, shorelines or watercourses; issuing approvals for septic systems and re-inspecting lakefront septic systems in some municipalities; and regulating activities near sources of municipal drinking water. Staff provide a comprehensive streamlined service to municipalities and applicants that brings together local watershed knowledge and provincial policies to reduce municipal liability, avoids delays and unnecessary expenses for applicants, and creates safe sustainable communities.

RVCA plays a key role in development review to help municipalities and the province meet their legislative responsibilities.

Special for 2024

- Update policies and procedures to better address slope stability hazards and reflect changes to provincial regulations and guidelines
- Work with municipalities to further integrate our development review processes and respond to increased pre-consultation requirements
- Improve technology in the field for inspection staff to be able to access information remotely and complete digital inspection reports
- Work with municipalities to increase awareness and implementation of Low Impact Development practices
- Continue providing septic approval and reinspection services to municipalities and train new septic installers and inspectors through the Ontario Rural Wastewater Centre
- Host information days for municipalities and contractors to discuss development review processes and emerging issues
- Host homeowner workshops about wells, septic systems and waterfront living



PLANNING ADVISORY & REGULATORY SERVICES INCLUDE:

Site-Specific Plan Review

- Review planning applications on behalf of the Province and municipalities.
- Provide comments to municipalities on natural hazards (floodplains, steep slopes, unstable soils, wetlands) and surface and ground water quantity.
- Staff work closely with applicants to discuss concerns and alternatives and prepare recommendations to the municipal approval authority.
- RVCA's review and recommendations brings local watershed science, provincial policies and guidelines, and individual municipality needs together to ensure sustainable development.

Non Site-Specific Plan Input

- Provide input to municipalities on official plans, comprehensive zoning by-laws, environmental assessments and other special studies in an effort to identify natural hazards and protect and enhance surface and groundwater quantity, wetlands and watercourses.
- Participate on technical advisory committees that oversee the preparation of master servicing studies, community design plans, subwatershed studies and environmental management plans.
- Sharing watershed knowledge and expertise with municipalities through these processes helps build sustainable communities.

Section 28 Regulations

- Regulate development, interference with wetlands and alterations to shorelines and watercourses as mandated by the *Conservation Authorities Act*.
- Mapping is prepared to show where development is regulated including hazard lands such as floodplains, steep slopes and unstable soils.
- Staff work closely with property owners to guide them through the permitting process and encourage pre-consultation to avoid unnecessary costs and delays.
- Staff also work with property owners to resolve issues of non-compliance and violations outside of the legal system wherever possible.

Septic Approvals

- Provide full review and approval services for private septic systems under Part 8 of the *Ontario Building Code*. This service is available to interested municipalities and is currently provided in the City of Ottawa, Tay Valley Township, Town of Carleton Place, Town of Smiths Falls, Township of Beckwith, Township of Lanark Highlands, Township of Mississippi Mills, Township of North Grenville and Village of Westport in partnership with our neighbouring Conservation Authorities.
- Staff work closely with local septic designers and installers as well as property owners when delivering this service.

Septic Re-Inspection

- Provide mandatory and discretionary inspection programs for existing private septic systems under the *Ontario Building Code*.
- This service is available to interested municipalities and is currently provided in the Township of Central Frontenac, Township of North Frontenac, Township of Rideau Lakes and Tay Valley Township.
- Staff work closely with property owners, lake associations and other local partners when delivering this service.

Source Water Regulations

- Act as Risk Management Inspectors and Officials on behalf of 12 municipalities in the Mississippi and Rideau watersheds. This service implements policies in the Mississippi-Rideau Source Protection Plan under Part IV of the *Clean Water Act*.
- Screen development applications within vulnerable drinking water areas on behalf of municipalities.



Stewardship Services

RVCA provides technical and financial support to landowners and other partners to help them undertake projects on private and public property that will improve watershed health. Projects include tree planting, naturalizing shorelines, managing runoff, enhancing habitat and upgrading wells and septic systems. Staff work closely with private landowners, municipalities, lake associations, NGOs, community groups, businesses, government agencies and the public to complete these important on-the-ground projects. Information from RVCA's science and monitoring programs help target areas and projects that provide the most benefit. Completing landowner stewardship projects across the watershed helps improve water quality, increase forest and wetland cover, reduce flooding and erosion and increase climate change resiliency.

STEWARDSHIP SERVICES INCLUDE:

Tree Planting

- Deliver a quality, full-service tree planting program to rural landowners that plants more than 200,000 trees a year on private land.
- Provide significant cost subsidies through external funding.
- Provide technical advice on woodlot management and best practices for landowners.
- Review conservation areas' coniferous plantations for thinning opportunities and potential revenue generation.

Butternut Recovery

- Help butternut persist on the landscape through the development of healthy, disease-tolerant seedlings.
- Locate healthy, disease-tolerant butternuts on private lands.
- Collect seeds to grow seedlings for distribution to landowners free of charge.
- Give away up to 2,000 seedlings per year to landowners.





Special for 2024

- Work with municipalities to increase promotion of stewardship programs and host more tree giveaways and community planting days
- Find new ways to increase the number of trees planted annually on private and public land
- Begin introducing shrubs as part of reforestation projects to increase biodiversity in woodlots
- Explore expanding the ALUS program to cover the whole Rideau watershed
- Integrate more bioengineering and aquatic plants into shoreline naturalization projects to demonstrate and promote erosion protection without hardening shorelines
- Work with the agricultural community to promote demonstration sites to encourage more farmers to access available grants for clean water and stewardship projects
- Support smaller scale planting and restoration sites that can provide connectivity and increase pollinator habitat
- Acquire more land to complete additional Species at Risk projects

Rural Clean Water

- Provide financial and technical assistance to farmers and rural landowners undertaking projects to protect and improve water quality in the watershed.
- Address erosion control and reduce the amount of nutrients, bacteria and microorganisms entering groundwater and surface water.
- Provide financial support through cost-share grants and incentive payments.
- Promote and support best management practices that address both surface and groundwater issues.

Shoreline Naturalization

- Increase the amount of natural shoreline cover across the watershed.
- Provide a simple and affordable option for landowners to complete naturalization projects on their shoreline by providing free advisory site visits, customized planting plans, subsidized native trees and shrubs, project management and monitoring

and assistance with planting installation.

- Work closely with municipalities, Parks Canada and RVCA regulatory staff to facilitate planting requirements for planning and permit applications when needed.
- Fundraise for special large-scale projects and stewardship targeting.

Ontario Rural Wastewater Centre

- Develop and teach courses for septic installers, designers and regulators looking to advance their knowledge of design, inspection, and repairing on-site systems.
- Ensure best practices, technology and innovations are being used across the industry.
- Manage and maintain a demonstration site at Baxter Conservation Area that provides hands-on learning, through displays of a wide variety of wastewater treatment technologies.

Conservation Land Management Services

RVCA accepts land donations to protect valuable features like forests, wetlands and shorelines in perpetuity. Staff manage these properties so natural features are left to perform natural functions like slowing runoff, filtering pollutants, reducing flooding and erosion and providing habitat. Some properties are developed into public conservation areas to encourage residents to spend time outdoors and develop an

appreciation for nature. Two conservation areas also offer outdoor education programs to get children outside and teach them about the importance of our natural environment and the need to protect it for future generations. RVCA's conservation areas are valued by local communities and municipalities as they provide affordable recreation, tourism and education for local residents and visitors.

“Some properties are developed into public conservation areas to encourage residents to spend time outdoors and develop an appreciation for nature.”

Special for 2024

- Complete a land inventory and conservation area strategy for all lands owned by the RVCA in accordance with new provincial regulations
- Improve trail information and signage at conservation areas
- Continue fundraising to replace a section of boardwalk at Baxter Conservation Area to make it more accessible and redesign and improve accessibility at Spy Rock
- Invest in staff training to improve knowledge of building and managing accessible outdoor spaces
- Increase fundraising for outdoor education programs, including more subsidies for school groups and forest school
- Continue to diversify outdoor education programs with a focus on attracting high schools
- Enhance Species at Risk monitoring on conservation lands and submit more CLTIP applications to reduce property taxes
- Improve heating and cooling at the workshop and interpretive centres (Baxter and Foley)





CONSERVATION LAND MANAGEMENT SERVICES INCLUDE:

Conservation Lands

- Accept land donations to restore and enhance degraded areas and protect high-quality natural areas in perpetuity for their invaluable environmental and ecological services and public benefits.
- Manage 61 properties (8,300 acres) of critical green infrastructure.
- Develop management plans for each property to ensure strategic land use planning and efficient use of resources.

Conservation Areas

- Welcome visitors to 11 public conservation areas.
- Provide nature-based recreation and visitor experiences through trails, picnic shelters, beaches, boat launches, docks and lookout points.
- Connect people to nature and ensure people of all backgrounds, abilities and circumstances can access natural areas and the Rideau River system.



Outdoor Education

- Deliver high-quality, curriculum-based education programs, forest schools, day camps and group programs that promote the values of conservation and environmental stewardship.
- Maintain quality facilities and interpretive centres at Baxter and Foley Mountain Conservation Areas where these programs and camps are offered.
- Incorporate new technology into education programs to enhance learning experiences.
- Encourage families and children to be active in outdoor play all-year-round.

Corporate Services

The RVCA is a public sector body committed to operating in an open, accountable and transparent manner. Working with all levels of government, residents, businesses and community partners the RVCA delivers programs and services that conserve, restore and responsibly manage land and water resources while balancing human, environmental and economic interests. As the needs of our watershed change, RVCA remains agile in the face of increasing growth pressure, fiscal constraints and climate change impacts. Through strategic planning, program reviews and consultation with partners and stakeholders, the RVCA is focused on modernizing our programs to ensure they are effective and cost-efficient at meeting the current and future needs of our watershed.

Special for 2024

- Host annual watershed tour in June for Board members and municipal partners
- Complete an Asset Management Plan for RVCA's tangible assets and work with municipalities to scope an Asset Management Plan for natural assets in the watershed
- Implement new budget and reporting software to improve efficiency
- Purchase an electric vehicle to reduce fleet emissions
- Digitize key records and documents across all departments
- Launch a new modernized, service-oriented website that optimizes functionality and responsiveness while ensuring accessible design standards are met
- Develop additional tools and applications to support information and data management and improve workflows and efficiency
- Acquire updated DRAPE imagery in partnership with MNRF, municipalities, conservation authorities and others
- Continue efforts to learn from and integrate Indigenous knowledge, support Indigenous conservation priorities and be a stronger ally in the journey of reconciliation

CORPORATE SERVICES INCLUDE:

Management, Finance & Human Resources

- Provide overall management of the RVCA through work planning, budgeting, financial reporting, policy development, issues management, municipal and government relations, partnership development, employee management and payroll.
- Serve the needs of the Board of Directors (training, meetings, agendas and minutes).
- Operate the RVCA efficiently, effectively and safely for staff and patrons while providing excellent customer service.

Communications and Outreach

- Increase awareness, knowledge, and understanding of RVCA services, programs and initiatives.
- Build effective relationships with municipal, provincial and federal levels of government as well as other stakeholders and partners.
- Maintain a positive, proactive relationship with watershed media to ensure a high level of accurate, comprehensive regional media coverage.



- Provide communication support through communication planning, media relations and plain language services.
- Distribute corporate information through annual reports, *Around the Rideau* newsletter, municipal information sheets, program brochures, displays, media releases, website, social media and public events/workshops.

GIS and Information Management

- Create and manage high-quality data sets and provide mapping, apps and other tools to help staff make sound and informed watershed decisions.
- Support flood and hazard mapping studies, analysis and delineation as well as the development of watershed analysis reports.
- Create tools to ensure data is readily accessible to staff, consultants and the public.

Fundraising and Partnerships

- Support the Rideau Valley Conservation Foundation in its efforts to raise funds for conservation programs and services.
- Solicit donations from corporate and private donors, manage multiple special fundraising campaigns, apply for grants and administer compensation projects.
- Focus efforts on raising funds for land care, river care and conservation education.

As the needs of our watershed change, RVCA remains agile in the face of increasing growth pressure, fiscal constraints and climate change impacts.





Questions?

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