

# Grand River Conservation Authority Land Acquisition Policy



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## Introduction

The Grand River Conservation Authority (GRCA) owns and manages approximately 19,000 hectares of land within the Grand River watershed. This represents 2.8% of the total watershed. In addition to natural areas and environmentally sensitive land, a portion is used for multi-purpose reservoirs and conservation areas. Conservation Authority lands were acquired for the following reasons:

- Water Management - lands for dams/water management reservoirs, erosion control projects and dykes
- Natural Heritage - lands that are environmentally sensitive (e.g. Provincially Significant Wetlands, Areas of Natural and Scientific Interest, source areas)
- Forested Lands - managed forests, Carolinian Canada forests
- Natural Hazards - lands that are unsafe for development (e.g. steep slopes, floodplains)
- Recreational Lands – lands that are used for recreation (e.g. conservation areas, rail trails)

The GRCA's Acquisition Policy was approved in 2003 and has been reviewed to ensure its alignment with the Mandatory Programs and Services Regulation (686/21).

## Purpose and Intent

As population growth and agricultural intensification continues at a rapid pace in the Grand River watershed, the need to acquire sensitive lands for conservation and protection has increased. At the same time, the cost of acquiring these lands has escalated. The Province no longer provides funding to Conservation Authorities for land acquisition. It is critical that the GRCA continue its land acquisition

program to ensure that future acquisition and protection is carried out on a priority basis and in a fiscally responsible manner.

This Policy provides guidance for the future acquisition and/or protection of lands by the GRCA.

## Legislative Framework

The *Conservation Authorities Act RSO 1990 C.27*:

- Section 20 describes the objects of a Conservation Authority to provide, in the area over which it has jurisdiction, the mandatory programs and services (Category 1), municipal programs and services (Category 2) and any other programs or services the GRCA Board decides are appropriate (Category 3).
- Section 21 lists the powers that Conservation Authorities have to accomplish their objectives.
- Section 21 (1)(c) gives the GRCA the power to acquire by purchase, lease or otherwise any land that it may require, and, subject to subsections (2) and (4), to sell, lease or otherwise dispose of land so acquired;
- Section 21(1)(d) gives the GRCA the power to lease acquired land for a term of five (5) years or less without notification to the Minister.
- Section 21(1)(e) gives the GRCA the power to purchase or acquire any personal property that it may require and sell or otherwise deal therewith.

Ontario Regulation 686/21: Mandatory Programs and Services outlines the following:

- Section 9(2), Programs and Services provided by an authority with respect to the conservation and *management of lands... shall include the following:*  
*vi. the development of one or more policies governing land acquisitions and land dispositions.*

## Land Acquisition Objectives, Policies and Procedures

### 1.0 Objectives

- 1.1 Through its programs of land acquisition and protection, the GRCA has the following objectives:
  - a. To protect exceptional ecosystems.
  - b. To protect representative ecosystems.
  - c. To protect natural heritage areas of national, provincial or watershed scale significance such as but not limited to Carolinian Canada sites, nationally rare prairie, provincially designated Areas of Natural and Scientific Interest, provincially significant wetlands, and significant valley lands.
  - d. To link natural heritage features and habitats such as wetlands and valley lands and to enhance their long-term integrity and ecological functions.
  - e. To protect major water source areas.
  - f. To protect hazard lands from development.
  - g. To provide high-quality outdoor recreational opportunities and educational benefits.
  - h. To increase public appreciation of conservation lands.
  - i. To protect defined future reservoir sites at West Montrose and Everton.

## 2.0 Policies

- 2.1 The GRCA will typically purchase lands within the Grand River watershed on a willing-buyer, willing-seller basis to meet its stated goals.
- 2.2 The GRCA may accept land dedications, land trades, donations and bequests and conservation easements to meet its stated goals on a case-by-case basis.
- 2.3 The GRCA will partner with participating municipalities and other conservation agencies such as but not limited to the Grand River Conservation Foundation, Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources, Nature Conservancy of Canada, Ducks Unlimited Canada, and Eastern Habitat Joint Venture to acquire and/or protect appropriate lands.

## 3.0 Implementation

- 3.1 This Policy will come into effect upon approval by the GRCA General Membership.
- 3.2 A priority listing and five-year budget for land acquisition by the GRCA will be developed and updated periodically.
- 3.3 The GRCA will consult with the participating municipality prior to acquiring lands in order to identify and resolve any municipal concerns.
- 3.4 The GRCA will acquire lands abutting existing land holdings identified in approved master/management plans as its budget permits. These plans include but are not limited to:
  - Forest Management Plan for GRCA properties
  - Watershed Forest Plan
  - Grand River Fisheries Management Plan
  - Watershed/Subwatershed Plans
  - Natural Heritage Framework
  - Conservation Area Master/Management Plans