



Outreach & Engagement Report:

NPCA Strategic Plan: 2021-2031

Introduction

In 2020, the Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority (NPCA) launched a staff-led strategic planning process to guide the organization's priorities and operations from 2021-2031. Due to the unforeseen impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and changes to the Conservation Authorities Act, there was a delay in formally launching the strategic planning process until January 2021.

During the early planning stages, the NPCA committed to communicating frequently and creating opportunities for meaningful, respectful dialogue with the watershed community, partners, Indigenous groups, and other stakeholders throughout the entire strategic planning process. NPCA staff conducted a thorough stakeholder analysis and developed a comprehensive plan to communicate and engage with various internal and external stakeholders.

The NPCA relied on virtual engagement tools to ensure broad public and community participation; however, given the restrictions of the pandemic, accommodations were made for those who did not have computer or internet access to participate in the public engagement process.

As a result of the extensive outreach and engagement efforts, the NPCA earned its highest project engagement with more than 5,700 visits to the Strategic Plan project webpage on Get Involved NPCA portal, more than 500 responses to the public survey of proposed strategic priorities and shared vision, and more than 70 participants attending the virtual public information session to provide feedback on the key components of the NPCA's draft Strategic Plan.

After careful review of all feedback from staff, members of the public, partners, NPCA Board of Directors, the Strategic Planning Committee, the Public Advisory Committee, and other stakeholders, the NPCA developed its 10-year Strategic Plan in October 2021. The Strategic Plan is available at www.npca.ca.

The NPCA thanks every person who contributed their perspective, which was essential in shaping the organization's first 10-year Strategic Plan. The NPCA looks forward to continuing to build on this important engagement as it operationalizes the Strategic Plan by working with the community, partners, and stakeholders to accomplish the priorities and goals ahead.

Overview of Outreach and Engagement Process

The NPCA used a tailored outreach and engagement approach with a mix of traditional and digital communications methods to inform and engage a wide range of internal and external stakeholders.

Internal Stakeholder Engagement

Internal stakeholders included NPCA staff, Board of Directors, Strategic Planning Committee, and Public Advisory Committee. These groups were informed regularly via email, virtual meetings, and a dedicated internal project site. In addition, the Strategic Planning Committee (comprised of members of the Board of Directors) and the NPCA's Public Advisory Committee received regular progress updates at each of their meetings from July 2020 to October 2021 and provided input before each critical milestone. Members of the Public Advisory Committee were also encouraged to share information and opportunities to provide feedback with their respective networks,

communities, and the general public.

Involvement from a staff working group and Senior Leadership Team sought to gain broader staff input from across the organization. It provided additional communication touchpoints for all staff to stay informed and to get involved in the process.

All internal stakeholders were engaged in strategic planning activities such as providing input into the NPCA's strengths-weaknesses-opportunities-threats (SWOT) and participating in several facilitated discussions. These formed the basis of the draft strategic priorities, goals and actions, values, and mission and vision statements used in subsequent engagement with external stakeholders.

Indigenous Engagement

Beginning in November 2020, NPCA staff reached out to staff at local First Nations whose Traditional Territory and/or Treaty Lands are within the NPCA watershed jurisdiction (Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation, Six Nations of the Grand River, and Haudenosaunee Confederacy), as well as the Métis Nation of Ontario (Region 9) were contacted by email (which was the indicated preference) to determine if there was an interest in participating in the strategic planning process and, if so, to seek guidance on their desired method for participation. Follow-up emails were sent to these contacts in April and August at key milestones. In addition, NPCA staff reached out to inform and engage local Indigenous peoples through emails to Indigenous Friendship Centres, partners, and news media outlets (e.g., Two Row Times and Turtle Island News, Jukasa Indigenous community radio).

Staff at the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation (Department of Consultation and Accommodation) requested a virtual meeting with NPCA staff following the Public Information Session to review and discuss the draft Strategic Plan. There were no concerns or disagreements with the strategic goals, actions, or performance indicators shared.

At a separate meeting, NPCA staff met with representatives of the Six Nations of the Grand River to share knowledge and build relationships. During the meeting, suggestions were provided that were incorporated into the Strategic Plan.

External Stakeholder Engagement

The NPCA sought to engage partner municipalities, residents, local interest groups, conservation area users, business owners, members of the agriculture, environment, planning, development, tourism, and education sectors, and the general public within the Niagara Region, Haldimand County, and the City of Hamilton to inform these external groups about the NPCA's strategic planning process and provide opportunities for engagement and giving feedback. A summary of the outreach and engagement tools is included below.

Results of External Outreach and Engagement

The NPCA is pleased with the level of public engagement and the critical feedback received thanks to extensive communication and outreach efforts. Several additional metrics were used to measure and report on a broad awareness of the NPCA's Strategic Plan process and to ensure

that the public and other groups had opportunities to engage and provide their feedback throughout key points in the process.

An overview of all the outreach and engagement tools/tactics used, and their associated results, are provided below. A more detailed summary of the public survey and public information session is provided in the following sections of the report.

Outreach or Engagement Tool/Tactic	Results
Strategic Plan project webpage (incl. timelines, important dates, documents, digital engagement tools (Q&A, ideas tool, survey))	5,800 visits to project page 32 new registrations 4,762 visitors aware ¹ 1,378 visitors engaged ² 105 document downloads
Placed-based marketing (i.e., posterboards, postcards offered at targeted locations)	6 key locations distributing print materials (i.e., NPCA & Niagara Region headquarters)
Traditional earned media (radio interviews and print stories)	2 media releases 11 media interviews 18 media stories
Direct emailing to local organizations and stakeholder lists	5,610 e-letters sent 2,307 e-letters opened
Direct mail to stakeholder lists	204 letters sent
Digital marketing (social media, digital advertising)	1,064,376 Impressions ³ 1,448 Reactions ⁴
Public survey on draft strategic priorities	498 online surveys submitted
Public Information Session	138 people viewed ⁵ session 22 questions asked Positive feedback
Non-virtual methods (i.e., paper surveys, print slide deck, phone calls, and meetings)	3 paper surveys submitted 1 request for a paper copy of the slide deck

Public Survey

A public survey was launched from March 30 until May 6, 2021, to allow the public, partners, and other stakeholders the opportunity to provide feedback and comments on the NPCA's draft strategic priorities. A total of 501 surveys (combined online and paper methods) were submitted and reviewed in detail by NPCA staff. The feedback received led to changes in the proposed strategic priorities and informed the development of the Strategic Plan.

¹ Aware = visited at least one page

² Engaged = viewed a video, downloaded a document, visited key dates section, completed survey, asked a question

³ Impressions = number of times the ad was seen

⁴ Reactions = likes, clicks, shares, comments on social media platforms

⁵ Combined number of people that attended the live session and watched the recorded session

The main goal of the survey was to obtain feedback on seven draft strategic priorities proposed by staff. The survey results demonstrated strong public support for the majority of the NPCA's strategic priorities. The average rating for each of the proposed strategic priorities is indicated below (out of 5):

- Healthy and Climate Resilient Watersheds: 4.6
- Sustainable Growth: 4.1
- Connecting People to Nature: 4.5
- Organizational Excellence: 4.1
- Financial Sustainability and Innovative Business Models: 3.9
- Partner of Choice: 3.9
- Marketing as a Destination of Choice: 3.4

The NPCA reviewed the survey feedback and updated its strategic priorities, goals, and actions to reflect the priorities and input received from the public in the survey results. For example, the "Marketing as a Destination of Choice" strategic priority was instead included as a strategic goal within "Connecting People to Nature" because it did not receive strong support as its own priority. Other topics of importance raised by respondents in the public survey included issues such as flood protection, climate change impact, agricultural practices, protection of habitat, smart growth, low impact development, public access, more environmental education, customer service, transparency, fees for service, alignment with public and private sector partners, partnerships with municipalities and local environmental and education groups.

Respondents were asked to indicate which watershed municipality they lived in to ensure the NPCA reached people within its watershed jurisdiction. Overall, 88% of respondents indicated that they lived in the Regional Municipality of Niagara, while 6% and 3% were from the City of Hamilton or Haldimand county, respectively. These demographics are aligned with the proportion of the Niagara Peninsula watershed within those municipal areas. The remainder lived elsewhere or preferred not to share.

The NPCA also wanted to know if it was hearing from different stakeholder groups. Survey participants were asked to select the option that best described their role in the watershed. Most survey participants identified as a member of the general public or as a Conservation area user (44% and 30%, respectively). The remainder of survey participants indicated they were from a non-government organization (5%), government organization (5%), academic institution (3%), agricultural sector (3%), tourism sector (2%), business sector (1%), development sector (1%), First Nations member (1%), and other (3%) or prefer not to say (2%).

Public Information Session

On August 19, 2021, the NPCA hosted a virtual public information session to engage the public and stakeholders. They were asked to provide feedback on key components of the draft Strategic Plan (i.e., priorities, goals, mission, vision, and values) through a moderated Question and Answer session and via the NPCA's Get Involved online engagement platform. The NPCA also accommodated non-virtual methods of engagement (e.g., paper survey, hardcopy meeting materials mailed, and phone calls) upon request.

The Virtual Public Information Session was attended by 71 unique viewers, from the original 141 people registered. A poll was used at the beginning of the session to determine if the NPCA had been successful in reaching people within the NPCA's watershed jurisdiction. Of those that completed the poll, 92% indicated they resided in the Niagara Region, 4% in the City of Hamilton, 0 participants from Haldimand County, and 4% from areas other than Niagara, Hamilton, and Haldimand. Like the survey on strategic priorities, attendees of the information session were asked to choose an option that best described their role in the watershed. Most of the attendees were members of the public (28%), conservation area users (28%), and non-government organizations (18%). The remainder were from government organizations (e.g., municipalities) (9%), agricultural sector (5%), tourism sector (5%), business sector (2%), development sector (4%), and other (2%, not specified). In a final poll, attendees were asked if they participated in the public survey on draft strategic priorities. Of those attendees participating in the poll, 47% indicated they had participated in the strategic plan survey, 42% did not participate, and 10% of respondents were not sure if they had participated.

After the presentation was provided, there was an opportunity for attendees to ask questions. There were 22 questions asked which were addressed by the moderator and NPCA staff during the session. Many of the questions pertained to land-use planning and protecting environmentally sensitive lands, the NPCA's relationship with community partners, Indigenous engagement, the Conservation Authorities Act, and financial sustainability. Questions that were posed outside of the scope of the strategic plan, for example, questions about specific NPCA sites or properties, were shared with NPCA staff for follow-up after the virtual session.

Following the public information session, a link to the evaluation was circulated to all attendees. Overall, 30% of attendees completed the assessment. Feedback received from the session was generally positive, receiving an average rating of 3.8 of out 5. While attendees remarked that the meeting was well-organized, the platform was easy to use, participate and ask questions, some attendees noted that there was not enough time for discussion and questions. Other participants would have preferred an in-person information session.

After the session, the NPCA welcomed additional feedback, questions, and comments from the community until Sept. 3, 2021, through the NPCA's Strategic Plan project web page. A recording of the session and supporting documents were posted to the webpage for those unable to attend. The recording was viewed 67 times during that period, and there were 6 questions/comments submitted after the public information session. The NPCA also offered non-virtual methods of engagement to accommodate those without internet access or with a preference for traditional methods. One person reached out to receive hardcopy materials following the Public Information Session.

Conclusion

The NPCA thanks every person who contributed their perspective to the organization's first 10-year Strategic Plan. The diverse viewpoints and contributions led to a stronger Strategic Plan and ensured that it reflects the priorities of the communities and partners the NPCA serves.

This important project and public engagement exercise further proved the community's passion

for nature and conservation and the NPCA looks forward to working with the watershed communities and partners as it operationalizes and implements the new Strategic Plan to 2031 toward a shared vision of *Nature for All!*

Visit the online engagement space at getinvolved.npca.ca to get involved in sharing your feedback on future projects.

For more information about the Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority, visit www.npca.ca or follow us on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#) for more updates.