



Essex Region
Conservation Foundation
enriching the place for life

2021
Gratitude
Report

A Message from the President & the Executive Director

2021 another was a year of change, uncertainty and creativity. Through various stages of lockdowns and reopening, people continued to flock to conservation areas in unprecedented numbers, again, demonstrating the critical importance of nature to our lives. Although these ebbs and flows required continued modifications to our fundraising efforts, support from a record number of incredible donors resulted in remarkable conservation successes.

Thank you.

The Foundation also underwent a renaissance this year, with the appointment of a new President and Executive Director – roles for which we are both honoured. Throughout the year, the Foundation updated its Strategic Plan, undertook a significant governance review, and completed our application for reaccreditation to the prestigious Imagine Canada Standards Program.

The regulations associated with the changes to the Conservation Authorities Act confirmed that our fundraising work will become even more critical to creating a sustainable future for this region. With this in mind, we launched the Partners in Sustainability – Inspiring Future Conservationists and Eco-stewards effort, and 10 organizations quickly stepped up with a five-year commitment to ensure that conservation education programs could continue. Such a huge thank you to the Hearn family for their gold sponsorship, and to all of the generous donors for their support.

A longstanding dream was realized in July, when the Heritage & Conservation Centre at the John R. Park Homestead was opened. This magnificent educational facility provides expanded, accessible teaching and exhibit areas to interpret the fascinating history of our region. It further enhances the tourism offerings in our region, and we are incredibly grateful to the many generous donors who contributed nearly \$775,000 in less than two years to make this dream into a reality.

Again, these contributions to conservation are only possible because of the support of many incredible donors. We look forward to continuing to work with you to ensure that the important conservation work that we do with you and with ERCA, can continue. Thank you, thank you, for your investment in a future of sustainability.



Claire Wales
President



Tim Byrne
Executive Director

Shared Mission

Improving our environment to enrich our lives.

Shared Vision

The Essex Region is a sustainable, resilient and vibrant place with healthy and thriving watersheds, Great Lakes, and a green culture.

Our Goals

The Essex Region Conservation Foundation will raise awareness and funds to improve the environment of the Windsor-Essex region through a variety of projects and programs that enrich our region as the Place for Life, and become the environmental foundation of choice in the Windsor-Essex-Peel Island region.



Greening Our Region & Taking Climate Action

Rotary Legacy Forest

In accordance with gathering restrictions, nearly 80 Rotarians from across Windsor-Essex came together on a chilly day in November for a safety-compliant planting of the final phase of the Rotary Legacy Forest. Thanks to donations from 12 Rotary Clubs in the Windsor-Essex community, more than 50,000 trees have been planted and 70 acres of farmland have been restored to natural habitat. The impact of this three-year planting project was already evident as trees planted in 2019 have already begun to create a forested canopy.

The Rotary Legacy Forest is located in the Cedar Creek watershed, and enhances habitat and improves water quality. As trees are identified as the biggest weapon in the fight against climate change, Rotarians from across Windsor-Essex are truly making a difference!



Greening Cedar Creek

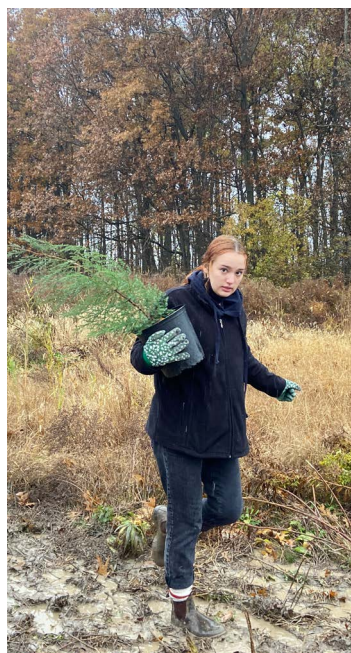
A generous donation of \$25,000 from Windsor Salt allowed 5,000 native hardwood trees to be planted in the Cedar Creek watershed to add forest habitat, mitigate flooding and take climate action. Green Sun Rising contributed \$3,000 to plant an additional 600 trees in this area. Donations through the Windsor-Essex Community Foundation contributed another 50 trees to this area. Thank you to all who supported greening our region!



Connecting Kids to Nature at the Solcz Family Foundation Forest

The Solcz Family Foundation has made an incredible impact in our region by connecting kids to nature. In November, nearly 450 families from youth-focused community groups and the public planted 575 trees over the course of 5 planting shifts. Free transportation was provided to ensure equal access for all those wishing to participate.

To date, 18.5 acres of forest habitat have been restored on this former agricultural property as a result of the Solcz Family Foundation's generosity, improving habitat and biodiversity in the Lebo Creek watershed. Many birds of prey, waterfowl and aquatic birds are now using the site for feeding, breeding, nesting and as a migration stop-over. Amphibians and reptiles spotted include the Endangered Eastern Fox Snake, and mammals such as squirrels, chipmunks, raccoons and deer have also left signs of their presence. On behalf of all of the kids who have been connected to nature as a result of this three-year project, thank you to the Solcz Family Foundation!



Fred Cada Heritage Forest

For the 26th year, Reid Funeral Home Ltd. contributed to the Fred Cada Heritage Forest at Hillman Marsh Conservation Area. Thank you, Reid Funeral Home Ltd., for your longstanding commitment to improving the environment while honouring the memories and families whom you have served.

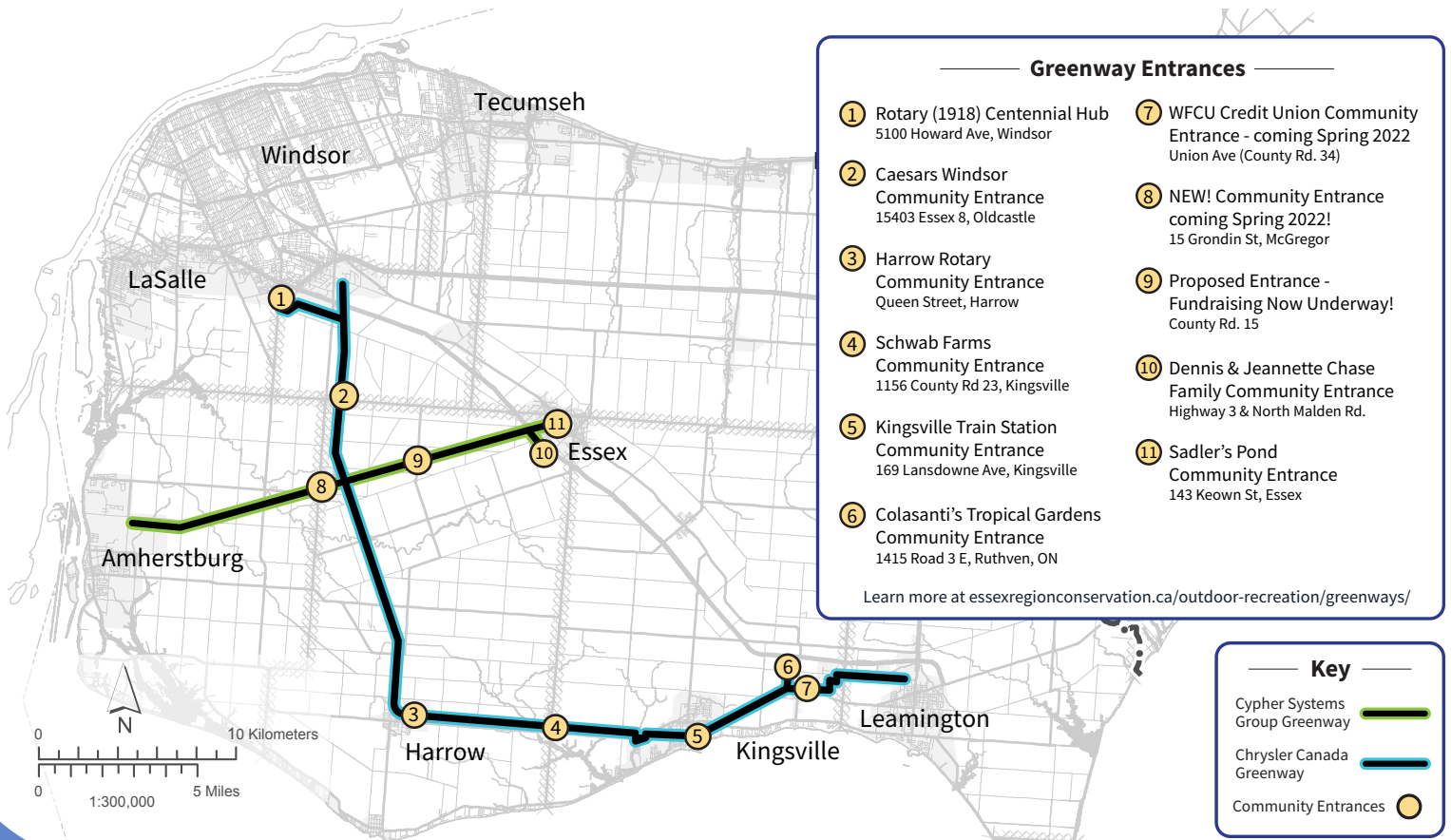
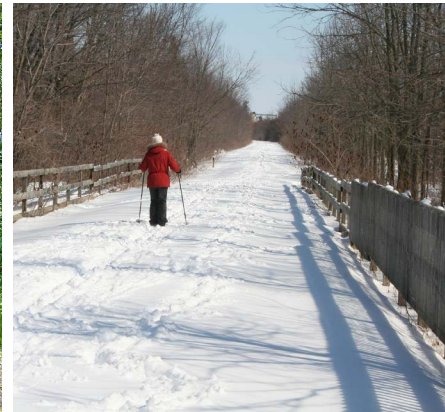




Connecting Our Region by Trails

New Community Entrances Coming Soon!

Major work was undertaken in 2021 to create two new community entrances for the Greenway system, thanks to the WFCU Credit Union and a new supporter, who will both be celebrated in the coming year. These new community entrances will enhance trail access and experience with parking and resting locations for the nearly 80 kilometres of connected, off-road trails that include the Chrysler Canada Greenway, the Cypher Systems Group Greenway and the Rotary (1918) Centennial Hub.





Inspiring Future Generations through Outdoor Education

Partners in Sustainability

As conservation education programs provided by ERCA for more than 40 years became vulnerable due to the changes to the Conservation Authorities Act, the Foundation launched the Partners in Sustainability – Inspiring Future Conservationists and Eco-Stewards program. The Hearn Family immediately stepped in to assist, making a five-year commitment as the Gold Sponsor to ensure this important program could continue without interruption.

A compelling body of evidence clearly shows that introducing kids to nature has numerous health benefits, including increased physical activity, healthier body weight, better concentration, reduced symptoms of ADHD and anxiety, and improved energy. More than 350,000 students across Windsor and Essex County have participated in ERCA's outdoor education programs since 1974.

Curriculum-based experiential learning opportunities are provided at four conservation areas across the Essex Region, and over this past year, have continued to be provided virtually. Topics range from watershed management, Great Lakes protection, ecosystem health, flooding and erosion, natural resources and sustainability, and natural and cultural heritage.

Traditionally, municipalities have supported this programming through levy allocations. However, the changes to the Act will require agreements with each municipality for this and other programs classified as 'non-core' to continue. Maximizing private donations provides assurance that this important education program can continue as these changes are navigated.



Partners in Sustainability



HEARN
Family



John & Shannon Omstead and Family



HASTINGS LaSALLE
Property Inc.



Margaret & David Reid
Nature Fund




SCOTT FAMILY FOUNDATION



Annual Support



“When we learned that outdoor education programs were at risk due to the recent changes to the Conservation Authorities Act, we were compelled to do what we could to ensure the continuity of this crucial element of a young person’s education. We value the importance of outdoor learning and providing opportunities for young people to connect with nature. We were particularly impressed to know that even when school was being conducted remotely, ERCA provided virtual field trips to ensure students were being educated about conservation and natural resource management.”

~ Steven Hearn, Co-President, Hearn Industrial Services



John & Shannon Omstead and Family, long-time sponsors of conservation education programs, have made a five-year commitment as the Silver Sponsor of this effort. Enbridge Gas Ltd, Hastings LaSalle Property Inc., Manz Contracting, the Margaret & David Reid Nature Fund, the Rosati Group, the Scott Family Foundation and Timberland Homes have invested in the children of this region as Bronze Sponsors of these important programs, and Facca Inc. and ROCK Developments made a one-year contribution.

The Essex Region Conservation Foundation is incredibly grateful to the Hearn family and all of the remarkably generous sponsors for this investment in outdoor education for the young people of the Essex region.

Enbridge Natural Playground

A new, natural playground has been created at Holiday Beach Conservation Area in Amherstburg, thanks to a generous gift from Enbridge Inc., which contributed \$30,000 to this project.

Holiday Beach Conservation Area welcomes over 30,000 visitors annually, including thousands of children visiting for day use and participating in outdoor education programs.

This natural playground is a great asset to Holiday Beach Conservation Area, and during the grand opening celebration, kids couldn’t wait to get playing!

The Enbridge Natural Playground reflects elements from nature, like logs, stumps and boulders, rather than a traditional steel playground structure. Outdoor play in a natural setting has proven physical benefits for children, including developing gross motor skills, eye-hand coordination and helping to prevent obesity. Interacting with natural environments also allows children to learn with all of their senses. Thank you Enbridge, for this remarkable gift to the young people of the Windsor-Essex region.





Preserving Our Heritage

Fox Creek Conservation Centre

A longstanding dream was realized in July when the Heritage & Conservation Centre at the John R. Park Homestead was opened, thanks to the incredible donors who committed more than \$773,000 to bring this vision to life.

The visitor experience begins with a grand entrance to The Stephanie & Barry Zekelman Foundation Welcome Centre, which includes the Town of Essex Tourism Hub, and serves as a tourism conduit for the region. Expanded exhibit areas tell the story of the Homestead's past, and the gift shop features beautiful handmade items from local artisans.

The Stephanie & Barry Zekelman Foundation Creative Commons is the Centre's main interior education space, tripling the site's current teaching capacity. The Creative Commons also provides an exhibit area for educational displays and sensitive historical artifacts, and is used to interpret the western basin of Lake Erie and the significance of the natural coastal processes on our local environments.

The Toldo Foundation Outdoor Classroom and Wildlife Viewing Area will allow thousands of students and visitors to take in the historic outbuildings, heritage gardens and orchard, and most spectacularly, one of the best vantage points of the western basin of Lake Erie.



"The Stephanie and Barry Zekelman Foundation is proud to be a party to such an important project for our community and our county. The Heritage and Conservation Centre will provide a unique opportunity to educate our community as to the importance of our ecosystem and our need to protect and preserve it. We want to thank everyone who has contributed both monetarily and with their hard work and vision to create such a wonderful space."

~ Barry Zekelman, The Stephanie & Barry Zekelman Foundation

"At a time when connection to the outdoors and the need for innovative learning spaces has never been more important, the Toldo Foundation is proud to support the Essex Region Conservation Foundation and students of all ages in the creation of a unique and environmentally conscious learning space."

~ Alex Toldo, Trustee, Toldo Foundation

Built in 1842, the John R. Park Homestead Conservation Area is the only living agricultural museum west of London. It is a popular destination for student field trips, tourists, and cyclists. It has been recognized with Best of Windsor-Essex Awards for the past three years, and was awarded the Russell K. Cooper Award as the best living history museum in Ontario.



Giving Tuesday Success!

On Giving Tuesday, donors again came together to Help the Homestead! To ensure the long-term preservation of the historic home of John R. and Amelia Park, specialized restoration work is required. As the sun went down on the world's most philanthropic day, more than \$24,295 was raised for this important work. Thank you!

Thank You!

\$24,295

www.givingtuesday.ca





Building & Maintaining A Responsible, Sustainable & Ethical Foundation

In addition to raising important funds for regional sustainability efforts, this year, the Foundation also undertook significant work to ensure its organizational sustainability. A donor survey was implemented to gain important insights about the conservation projects and programs for which we fundraise. The Foundation's Strategic Plan was updated, and a Governance Committee met regularly to thoroughly review our bylaws and policies. A Risk Management program was also developed to ensure that the organization's risks are identified, managed and mitigated.



Following these comprehensive reviews, our application for reaccreditation to the Imagine Canada Standards for Charitable and Non-Profit Organizations was completed and submitted. Continuing to meet these high standards will inspire confidence among our donors and partners, and ensure that the Essex Region Conservation Foundation continues to be the Foundation of choice for those in the region who wish to make a difference in achieving a cleaner, healthier and more environmentally sustainable Windsor-Essex-Peel Island region.



Thank You – Event Participants!

The Essex Region Conservation Foundation's Fundraising Golf Tournament was held at Kingsville Golf and Country Club and raised more than \$38,500 in support of conservation. A sold out field of 144 golfers teed off in support of conservation! A big thank you to every player, sponsor, hole sponsor and auction donor for your incredible contributions. Thank you also to Enbridge Gas Inc. for its generous Gold Sponsorship.

The Essex Region Bike Tour returned in 2021 in a modified manner to ensure the health and safety of all cyclists and volunteers. Despite a rainy start to the day, in total, 125 riders cycled across the Essex Region, raising over \$22,000 in support of conservation.



Congratulations!

At the Foundation's Virtual Annual General Meeting held in March, The Solcz Family Foundation was recognized with the *Clifford Hatch Award for Outstanding Individual Contributions* for their three-year commitment to Connect Kids with Nature at the Solcz Family Foundation Forest. As a result of this commitment, even with the impacts of COVID-19 requiring capacity limits, nearly 2,000 young people will have had the chance to add thousands of trees to the region's landscape and experience the benefits of connecting with nature, while creating a new forest habitat in our region.

Hicks, MacPherson, Iatonna & Driedger LLP, known as HMID, was recognized with the *Conservation Foundation Award for Outstanding Corporate Contribution*. HMID and its predecessor firms began donating audit services in 1978. In the last decade alone, the value of services donated to the Essex Region Conservation Foundation is estimated to be over \$32,000. The savings realized by the generous donations from HMID LLP allowed those funds to be invested into conservation projects and programs in the Windsor-Essex region.



The Foundation's Youngest Donor Supports Trees!

Meet Kai M.

The Essex Region will be a little greener this year, thanks to a donation from Kai M. to support tree planting. At just 13, Kai is a Grade 7 student at Holy Cross Catholic Elementary School. When his generous donation was received over the Christmas holidays, the Conservation Foundation wanted to meet this young leader in person.

The donated funds were raised through Kai's lawn cutting business.

"I use an electric mower because electric is greener energy and helps the environment," Kai explains. "I have about 10 or 12 customers around the neighbourhood." His business has expanded to include snow shoveling, as well.

"The environment is important because I love hiking and canoeing in nature," he says. "My dad is always teaching us about the environment and ways to help save it, and I thought, why not use some of the money I made to help support it?"

He cites canoe trips to Algonquin with Mom and Dad, Sheena and Phil, his two younger sisters and his grandparents as pivotal to growing his connections to and appreciation for our natural world. "We all love to be around nature," Kai enthuses.

Locally, Kai loves to hike, bike and run anywhere he can find trails, with a special affinity for LaSalle's nearby Brunet Park, and the connected Greenway trail system, which was built with funding raised through the Foundation. "We love how long the trail is, and hope to ride it to our grandparent's house in Amherstburg," he says of his summer plans.

The family's environmental consciousness is evident. "We've been planting trees locally for a while," says Phil, who also made a generous contribution. "We wanted to make a family donation to offset our carbon use, and are looking forward to electric family vehicles being more readily available."

And while Dad's influence is clearly visible, Phil gives all the credit for this environmental leadership to his son. "Kai came up with the idea (of donating). He connects the dots of our conversations and ties them to his own responsibilities."

"We all have to keep in mind that it is important to support conservation and the environment or it's not going to be here for everyone to enjoy," Kai cautions.

Wise, mature and outgoing, this young conservationist has some sage advice for others. "Look for opportunities to pitch in and go the whole way – don't quit and we can all make a difference."

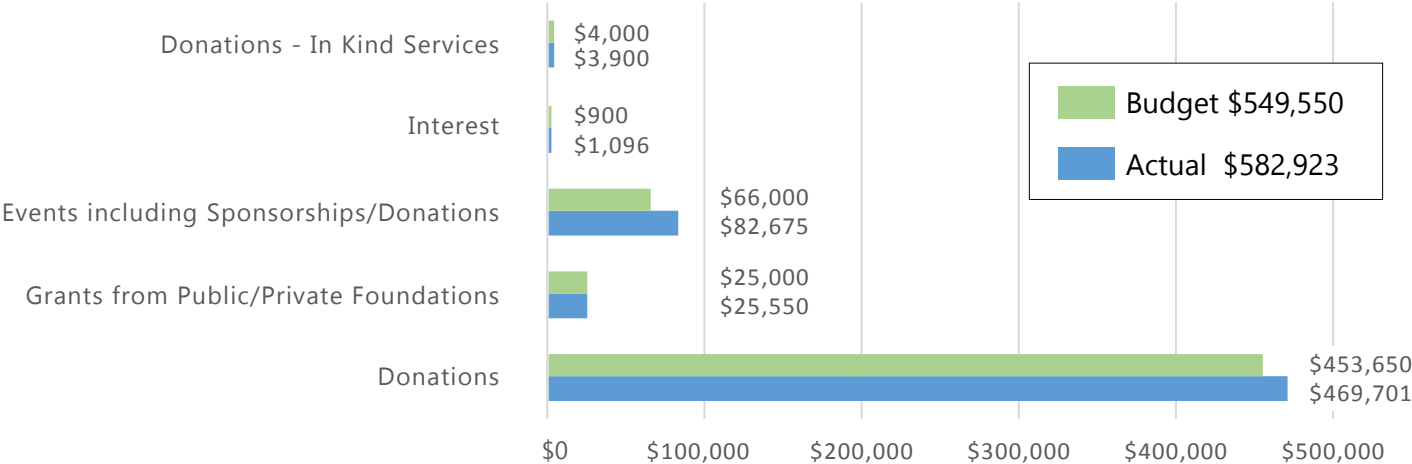
Thank you Kai – for your generosity, support, and inspired commitment to the environment.



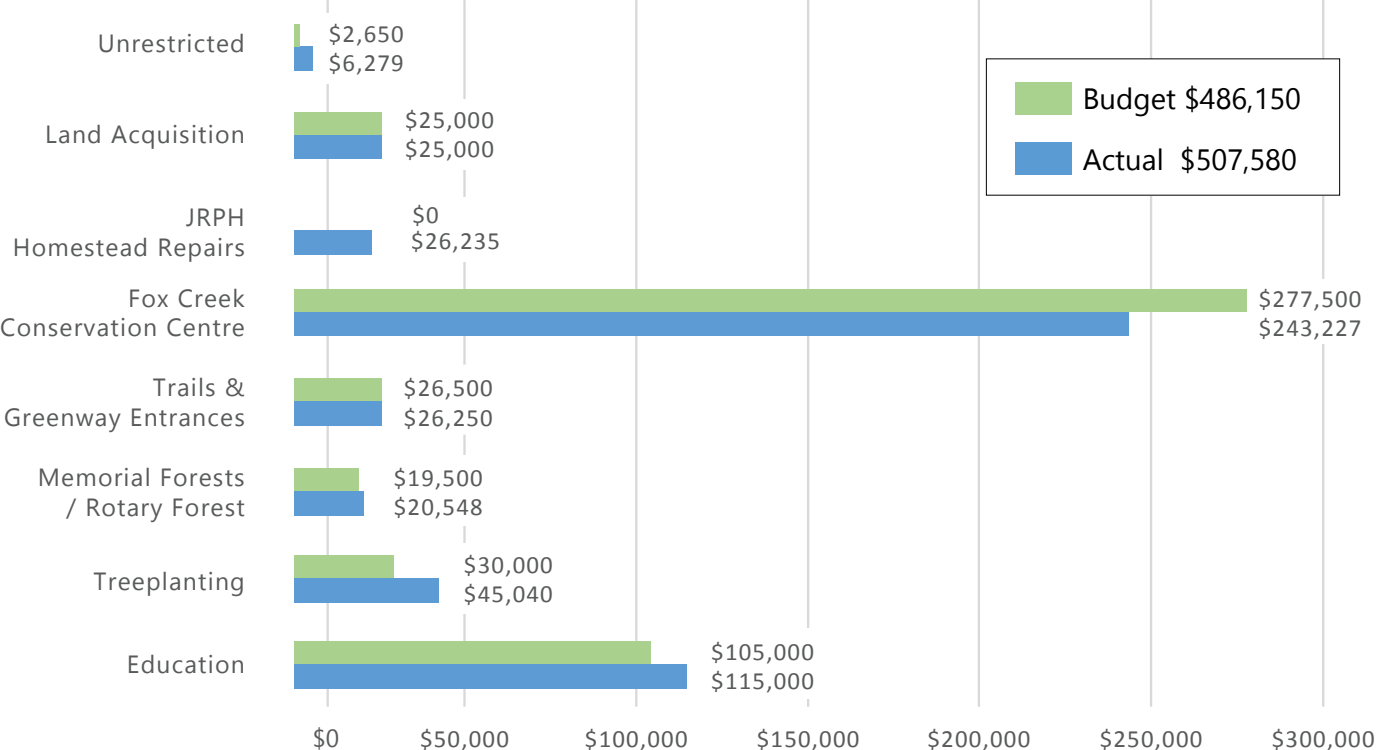
2021 Financial Highlights

Despite the on-going challenges that the world-wide COVID-19 pandemic presented locally, the Foundation's 2021 results exceeded budget, due to unique fundraising campaigns and approaches, a successful golf tournament, significant engagement of the local business and development community, and the generosity of many.

2021 Budget to Actual Revenues

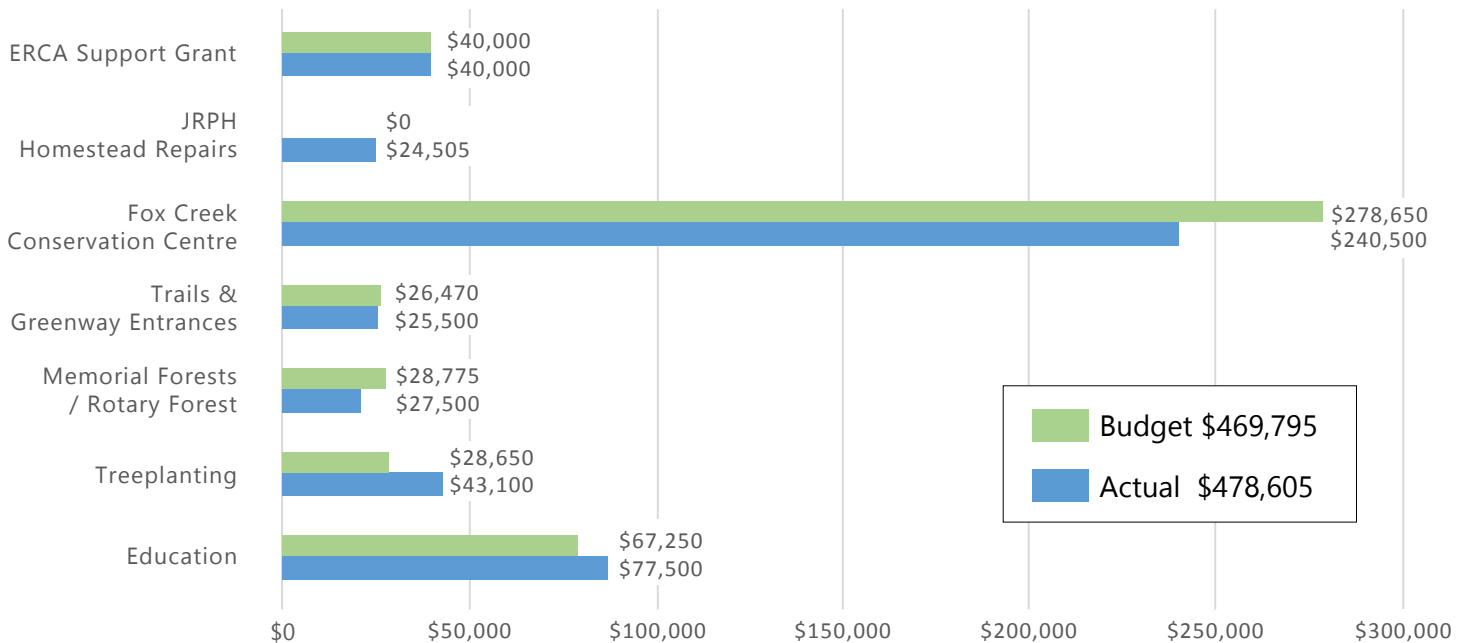


2021 Budget to Actual Donations by Restriction



2021 Financial Highlights

2021 Budget to Actual Grants to ERCA



The Foundation utilized a mere 5.2% of its 2021 revenues for administration, operations and fundraising supplies, far below CRA's 30% upper limit for administration and fundraising expenses due to a focus on major gifts, in lieu of events. Grants comprised 82% of the Foundation's disbursements and the target for grants was exceeded due to additional donations being secured.

Thank You

With gratitude to the many donors making a difference in enriching and sustaining the Place for Life in 2021.

10 Tech Industrial Services
 Natalie Abramovich
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 Tricia Allemann
 Christina Allsop
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 Gil Allsop
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Green Sun Rising	Mallot's Guard Drugs	Jim Potter	The Toldo Foundation
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Susan Harrison	Beth Marinacci-Green	Reid Funeral Home	Luna Tomasini
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Hearn Construction	Don McArthur	Stephen Reynolds	
Heavy Construction Association of Windsor	Sarah McCarthy	Steven Richardson	
Ken P Hedgewick	McCloskey Engineering	Elaine Richardson	

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Contact Us

360 Fairview Avenue West, Suite 311
Essex, Ontario, N8M 1Y6

P: 519-776-5209 F: 519-776-8688

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