

Severn Sound Environmental Association Strategic Plan - 2024 – 2029

Sustaining Severn Sound: A Vision for the Future



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Land Acknowledgement

This watershed area has been an important homeland and gathering place for Indigenous people for thousands of years. We acknowledge that this place on earth has existed since before our creation and that all living things on earth, in the water, and in the air are our relatives and equals. With its landscape as a teacher and water for its life, we learn, share, and live on these traditional lands.

We acknowledge the Indigenous Peoples who are the original stewards and are still stewards of these lands we are located on today and recognize our shared responsibility to protect and preserve our first Mother, the earth, ensuring her health and integrity for future generations.

We are dedicated to honoring our Indigenous history and culture and are committed to coming together to learn, heal, and create future prosperity, respect, and understanding in our community. We respectfully acknowledge that we are the stewards and caretakers of these lands and waters, and that we continue to maintain this responsibility to ensure their health and integrity for generations to come.

Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Commitment

The Severn Sound Environmental Association (SSEA) is committed to Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI). SSEA is dedicated to recognizing the diversity, dignity and worth of every person and to provide equal rights and opportunities without discrimination. We see diversity and inclusion as integral to our mission and key to ensuring the well-being of our employees and the clients that we serve. SSEA will embrace EDI and will take a proactive approach to address issues associated with the delivery of services and programs in an equitable and inclusive manner. This affirmed commitment to EDI will act as a solid foundation for guiding SSEA as it conducts itself as a partner and employer.

Acknowledgments

Thank you to Karen Wianecki, Director of Practice, Planning Solutions Inc. for her support and expertise in helping lead this renewal process with SSEA. Also, to the SSEA staff and Board for their enthusiasm and expertise and the early thought leaders whose input provided the starting framework for this strategic plan renewal.

This strategic plan was initially drafted by Karen Wianecki. Subsequent enhancements were made through review from the SSEA staff and with the assistance of Microsoft Copilot's AI technology, based on input, ideas, and prompts provided by our staff. AI facilitated the writing process to enhance efficiency and accuracy.

Introduction

Strategic planning is one of the most critical tools available to any organization. In addition to functioning as one of the most important communication tools available to organizations, it identifies the direction an organization is going and the specific tasks that will be undertaken to get there. A Strategic Plan is a comprehensive document that outlines an organization's goals, objectives, and strategies. It acts as a blueprint or compass to guide the organization and provides the basis for detailed operational and work planning. Importantly, the Strategic Plan presents a shared vision for the future and provides the foundation for the efficient and effective allocation of fiscal and human resources as well as the flexibility to adapt to change.

This renewed Strategic Plan will be used by the Severn Sound Environmental Association (SSEA) to build upon our previous successes and advance real 'on the ground' results across the Severn Sound area. It will provide the necessary direction and focus that will empower SSEA to act and galvanize others to take action to protect the Severn Sound area.

The SSEA is taking a critical adaptive management approach. The issues impacting the Severn Sound area cannot be addressed on a piecemeal basis. Issues like invasive species, water quality protection, shoreline management need to be addressed strategically and proactively. Taking a forward thinking and forward acting approach just makes good economic sense. It costs far less to prevent environmental impairment than it does to focus on clean up. This is the simple reason why thinking, acting and leading from a strategic vantage point is so critical...for all of us.

Joint Message from the Executive Director and Chair of SSEA

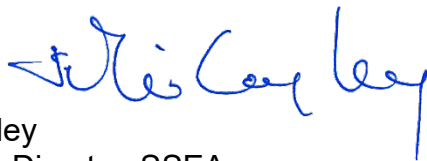
As we embark on the renewal of the Severn Sound Environmental Association's (SSEA) Strategic Plan, we learn from the impacts of the COVID pandemic and are reminded of the accelerating growth across the watershed and its profound impacts on biodiversity, environmental quality, and the health of our ecosystems. We see increasing duration and intensity of severe weather, toxic blue green algae blooms and invasive species impacting our forests and waterways. The state of the watershed reflects a need for action as ecological and biological health are increasingly stressed, and the ripple effects on human health are undeniable.

The changing climate combined with the anticipated escalating demands from more uses and users across the watershed, will only intensify these challenges. While there are numerous governments and organizations working on selected aspects of environmental protection in particular geographies, SSEA is uniquely positioned as the only agency taking a coordinated watershed-wide approach, a perspective that is essential to addressing the complex, interconnected issues our communities face. SSEA's role as a trusted partner and source of sound local scientific and technical advice is critical — providing expertise that many of our municipalities would not otherwise have at their disposal.

SSEA is perfectly positioned to lead and galvanize action. Through collaboration and evidence-based decision-making, we can achieve positive outcomes for the Severn Sound watershed. This Strategic Plan reflects SSEA's steadfast commitment to working with municipalities, community members, partners, and stakeholders to ensure that the Severn Sound area remains a treasure for generations to come—a special place worth protecting.

Building on the legacy of SSEA, this renewed strategic plan is a guiding document that will shape our decisions over the next four years and beyond, ensuring that resources are allocated efficiently and effectively to bring value to all.

We thank the thought leaders, municipal staff and councillors and community members who provided input to this renewed strategic plan. Moving forward with determination and purpose, together we will protect and enhance the Severn Sound watershed.



Julie Cayley
Executive Director, SSEA



Steffen Walma
Chair, SSEA Board of Director
Councillor, Township of Tiny

Severn Sound Environmental Association

- Our Story So Far

LOCATION - Severn Sound, a group of bays covering approximately 130 km² in southeastern Georgian Bay, Lake Huron, is part of a watershed spanning about 1,000 km². The Severn Sound area includes small urban and rural subregions, facing pressures from urban growth and a population that almost triples in size during the summer.

ORIGIN - In 1985, primarily due to degraded water quality, Severn Sound was listed by the International Joint Commission as one of 17 most polluted places on the Canadian side of the Great Lakes. These places are known as “Areas Of Concern” (AOC). In each AOC, a Remedial Action Plan (RAP) was created to address pollution and report on cleanup efforts. In 1987, Environment Canada and the Ontario Ministry of Environment collaborated with various agencies and local partners to complete the Severn Sound RAP, aiming to restore and preserve its beneficial uses.

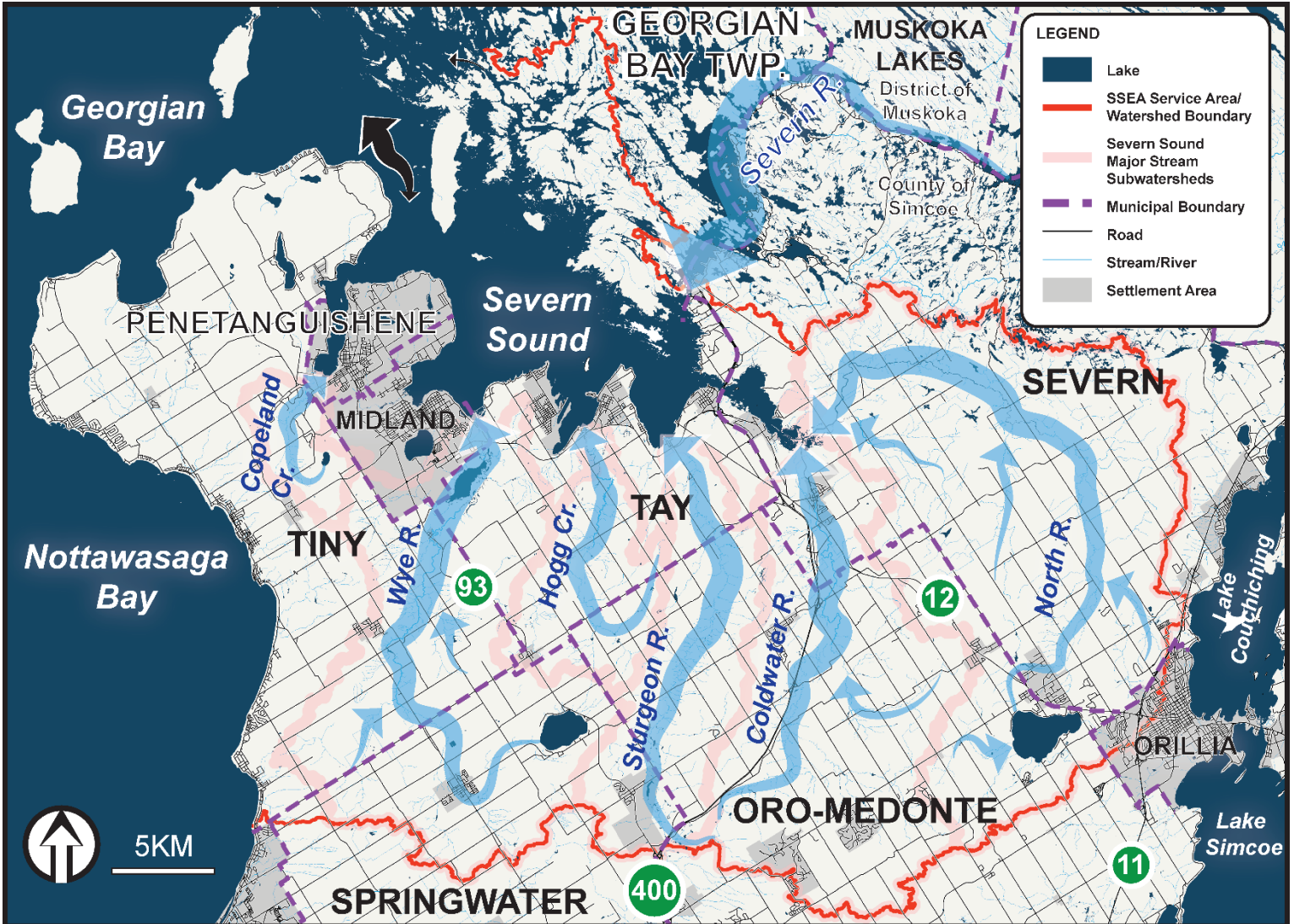
PARTNERSHIP WITH PURPOSE – Established in 1997, the Severn Sound Environmental Association (SSEA) is dedicated to the management, monitoring, and stewardship of the Severn Sound area. As a federal, provincial, and municipal partnership, our mission supported the Severn Sound Remedial Action Plan (SSRAP) and directed its implementation.

With significant effort from the Severn Sound community and investment from all levels of government, the Severn Sound was delisted as an Area of Concern in 2003, with the expectation that certain activities, such as continued monitoring and fish habitat improvements, would persist to ensure ongoing environmental health. Our efforts, in collaboration with others, led to this delisting.

MUNICIPAL COMMITMENT - While we have remained true to our original mandate, SSEA has adapted over the years. In 2008, the SSEA Municipal member Councils signed on to the Severn Sound Sustainability Plan, which envisions that *"By 2050, the Severn Sound Watershed will contain a network of communities that have achieved a sustainable quality of life for all citizens by developing a common culture of environmental, economic, and social balance."* In 2009, the SSEA was formalized into a Joint Municipal Service Board under the Ontario Municipal Act 2001 to continue coordinating the Long-Term Sustainability Plan and assume responsibilities for drinking water source protection as the local authority a requirement under the Ontario Clean Water Act 2006.

Our unique structure allows us to act as a neutral, informed voice in the Severn Sound watershed, building partnerships and collaborating on projects to enhance environmental quality. We monitor water quality, habitats, and engage in various initiatives to ensure a lasting environmental impact for future generations.

Severn Sound Watershed



Flow direction arrows are for illustrative purposes. Produced by the Severn Sound Environmental Association with data supplied in part from the County of Simcoe, the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry (© King's Printer 2025), and under license with members of the Ontario Geospatial Data Exchange, 2025. While every effort has been made to accurately depict the feature data, errors may exist. Any party relying on this information does so at their own risk.

Our Role

We focus on...			
Providing exceptional service to our partners.	Working hard with our partners to make Severn Sound better for generations to come.	Protecting and restoring water quality and habitat in Severn Sound.	Providing technical expertise and innovative solutions.
Monitoring for early warning signs of changes in the Severn Sound environment.	Connecting people to the watershed.	Implementing the Sustainability Plan, Drinking Water Source Protection & RAP commitments.	Monitoring the environment, collecting and analyzing data and sharing our findings.
Providing environmental advice to our watershed municipalities through land use planning & policy.	Enhancing community engagement and environmental awareness.	Building strong partnerships for unified action.	Maintaining a healthy and resilient Severn Sound.

SSEA Services - delivered to support municipal policies and to complete priority actions

- Environmental Monitoring
- Expert Data Collection & Analysis
- Report Writing
- Drinking Water Source Protection & related Risk Management Services
- Municipal planning & policy review & advice
- Habitat & Natural Heritage Assessments
- Stewardship Project Development & Facilitation
- Tree planting & Seedling distribution
- Local Biological Expertise (includes Invasive Species, Fish & Wildlife Habitat, and Natural Heritage)
- Remedial Action Plan Commitments
- Other related services at the request of the municipal partners

Why SSEA?

During the formalization of the SSEA into a Joint Municipal Service Board in 2008, the option of transitioning to a Conservation Authority (CA) was considered. However, the Association Members and municipal leaders decided that becoming a CA could lead to an expanded mandate and increased costs. While both SSEA and CAs provide targeted services, CAs offer a broader range, including operating conservation areas and managing flood forecasting, flood mapping and flood regulation under the Conservation Authorities Act, R.S.O. 1990. This decision allowed the SSEA, under the direction of the Board, to focus on its core mandates of Monitoring and Stewardship, ensuring efficient use of resources.

The SSEA is pivotal in maintaining and enhancing the environmental health of the Severn Sound watershed. Our work in monitoring water quality, protecting habitats, and promoting sustainable practices is essential for the long-term well-being of the region. The SSEA's unique ability to bring together various stakeholders ensures that our initiatives are comprehensive and effective.

Municipal government support for the SSEA is crucial as it enables a coordinated and consistent approach to environmental management. Without this support, the region would face uncertainty and fragmented efforts, relying on short term projects that often lack the continuity and holistic perspective necessary for sustained impact. Such an approach could lead to inconsistent monitoring, disjointed initiatives, missed opportunities for long-term improvements and inefficient use of resources and funding.

By investing in the SSEA, municipal governments ensure that the Severn Sound watershed benefits from a dedicated, knowledgeable, and collaborative organization. This support allows us to address emerging environmental challenges, implement innovative solutions, and maintain the ecological integrity of the region in a highly skilled, efficient and fiscally responsible approach. The SSEA's efforts contribute to a sustainable future, preserving the natural beauty and health of the Severn Sound area for all residents and visitors.

Continued municipal support for the SSEA is not just an investment in environmental stewardship; it is an investment in the community's quality of life and economic vitality. A healthy watershed supports recreation, tourism, and local economies, making it essential for municipalities to back the SSEA's mission and initiatives.

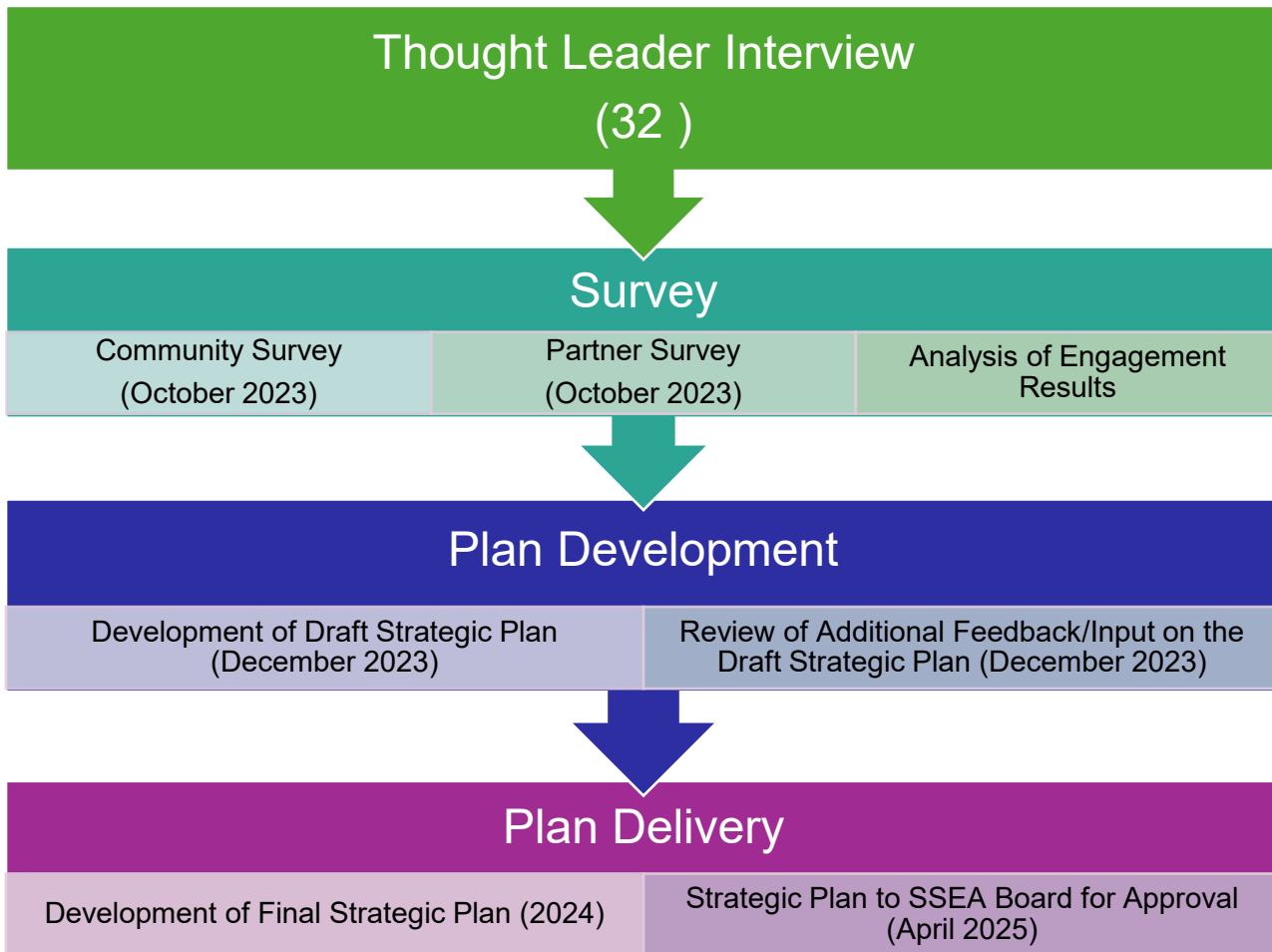
Context & Introductory Messaging

The Process & What We Heard

SSEA is committed to strategic planning and forward thinking. This document will be used by the Board and SSEA staff over the next four years to inform and guide decision making and promote on-the-ground results while taking an adaptive management approach.

An extensive and robust engagement process was developed to ensure this document was shaped by watershed municipal partners (elected officials and staff), community members, partners (including business, industry, agriculture, academia), other levels of government, and SSEA Board and staff. The input that has been shared has been incorporated into the new SSEA Strategic Plan and it is our hope that those who participated will see how their contributions are reflected.

To all who took the time to participate, thank you. An overview of the process to develop the Strategic Plan follows:



How Is This Strategic Plan Tailored to SSEA?

This renewed Strategic Plan builds on the long- and well-established legacy of organizational excellence and results achieved by SSEA. The watershed is not only growing in population, but changing environmentally, economically, socio-culturally and some of that change is being driven by technological advancement. SSEA is strategically positioned to address these changes, while building on the legacy of achievement that is associated with the early days of SSEA and the delisting of Severn Sound as an Area of Concern.

This Strategic Plan acknowledges the history of the organization but sets a new course of action for the organization. In the pages of this document, you will read about the important strategic positioning that SSEA is taking to ensure the watershed is left in a better state than present. You will see a commitment to accessibility, equity and inclusion and you will read about the importance that SSEA places on collaboration and partnership. Importantly, you will find specific details about the action – on the ground – that SSEA as an organization will continue to advance to amplify results and to demonstrate the value of the watershed, and the value of the organization.

In developing this Strategic Plan, SSEA is positioning itself to address a number of key challenges facing the watershed, and the organization. Including:

- Addressing the growth that is already here
- Anticipating future needs at the community level across all watershed municipalities
- Addressing key environmental issues, including protecting water quality for drinking and recreation – a top community priority.
- Protecting shoreline areas from erosion
- Working collaboratively with watershed municipal partners, volunteers, community members, and governments at all levels including Indigenous government to address not only existing but emerging issues
- Identifying the critical impacts at the watershed level from climate change and taking action with partners to build resilience
- Ensuring the sustainability of SSEA as an organization – the Go -To Agency for all watershed-related data, information and knowledge.

To all who took the time to assist with the development of this Strategic Plan, we hope you will review this document and see how your insight and wisdom has helped to shape this document.

We look forward to the next chapter in SSEA's future and we look forward to serving you.

Our Vision

SSEA's Vision is one that combines the leadership of the organization with the health of the Severn Sound watershed.

Vision Renewal

As part of the Strategic Plan Renewal process, our vision was carefully reviewed by staff and the Board, incorporating feedback from surveys and current operational insights. The previous vision, "*Severn Sound will be the most resilient and thriving Great Lakes watershed*" was evaluated and refined to enhance clarity.

Our renewed vision is:

The SSEA is the lead agency ensuring Severn Sound is one of the most resilient and thriving Great Lakes watersheds.

Our Mission

SSEA plays a critical role in protecting the Severn Sound watershed. Unlike any other organization, SSEA takes a watershed approach to effective protection and management of the land and water. SSEA's role is widely varied, providing a range of services and delivering a variety of programs to the watershed municipalities it serves. SSEA is in the service business – working collaboratively with elected officials, municipal staff, partners, businesses and industry, agricultural representatives, community groups and community members.

Mission Statement Renewal

During the SSEA Strategic Plan Renewal process, our mission was thoroughly evaluated. The original mission, *"At SSEA, we are committed to ensuring exceptional environmental quality and exemplary stewardship of the Severn Sound area through sound science, collaboration, and partnerships,"* was reviewed to identify areas for enhancement. Key components to retain and emphasize included:

- Sound science
- Inspiring and engaging with community members and municipalities
- Supporting watershed municipalities
- Providing exceptional services

The renewed mission is:

Leading and galvanizing action to protect the lands and waters of the Severn Sound area through sound science, collaboration, and partnerships.

Corporate Values, Principles & Beliefs

At SSEA, we value and honour our history – it defines who we are and how we have evolved. At the same time, we are responsive and reflective, and we consistently look to the horizon to build resilience and to anticipate change. At the ‘heart of SSEA’, is our commitment to our Corporate Core Values which guide us in all our actions, and all our interactions.

Corporate Values Renewal

During the Strategic Plan Renewal process, our corporate values were reassessed to better reflect our commitment to Diversity, Equity, Inclusion & Accessibility, forward thinking, and a sense of belonging. Key updates include:

- Emphasizing respect and responsibility with a focus on ownership and Indigenous relationship building.
- Promoting forward thinking and shared responsibility for protecting the Severn Sound area.
- Enhancing accountability by incorporating stewardship and demonstrating environmentally sustainable practices.

SSEA will be driven by the following corporate values, guiding principles and core beliefs:

H **Honesty & Integrity:** We are accountable and transparent in our actions. We foster a culture of honesty, and we treat our employees, our partners and our community members fairly. We offer neutral, objective and fact-based technical expertise and sound scientific evidence and information. SSEA is a trusted partner.

E **Exceptional Service:** We are creative and innovative, and we are committed to consistently providing service that is professional, responsive, inclusive, accessible, relevant and timely.

A **Action:** We provide environmental leadership and consistently demonstrate environmentally sustainable practices and results.

R **Respect & Responsibility:** We are fiscally responsible and financially prudent. We consistently focus on providing value across the Severn Sound watershed. We work with others to advance a sense of shared responsibility and recognize that Severn Sound is a special place worthy of protection and responsible stewardship.

T **Teamwork:** We value the wisdom, knowledge and contributions of our staff, our Board, our partners, other levels of government including Indigenous government, and our community. Our staff are our critical infrastructure, we value them and prioritize them. We are a strong resilient team.

Strategic Goals, Objectives & Priority Actions

Severn Sound Environmental Association is more committed than ever to demonstrate value and realize on-the-ground results. The essence of this Strategic Plan is Action – action as environmental leaders, action with respect to engaging and empowering others and action from the lens of ‘discovery’ – learning from others, remaining at the leading edge of best available science and sharing this sound science and technical expertise across the watershed.

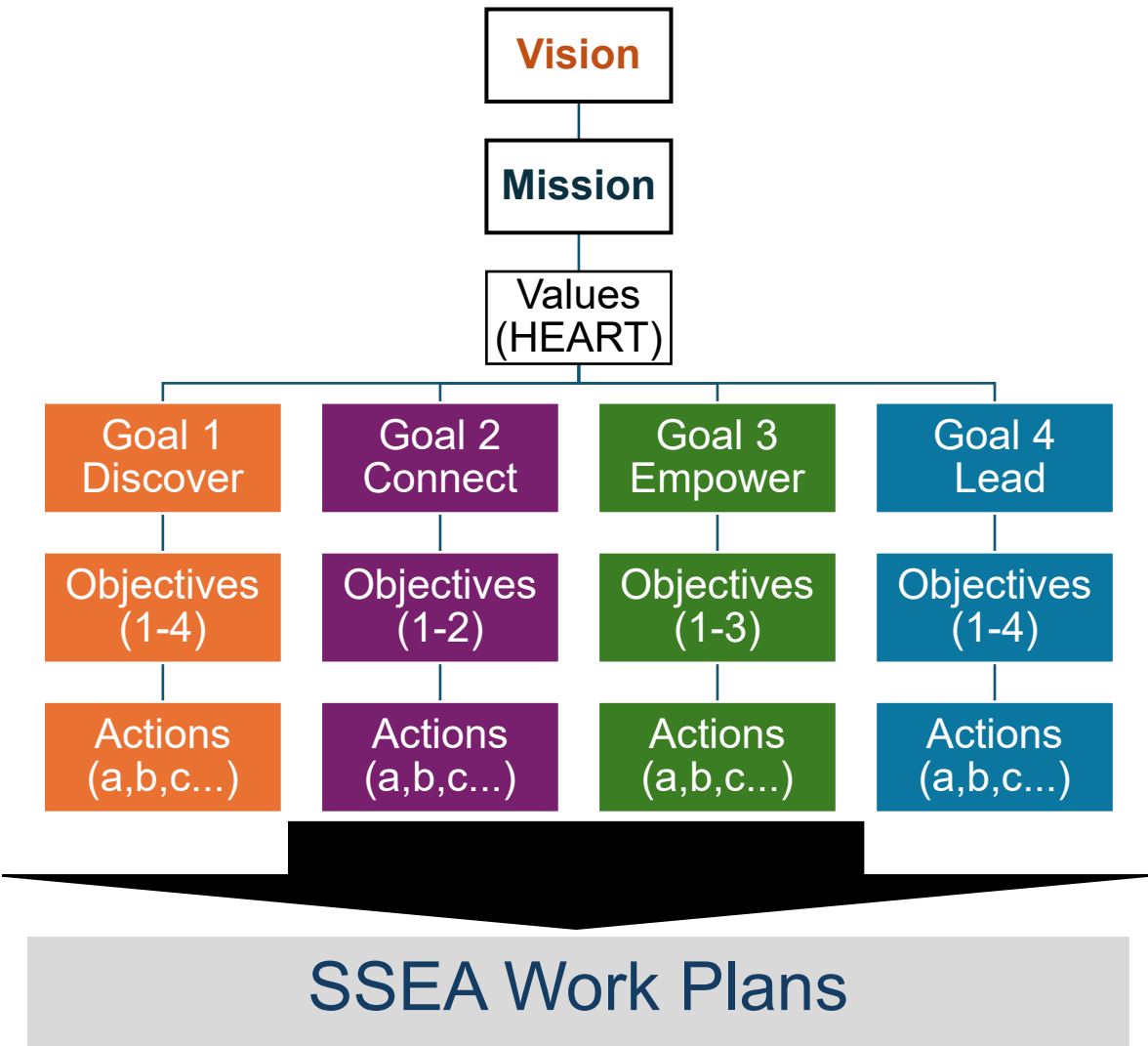
The four goal areas and the priority actions identified herein reflect SSEA’s commitment to collaboration and partnership and importantly, to improving the quality of Severn Sound so that all who come as stewards will thank us for taking such good care of this place, we call home.



Structure of the Strategic Plan

The SSEA Strategic Plan is based on four goals: Discover, Connect, Empower and Lead. Under each goal is a set of strategic objectives or outcomes to be realized and a defined set of strategic actions that have been further divided into existing or ongoing initiatives and new actions. The Strategic Plan is operationalized through SSEA’s work planning process.

To facilitate tracking of the numerous actions in the Strategic Goals tables that follow, we developed a numbering system. Goals are numbered from 1 to 4, objectives are numbered sequentially, and actions are assigned alphabetical identifiers and do not necessarily represent an order of importance.

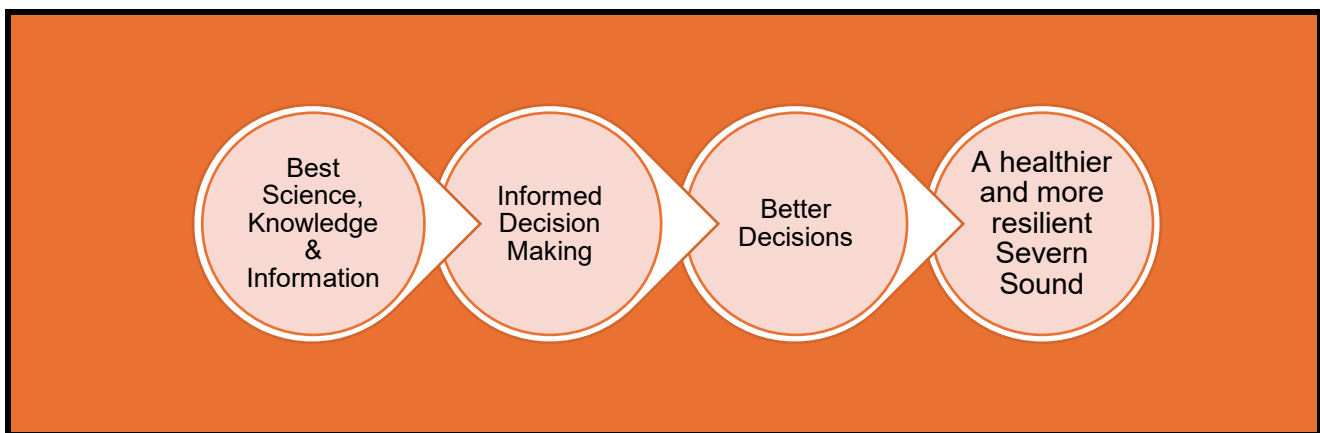


STRATEGIC GOAL 1: DISCOVER

SSEA is the trusted hub for accurate, up-to-date information on the Severn Sound Area, valuing all knowledge and experience, and driven to provide leading-edge science for informed decision-making.

Strategic Focus:

Discovery involves an ongoing commitment to informed decision-making. It involves relying on accurate, established and credible scientific methods to inform process, policy, strategies and action.



Objectives/Outcomes:

- *Address Priority & Legacy Issues* - The SSEA is committed to informed decision-making by providing accurate, reliable, and up-to-date scientific information to address priority, legacy and emerging issues.
- *Build Scientific Knowledge & Understanding* - The SSEA is dedicated to building scientific knowledge and understanding through comprehensive evaluations, continuous monitoring, and collaborative information sharing.
- *Fill Knowledge Gaps* - The SSEA is committed to filling knowledge gaps by assessing needs, enhancing expertise, and developing guidelines for better environmental management.
- *Learn From Others* - The SSEA aims to learn from others by developing citizen science initiatives and building relationships with Indigenous partners.

↑ **Sound Science** ↓

Objectives/ Outcomes

DISCOVER 1: Address Priority, Legacy & Emerging Issues

Strategic Actions

Ongoing actions include establishing a Scientific Advisory Team that includes Indigenous Leaders, defining and addressing priority and legacy issues, providing exceptional service as the Source Protection Authority, and maintaining a list of project priorities based on known issues.

Actions & Initiatives

- a. Establish a Scientific Advisory Team that includes Indigenous Leaders to identify priority science projects
- b. Define priorities and address legacy issues (e.g. restoration of walleye fishery, managing nutrients) See Appendix A
- c. Continue to provide exceptional service as the Source Protection Authority for Severn Sound
- d. Create and maintain a list of project priorities based on known legacy and emerging issues
- e. Maintain a Monitoring and Surveillance Plan – review annually to ensure relevant and effective
- f. Identify and track emerging issues through monitoring and networking with scientific community

Objectives/ Outcomes

DISCOVER 2: Build Scientific Knowledge & Understanding

Strategic Actions

Actions include conducting habitat and natural heritage evaluations, sharing progress reports, enhancing monitoring programs, collaborating with Indigenous partners exploring opportunities for open data and knowledge sharing.

Actions & Initiatives

- a. Undertake habitat and natural heritage evaluations to assess current conditions and identify opportunities
- b. Share information and progress by reporting on results
- c. Annual review of *Monitoring and Surveillance Plan* – ensure SSEA is measuring the most relevant indicators, in the most critical locations, at the most appropriate times.
- d. Maintain and enhance monitoring programs (PWQMN, PGMN, stream invertebrate communities, Severn Sound and inland lake water quality).
- e. Share monitoring findings with:
 - i. Core SSEA Municipal partners
 - ii. upper levels of government to ensure continued support of monitoring programs (e.g. MECP)
 - iii. SS watershed community
- f. Work with Indigenous partners to understand and advance the application of Traditional Ecological Knowledge
- g. Explore new opportunities for acquiring data and information (e.g. remote sensing, drones, automated samplers/buoys etc.)
- h. Explore new opportunities for information and knowledge sharing (e.g. open data)

Strategic
Actions

Actions include conducting needs assessments, exploring expertise in emerging areas, identifying research opportunities, monitoring trends, building data management capacity, collaborating with government partners, as well as developing guidelines and resources for municipal planners, partners, and community members.

Actions & Initiatives

- a. Undertake a needs assessment to identify key parameters not currently being assessed (e.g. snow, soil substrate) and a strategy to collect this critical information and incorporate into *Monitoring and Surveillance Plan*
- b. Explore opportunities to enhance expertise in emerging areas (e.g. stormwater management, hydrogeology, land use planning, fisheries, Species at Risk)
- c. Identify research opportunities to enhance understanding of existing and emerging issues and concepts (e.g. Natural Heritage, Ecological Economics & Natural Capital, microplastics, PFAs)
- d. Monitor trends and drivers of change to anticipate issues and challenges
- e. Build capacity for data management and analysis
- f. Work with municipal/provincial/federal government partners to identify data needs
- g. Develop regular reporting to partners and public regarding monitoring findings
- h. Develop resources for municipal planners, partners and community members
- i. Develop guidelines for municipal planning (e.g. natural plantings)
- j. Explore opportunities to support municipal program and policy review and development (e.g septic inspection)

Objectives/ Outcomes

DISCOVER 4: Learn From Others

Strategic Actions

Actions include developing a Citizen Science Strategy and Monitoring Tool Kit, enhancing relationships with Indigenous partners and, completing a good practice review of other jurisdictions and organizations to identify relevant initiatives for SSEA.

Actions & Initiatives

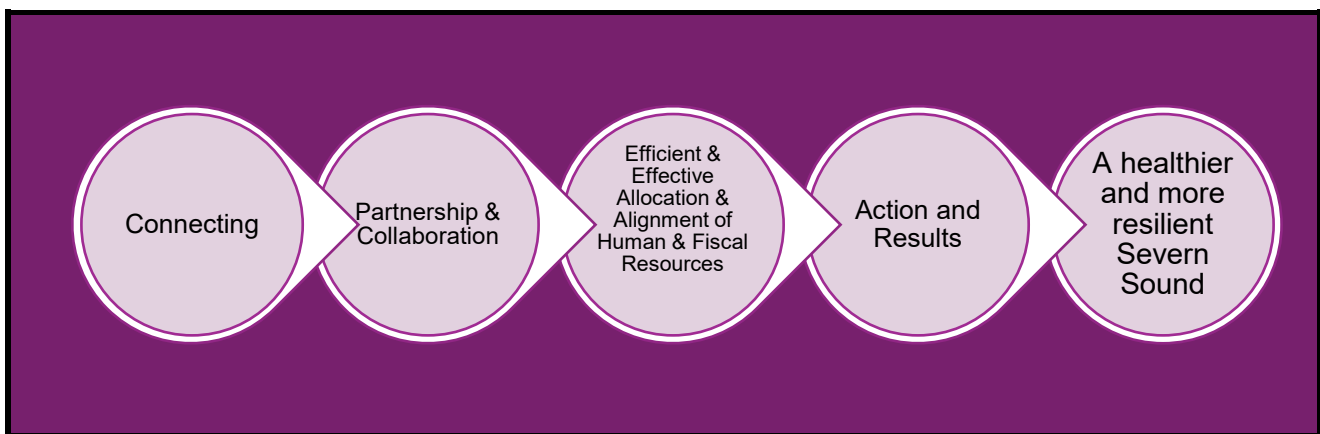
- a. Work with partners to develop and implement a Citizen Science Strategy and Citizen Science Monitoring Tool Kit
- b. Build the Relationship with Indigenous partners to enhance knowledge and understanding
- c. Complete a good practice review of other jurisdictions, agencies and organizations to identify exemplary outreach, education, communication and marketing initiatives that have relevance for SSEA

STRATEGIC GOAL 2: CONNECT

- SSEA is the tie that binds. It is the conduit and connector...the link for all agencies and municipalities operating in the Severn Sound area.

Strategic Focus:

To connect incorporates the concept of establishing and cultivating strong relationships. It means collaborating and partnering with others and creating an alignment of thinking. Connecting promotes cohesion and integration and results in a different, more resourceful allocation of human and fiscal resources.



Objectives/Outcomes:

- *Strengthen Existing Partnerships* - The SSEA connects and collaborates with various stakeholders to foster strong relationships, promote cohesion, and optimize resource allocation.
- *Build New Alliances* - The SSEA aims to ensure long-term sustainability through strong governance, strategic partnerships, financial responsibility, and building organizational capacity and resilience

Supportive Partnerships

Objectives/ Outcomes

CONNECT 1: Strengthen Existing Partnerships

Strategic Actions

Actions include strengthening relationships with municipal partners, participating in planning meetings, collaborating with academia and the agricultural community, ensuring effective implementation of the Clean Water Act, leveraging Board Members' networks, developing Ambassadors, exploring research partnerships, and engaging more with the philanthropic sector.

Actions & Initiatives

- a. Strengthen the relationship with municipal partners by regularly convening CAO & Mayor Round Table to discuss common issues and areas of opportunity across the Severn Sound watershed
- b. Participate when invited in the Planning and other relevant municipal staff meetings
- c. Attend municipal staff and partner meetings to discuss existing and emerging issues of environmental concern across the watershed
- d. Work with academia (e.g. Colleges, universities, high schools) to develop partnerships and collective opportunities
- e. Explore research partnerships with academic institutions
- f. Partner with local school boards to improve visibility and improve understanding of and connection to the watershed (e.g. GB5)
- g. Continue to collaborate with the agricultural community
- h. Strengthen existing (and build new) relationships to ensure the effective implementation of the Clean Water Act
- i. Share monitoring findings with core SSEA members and upper levels of government that support monitoring programs
- j. Leverage connections and networks of Board Members to advance support for SSEA and promote collaboration and partnerships
- k. Identify opportunities to develop Ambassadors among Board, staff, alumni, partners and municipalities
- l. Identify opportunities to engage more with the philanthropic sector

**Strategic
Actions**

Actions include building relationships with Francophone, Metis and First Nation communities, collaborating with the County of Simcoe and District of Muskoka, developing a stakeholder map, exploring the establishment of a Great Lakes Centre of Excellence, and identifying non-traditional partners to connect human health and well-being with the health of the Severn Sound watershed.

Actions & Initiatives

- a. Build the relationship with First Nation communities, Francophone and Metis with a view to collaborating on initiatives that are of mutual interest
- b. Explore opportunities to collaborate with the County of Simcoe and District of Muskoka
- c. Develop a stakeholder map to identify new partnership opportunities across the watershed and beyond
- d. Explore opportunities to establish a Great Lakes Centre of Excellence (education/outreach/action)
- e. Identify non-traditional partners and partnerships to develop a stronger connection between human health, wellness and well-being and the health of Severn Sound watershed (e.g. Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit, wellness organizations, community foundations, seniors centres)

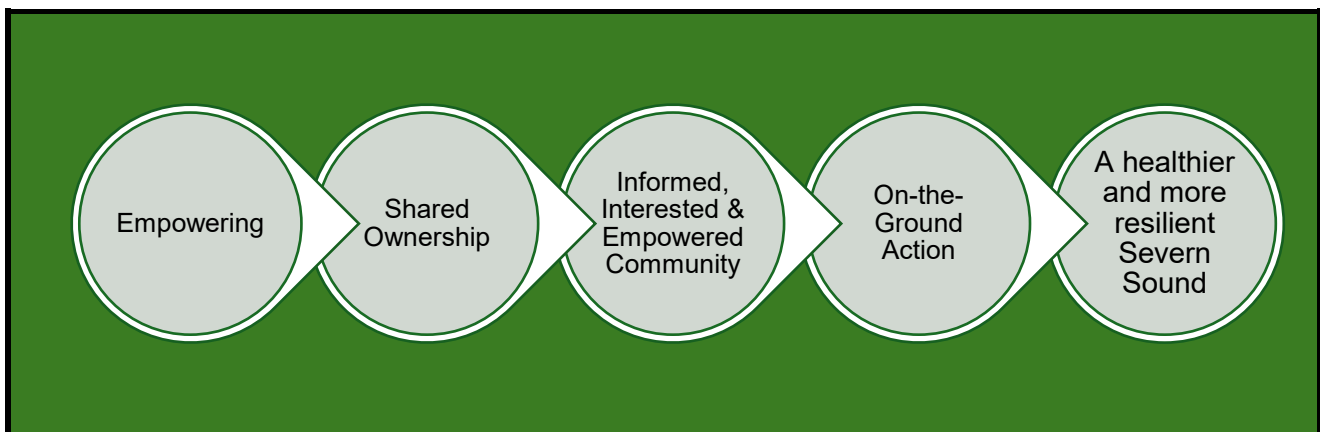
STRATEGIC GOAL 3: EMPOWER

- SSEA Is an Inclusive, Diverse and Accessible Organization that empowers others to contribute and make a difference

Strategic Focus:

To empower others involves building awareness of the importance of the Severn providing the information, knowledge, tools, skills and support to allow others to make a difference.

Empowering SSEA is critical to long term success. Key to long term success is SSEA's value proposition and using every opportunity to showcase the work of the organization, and to increase the visibility, profile and value of SSEA.



Objectives/Outcomes:

- *Increase Watershed Awareness & Understanding* - The SSEA empowers others through inclusivity, diversity, and accessibility, while increasing watershed awareness and understanding.
- *Encourage Others to Take Action* - The SSEA encourages others to take action by collaborating with partners, supporting landowners, and developing volunteer opportunities.
- *Empower SSEA Success* - The SSEA empowers its success by fostering innovation, investing in staff development, embracing diversity, leveraging technology, enhancing governance, and remaining adaptable to change.

 An Engaged & Informed Community 

Objectives/ Outcomes

EMPOWER 1: Increase Watershed Awareness & Understanding

Strategic Actions

Actions include developing communication and engagement strategies, creating outreach programs and educational events, and delivering orientation programs for board members and municipal leaders, and identifying opportunities to showcase SSEA's work at local events and festivals

Actions & Initiatives

- a. Develop a Communications & Engagement Strategy (Community, Stakeholder, partner & Rights Holder)
- b. Develop an “outreach program/webinar series” – alone or in collaboration with partners to address issues of priority
- c. Develop a roster of workshops and educational events (webinars and videos) to address specific topic areas
- d. Develop and deliver Board Orientation Program
- e. Develop and deliver an SSEA Orientation Program for Municipal Leaders and staff that includes ongoing reporting and the development of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)
- f. Explore opportunities to improve water and land through community empowerment and stewardship
- g. Identify opportunities to participate and profile the work of SSEA at local events and festivals

Objectives/ Outcomes

EMPOWER 2: Encourage Others to Take Action

Strategic Actions

Actions include identifying opportunities for landowners to manage invasive species, investigating early intervention methods to improve environmental quality, and implementing a volunteer strategy involving school cooperatives.

Actions & Initiatives

- a. Work with partners to identify new opportunities for landowners to support the management of invasive species
- b. Investigate opportunities for early intervention to support landowner and partner efforts designed to improve and protect environmental quality (stewardship programs, watershed citizen science)
- c. Develop and implement a Volunteer Strategy (including schools and seniors)
- d. In partnership with Municipalities, develop and update Municipal and Community Climate Action Plans.

Objectives/ Outcomes

EMPOWER 3: Empower SSEA Success

Strategic Actions

Actions include promoting a culture of innovation and learning, investing in staff training, embracing diversity, equity, and inclusion, leveraging technology for efficiency, enhancing public and stakeholder representation, and proactively promoting SSEA to demonstrate organizational value and core partners value in delivery of programs.

Actions & Initiatives

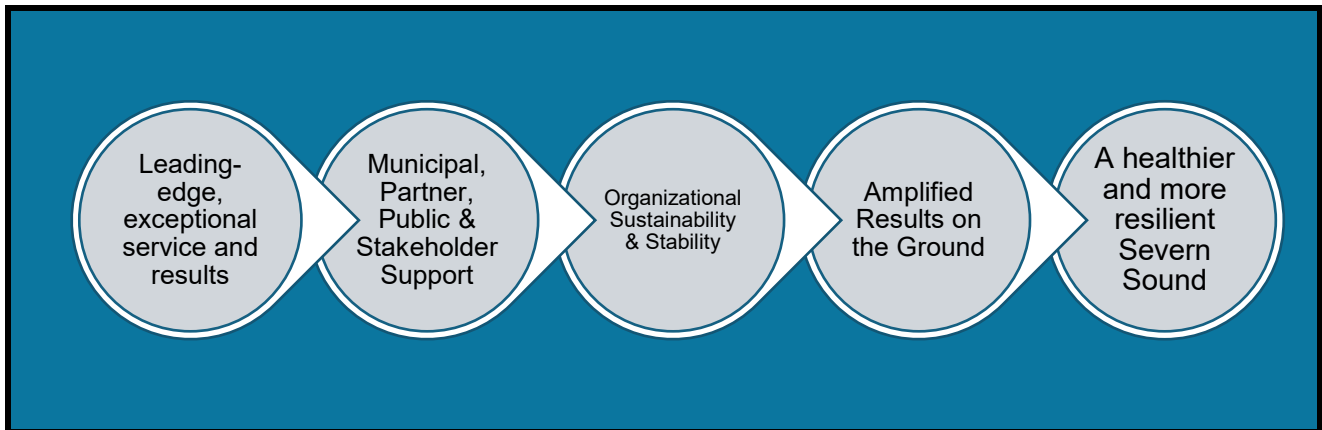
- a. Promote a culture of innovation and learning at SSEA
- b. Invest in staff training and development
- c. Embrace diversity, equity and inclusion
- d. Leverage technology for efficiency, effectiveness and value for money
- e. Explore opportunities to enhance public and stakeholder representation in current governance model
- f. Remain adaptable to change by proactively promoting SSEA and identifying opportunities to demonstrate organizational value
- g. Actively promoting SSEA core partners value in SSEA program delivery

STRATEGIC GOAL 4: LEAD

- SSEA is a Leader

Strategic Focus:

To lead is to take action. Leading involves proactive preparedness. It involves being front and centre in making a recognizable difference on the ground, and galvanizing others to make a difference. To lead is to demonstrate corporate excellence, innovation, responsibility and results.



Objectives/Outcomes:

- *Amplify evidence of on-the-ground results* - The SSEA leads by demonstrating proactive preparedness and innovation, addressing key environmental issues and galvanizing community action for sustainable results.
- *Be a leading and sustainable organization* - The SSEA aims to ensure long-term sustainability through strong governance, strategic partnerships, financial responsibility, and building organizational capacity and resilience
- *Deliver leading-edge, exceptional and valued service* - The SSEA strives to provide top-tier services through financial diversification, standardized reporting, technical expertise, and promoting a diverse, inclusive workplace.
- *Be seen and understood* - The SSEA seeks to enhance its visibility and understanding through strategic branding, community engagement, and regular communication with stakeholders.

**Accountable Exceptional Service
Driven Organization**

Objectives/ Outcomes

LEAD 1: Amplify evidence of on the ground impact

Strategic Actions

Actions include commitments to on-the-ground initiatives, developing a water quality index, addressing environmental issues, establishing an SSEA Foundation, increasing visibility at community events, and supporting shoreline health through collaborative efforts.

Actions & Initiatives

- a. Remain committed to on-the-ground action
- b. Remain committed to addressing priority, legacy & emerging issues (see Appendix B).
- c. Build resilience across the Severn Sound area through action including:
 - i. Climate Change Adaptation and Planning (i.e. Sustainable Severn Sound Project)
 - ii. Commitment to program evaluation (e.g. tree seedling distribution and tree planting, invasive species management and monitoring programs)
 - iii. Developing a water quality/environment state of index (e.g. State of the Environment Index) with partners
 - iv. Address existing & emerging issues including:
 - o nitrates in groundwater in SWP Issue Contributing Areas
 - o increasing sodium/salt in ground & surface water
 - o Microplastics
 - o PFAS
 - v. Collaborative efforts with partners and community members to support shoreline resilience/improve shoreline health
- d. Lead, create and position SSEA as 'The Hub' or "go to" for information, knowledge, technical expertise and advice pertaining to the Severn Sound area
- e. Establish an SSEA Foundation
- f. Identify opportunities to increase SSEA 'visibility' at local community events
- g. Investigate other agencies and organizations to identify good practices promoting collaborative conservation
- h. Complete a Needs Assessment to identify current and emerging partner needs and service gaps, leveraging the expertise at SSEA to address these areas
- i. Proactively identify value of opportunities for SSEA to become more actively involved with signature initiatives underway across the Severn Sound area (e.g. UNESCO Global Geopark, Water Museum)

Strategic
Actions

Actions include delivering financially responsible services, maintaining strong funding relationships, and building financial reserves, developing a sustainable funding strategy, exploring grant opportunities, and enhancing organizational capacity through internships and staff development programs.

Actions & Initiatives

Funding:

- a. Continue to deliver financially responsible services through strong governance and strategic partnerships
- b. Safeguard SSEA existing sources of funding support by maintaining strong relationships and demonstrating value, exceeding expectations and following through on commitments.
- c. Continue to build financial reserves to ensure long-term organizational sustainability and reduce risk.
- d. Develop and implement a sustainable funding strategy for SSEA to ensure funding for the long-term is secure
- e. Explore grant opportunities for SSEA, including applications for grant funding in collaboration with others

Organizational Capacity & Resilience:

- f. Develop an HR Strategy to continue to attract, retain and develop a highly skilled Team SSEA ensuring SSEA remains competitive in the labour market
- g. Explore opportunities to build organizational capacity through internships, placements, and co-ops
- h. Develop Staff Training Needs Assessment and Staff Development Program to deliver on core competencies and promote leadership development and skills building across the organization, ensure SSEA remains at the leading edge.
- i. Develop an SSEA Staff and Board Succession Plan focusing on information and knowledge transfer to ensure the long-term sustainability of the organization.
- j. Develop and implement a standardized Performance Appraisal process and protocols
- k. Regularly review and update internal staff and Board policies
 - o Review and update Pay grid and Pay equity every 5 years.
 - o Explore new HR and operational policies (e.g. hybrid work environment, staff recognition)

Objectives/ Outcomes

LEAD 2: Be a leading and sustainable organization (cont'd)

Strategic Actions

Actions include reviewing SSEA governance, enhancing operations and service delivery, reviewing the JMSB agreement and core funding arrangement to assess fairness, analyzing watershed protection values, communicating SSEA business case, integrating equity and accessibility, and reporting on service levels to enhance decision-making.

Actions & Initiatives

Structure & Governance:

- l. Review internal SSEA governance and update as appropriate
- m. Continue to modernize and enhance operational, program and service delivery, including applying new technologies and approach.
- n. Review SSEA JMSB agreement, ensuring fair and effective partnership
- o. Review SSEA JMSB, funding formula, ensuring fair and effective partnership

Value:

- p. Undertake a comprehensive analysis of the economic, social and environmental costs and value associated with effective watershed protection and management
- q. Develop a Business Case for SSEA that articulates investment and impacts, and describes good practices, results and the need for a proactive and collaborative approach (link to review of letter of agreement and strategic plan updates)
- r. Communicate SSEA value to watershed municipalities, partners and community members

Inclusion, Equity and Diversity:

- s. Model diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility through program and service delivery and in the workplace

Reporting:

- t. Establish and report on service levels and information of interest to watershed municipalities, partners and community members to enhance decision making, improve accountability and strengthen partnerships.

Objectives/ Outcomes

LEAD 3: Deliver leading-edge, exceptional and valued service

Strategic Actions

Actions include implementing the SSEA fee structure, providing technical expertise, applying leading practices to remain competitive in the employment market, exploring funding diversification, developing standardized reporting formats, and creating a customer satisfaction survey.

Actions & Initiatives

- a. Implement SSEA Fee Structure, establish an Annual Review
- b. Explore opportunities to diversity SSEA funding
- c. Develop and implement standardized reporting formats
- d. Investigate good value-added practices in other organizations with a view to adopting those that hold promise for SSEA
- e. Continue to provide technical expertise planning, environmental and resource management advice to watershed municipal partners, community decision makers, stakeholders and community members
- f. Develop and implement a Customer Service/Satisfaction Survey to document satisfaction levels with SSEA service and prepare an Annual Report summarizing the results for presentation to the Board, watershed municipalities and partners
- g. Apply leading practices and policies to ensure SSEA remains competitive in the employment market (e.g. hybrid work, pay grid)
- h. Implement actions to create a diverse, equitable, inclusive workplace
- i. Identify opportunities to ensure SSEA's workforce is reflective of the community it serves

Strategic
Actions

Actions include developing a branding strategy, creating a calendar of community events, delivering tailored presentations to municipalities, convening an annual municipal symposium to discuss watershed issues and collaborative opportunities.

Actions & Initiatives

Enhance SSEA profile and visibility by:

- a. Developing an SSEA Branding Strategy to promote increased awareness and understanding at the community level and among partners, municipal staff and community leaders
- b. Develop a calendar of community-based events across the watershed and identify opportunities for SSEA 'Pop Up Events'
- c. Develop and deliver regular and tailored presentations to watershed municipalities to document organizational value and results
- d. Actively seek opportunities to present to community groups and at watershed events (e.g. Rotary, Rotaract, Probus etc.)
- e. Convene an annual municipal partner symposium to profile the state of the watershed, issues of common concern and opportunities for collaborative action
- f. Develop regular contact with MPs and MPPs in the watershed.

Measurement & Progress Reporting

Perhaps the most critical component of any Strategic Plan is implementation. Viewing the Plan as a living document will ensure the Vision, Goals and Strategic Priorities (ongoing and new) will continue to advance.

SSEA is committed to the ongoing and successful implementation of this Strategic Plan. SSEA is also committed to ensure that the watershed municipalities Council and Staff, and community members are regularly apprised of progress and results, as they are achieved. To this end, SSEA will undertake the following specific actions to measure progress, and to report on success which in turn will provide confidence and build trust that SSEA is an organization to be valued:

- *The Board:* Critical linkages between the Strategic Plan and Reports to the SSEA Board will include specific reference to the Strategic Plan. All initiatives proceeding to the Board for decision will identify how they align directly with the goals and strategic priorities included in this Strategic Plan.
- *The Budget:* The SSEA's budget will outline how decisions can support the Strategic Plan and will ensure that initiatives undertaken by SSEA are properly resourced from both a fiscal and human resource perspective.
- *The Community & Core Partners:* An Annual Report will be prepared by staff guided by the Executive Director and Board Chair to identify Strategic Plan progress as well as any changes to the goals and strategic actions. This Annual Report will be forwarded to all watershed municipalities and made available to interested community members as a matter of the public record. SSEA's website will continue to be updated to ensure that all information pertaining to the SSEA Strategic Plan is easily accessible and readily available for review.

Appendix A: COMMON STRATEGIC PLANNING

TERMS DEFINED

Values: A small set of timeliness, guiding principles that do not require external justification. They have intrinsic value to the organization. Core values are fundamental that they seldom, if ever change. They define the behaviour required in order for the organization to achieve its purpose.

Core values can include the following: Respectfulness; continuous learning; collaboration; ethical behaviour; integrity; innovation; visionary thinking; accountability; cooperation.

Vision: The vision statement is our inspiration. It describes a set of ideals and priorities; it describes a picture of the future; a sense of what makes the SSEA special and unique.

The vision defines the B-A-G – the organization’s Big Audacious Goal. Because it is audacious, it represents a significant challenge, and its achievement will require the SSEA to move beyond its comfort zone. It is clear and compelling to everyone. It has a clear finish line that will take time and hard work to accomplish. The goal should stimulate leadership activity, commitment and participation beyond SSEA’s current leadership.

A vision statement is: realistic, credible, attractive (it must galvanize people to act) and it describes a future state (not a present condition).

Goals: A goal is an outcome-oriented statement that will lead the SSEA toward its envisioned future. The goals are not in any order of priority. All of the goals will need to be achieved if the SSEA is to fully realize its strategic vision. Goals are general objectives that explain what you are attempting to achieve.

Examples:

- Economic Vitality
- Healthy Communities
- Sustainable Environment
- Good Government

Objectives: Specific, measurable outcomes that are intended to be achieved under each strategic goal. Objectives serve as benchmarks for success and guide the strategic actions necessary to realize the overarching goals. They are sequentially numbered to facilitate tracking and alignment with the strategic plan.

Actions: Specific tasks or initiatives that are undertaken to achieve the strategic objectives. Actions are detailed steps that outline how each objective will be accomplished, and they are categorized into existing or ongoing initiatives and new actions. Each action is assigned an alphabetical identifier to facilitate tracking and alignment with the strategic plan.

Work Plan: A comprehensive process that details the specific steps required to implement strategies and achieve strategic objectives. A Work Plan serves as a bridge between actions and strategies, ensuring that each strategy is translated into actionable tasks. Work plans are reviewed at the beginning of each year or as needed throughout the year. A typical work plan includes developed strategies, detailed tasks, resource identification, responsibility assignment and reporting of milestones. Each component of the Work Plan is sequentially organized to facilitate tracking and alignment with the strategic plan. Work Plans can be developed at the organizational and staff levels.

Strategies: Strategies define the specific actions that will be taken to attain goals. Part of our Work Plan process involves developing strategies to deliver on priority actions. Creating and implementing a strategy involves identifying the specific steps required to achieve our goals, ensuring each step is SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, and Time-Bound), allocating the necessary resources, assigning responsibilities, and establishing the timeline for execution and evaluation.

Appendix B: COMMITMENT TO SEVERN SOUND PRIORITY AND LEGACY ISSUES

The Severn Sound Environmental Association (SSEA) remains steadfast in its commitment to the Remedial Action Plan (RAP) objectives, ensuring the continued protection and enhancement of Severn Sound's environmental health. By highlighting and adhering to the ongoing RAP commitments, SSEA demonstrates a strategic and well-coordinated approach to the environmental stewardship of Severn Sound and its watershed. This strategic plan process is not static; it requires periodic evaluation and specific actions to address emerging challenges and opportunities. Such evaluations ensure that beneficial uses of Severn Sound remain unimpaired, safeguarding ecological integrity and sustainability for future generations.

As part of this commitment, the SSEA has developed the Strategic Plan 2024 to 2029, which acts as a blueprint for implementing its environmental goals over the next five years. The Strategic Plan 2024 to 2029 underscores the importance of continued RAP commitments and sets forth a clear path for achieving long-term environmental sustainability. The following list identifies areas that require ongoing monitoring and action as defined in SSRAP Stage 3 Delisting Document. Note, status identified is as of delisting (2003) and may not reflect current conditions.

1. Improve Sewage Plant Efficiency

1a. Optimize the use of existing equipment and treatment

Implementation Status: Complete **Actions Needed:** Continue monitoring and training to sustain optimization.

1d. Consolidate plants to combine improved treatment with better discharge location

Implementation Status: Ongoing **Actions Needed:** Evaluate potential consolidation opportunities and implement where feasible.

1e. Store sludge from sewage plants during the period when spreading is not recommended

Implementation Status: Ongoing **Actions Needed:** Ensure compliance with storage guidelines and expand storage facilities as needed.

2. Upgrade Private Sewage Systems

2a. Replace faulty or seriously substandard private sewage systems

Implementation Status: Ongoing **Actions Needed:** Regular inspections and enforcement of replacements or repairs.

2b. Continue research on phosphorus, nitrogen, and bacteria removal efficiency

Implementation Status: Ongoing **Actions Needed:** Support and participate in ongoing research initiatives.

3. Reduce Storm Water Supply

3a. Virtually eliminate bypass from sewage pumping stations and combined sewer overflows (CSOs)

Implementation Status: Ongoing **Actions Needed:** Upgrade remaining pumping stations and monitor bypass incidents.

3b. Retain and treat stormwater runoff in existing catchments

Implementation Status: Ongoing **Actions Needed:** Implement and maintain stormwater retention and treatment systems.

3c. Plan all new development proposals to include retention and treatment of stormwater

Implementation Status: Ongoing **Actions Needed:** Ensure new developments comply with stormwater management guidelines.

3d. Minimize clearing of land prior to construction

Implementation Status: Ongoing **Actions Needed:** Enforce regulations to retain natural vegetation during construction.

4. Reduce Agriculture Sources

4a. Manage runoff from manure storage areas and barnyards

Implementation Status: Ongoing **Actions Needed:** Provide funding and technical assistance for runoff management projects.

4b. Eliminate spreading of manure on land from freeze-up until land is workable after spring thaw

Implementation Status: Ongoing **Actions Needed:** Enforce seasonal restrictions on manure spreading.

4c. Eliminate the spreading of sludge on land from freeze-up until land is workable after spring thaw

Implementation Status: Ongoing **Actions Needed:** Ensure compliance with sludge spreading restrictions.

4d. Eliminate the spreading of septage at any time

Implementation Status: Ongoing **Actions Needed:** Promote and implement alternative septage treatment methods.

4e. Direct milkhouse waste to treatment

Implementation Status: Ongoing **Actions Needed:** Provide funding and technical support for milkhouse waste treatment projects.

4f. Restrict livestock access to watercourses

Implementation Status: Ongoing **Actions Needed:** Continue fencing projects and provide incentives for landowners.

4g. Encourage conservation tillage, crop rotation, and other erosion control practices

Implementation Status: Ongoing **Actions Needed:** Promote and support conservation practices through funding and education.

5. Reduce Sources of Erosion

5a. Stabilize banks and plant vegetation buffers along watercourses

Implementation Status: Ongoing **Actions Needed:** Continue financial and technical support for bank stabilization projects.

5b. Minimize erosion during and after road construction and maintenance practices

Implementation Status: Ongoing **Actions Needed:** Implement best practices for erosion control during construction.

6. Reduce Supply from Marine Activities

6a. Enforce Pleasure Craft Black Water Legislation

Implementation Status: Cooperative action required **Actions Needed:** Strengthen enforcement and cooperation among federal, provincial, and municipal authorities.

6b. Encourage onboard storage of grey water

Implementation Status: Ongoing **Actions Needed:** Promote onboard storage through education and incentives.

6c. Designate one agency to coordinate the review of all marine construction proposals

Implementation Status: Ongoing **Actions Needed:** Establish a coordinating agency and streamline the review process.

7. Fish and Wildlife Protection and Improvement

7a. Support and incorporate wetlands and other unique and valuable habitat preservation initiatives

Implementation Status: Ongoing **Actions Needed:** Integrate habitat preservation into planning and development processes.

7b. Create productive fish and wildlife habitats

Implementation Status: Ongoing **Actions Needed:** Continue habitat creation projects and monitor their effectiveness.

7d. Rehabilitate fish habitat and buffer vegetation of streams flowing directly to Severn Sound

Implementation Status: Ongoing **Actions Needed:** Provide funding and technical support for rehabilitation projects.

8. Prevent Contamination

8b. Encourage water conservation in and around the home and in industrial processes

Implementation Status: Ongoing **Actions Needed:** Promote water conservation through public education and incentives.

8c. Encourage use of safe alternatives to cleaning products containing phosphorus

Implementation Status: Ongoing **Actions Needed:** Educate the public on safe alternatives and promote their use.

8d. Encourage personal and corporate efforts to eliminate the creation and disposal of pollutants

Implementation Status: Ongoing **Actions Needed:** Support initiatives to reduce pollutant creation and disposal.

8e. Control sources of bacteria

Implementation Status: Ongoing **Actions Needed:** Implement and enforce measures to control bacterial contamination.

8f. Monitor to ensure detection of new sources of contamination and the decline of existing contaminants

Implementation Status: Ongoing **Actions Needed:** Continue monitoring programs and address any new contamination sources.

9. Plan Input and Review

9a. Create Official Plan model amendments with RAP objectives for all municipalities within the Severn Sound watershed

Implementation Status: Ongoing **Actions Needed:** Assist municipalities in incorporating RAP objectives into their Official Plans.

9c. Encourage OMAFRA to develop farm plans with RAP objectives

Implementation Status: Ongoing **Actions Needed:** Work with OMAFRA to integrate RAP objectives into farm plans.

RAP Commitments

Specific actions that the Severn Sound Environmental Association (SSEA) must commit to in order to ensure delisting objectives stay intact:

1. Maintain a Monitoring and Surveillance Plan

- Coordinate and implement the monitoring and surveillance plan to track environmental health and detect new issues.

2. Provide Technical Support for Sewage Plant Optimization

- Assist municipal operators with technical support and periodic reviews to ensure optimization efforts are effective.

3. Monitor Sludge Quality and Storage Practices

- Ensure compliance with storage guidelines and monitor sludge quality to prevent environmental contamination.

4. Support Private Sewage System Inspections

- Provide technical support and assist municipalities with monitoring system performance and compliance.

5. Review and Guide Stormwater Management Systems

- Assist municipalities in implementing and maintaining stormwater retention and treatment systems and monitor their effectiveness.

6. Assist with Agricultural Runoff Management Projects

- Provide technical assistance and monitor runoff quality to reduce nutrient loadings and protect water quality.

7. Monitor Compliance with Manure and Sludge Spreading Restrictions

- Ensure seasonal restrictions are enforced and monitor environmental impact to prevent nutrient runoff.

8. Support Bank Stabilization and Vegetation Projects

- Provide financial and technical support for bank stabilization and vegetation buffer projects and monitor their effectiveness.

9. Monitor Marine Activity Compliance

- Assist with monitoring compliance and enforcement of Pleasure Craft Black Water Legislation to prevent marine pollution.

10. Provide Technical Support for Fish Habitat Rehabilitation

- Support landowners and municipalities in rehabilitating fish habitats and monitor habitat conditions and rehabilitation success.

11. Monitor Bacterial Levels and Contamination Sources

- Implement and enforce measures to control bacterial contamination and monitor bacterial levels and sources.

12. Coordinate and Analyze Contaminant Monitoring Data

- Continue monitoring programs, analyze data to detect new sources of contamination, and address any emerging issues.

These actions are crucial for maintaining the environmental health of Severn Sound and ensuring that delisting objectives remain intact.