



A Place to Connect

2020-2024 Strategy and Plans

Lichen. Photo by D. Crowell



Table of Contents

Our Mission, Vision and Values..... 4

Directors’ Letters..... 5

Why *rare*?..... 6

Global Report Cards
— Improving Canada’s Grades 8

Canada’s New Approach to Conservation
—the Need is Urgent..... 9

Our organizational goals
for 2020-2024..... 12

Stewardship & Place 14

Braiding & Belonging..... 16

Learning & Inquiring 18

Abundance 20

Leadership 23

Land Acknowledgement

Founded on December 6, 2001, the *rare* Charitable Research Reserve is a community-driven urban land trust, nature reserve and environmental institute. The reserve’s headquarters and first four locations comprise over 980 acres of conservation lands. Most of these lands are located within the Haldimand Tract. Spanning six miles on either side of the Grand River from source to mouth, the Haldimand Tract is land granted to the Six Nations of the Grand River in 1784 to recognize their support for the British in the American Revolution. With the most recent expansion to Guelph/Wellington, *rare* also stewards lands are at the border of the Upper Canada Treaty No. 3 from 1792 and Treaty 19 from 1818.

For all its properties, *rare* acknowledges and is grateful to the original stewards of the land. This land has been rich in diverse Indigenous presence since time immemorial. We would like to honour and respect the sovereignty of both First Nations in our area: the Onkwehon:we Peoples of Six Nations of the Grand River and the Anishinaabe Peoples of the Mississaugas of the Credit. Nia:wen and Miigwech (thank you) to these Nations who share their lands with us. We would also like to acknowledge the Neutral people and Indigenous Paleo-Hunters, for whom we have archeological evidence dating back 10,500 years. Today, these lands are also home to many other First Nations, Métis and Inuit people who have moved to the area from across Turtle Island.

Our Mission, Vision and Values

Our Mission

Through the combined efforts of the community, including local Indigenous Peoples, and *rare*’s team of staff, advisors and artists, we will co-create the most inclusive practices and answers to environmental issues, stewarding the reserve’s diverse network of natural landscapes for ecological integrity and future generations.

Our Vision

To offer the community, including local Indigenous Peoples, the international community and future generations, a diverse network of connected natural areas, protected intact in perpetuity. As an international leader in conservation, research, restoration and education, *rare* will serve as a model system that not only demonstrates the link between ecological integrity and economic sustainability but includes meaningful reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples, both of which are critical for the enhancement and quality of life of the planet.

Our Values

- Honouring place
- Conserving biodiversity
- Embracing Indigenous knowledge systems
- Committing to reconciliation and Indigenous resurgence
- Strengthening science
- Building diverse, equitable and inclusive communities
- Training the next generation of land stewards

Directors’ Letters

Every morning I rise with eagerness, thankful to be given another opportunity to use my day to fight for what motivates me and what everyone should have access to: a sustainable home, a place of belonging, land that we live with in reciprocity and that generations from now is still intact, in perpetuity.

It is an exciting time, indeed, to be at the helm of *rare*. Canada’s conservation landscape is changing, most visibly on the ground with more lands protected, but also through a change of attitudes and perceptions. A new generation of leaders, many of them women, have emerged and bring their experiences and vision of a new future to the work. As the community grows with its challenges, particularly in the context of the climate crisis, *rare* has also grown and evolved, resulting in an organization where silos are broken down and where true experimentation happens frequently.

This includes the braiding of knowledge systems in an effort not only to reconcile as a people, but to nurture the planet, thereby shielding it from further degradation. Our core values, which include conserving biodiversity but also supporting Indigenous ways of knowing and being, have become more important than ever and *rare*’s programs have advanced to make significant contributions to building a diverse community of concern around conservation goals. A next generation of land stewards has risen, demanding more protected lands in Canada and beyond while reducing carbon emissions. Youth have taken the lead in telling governments that strong action is needed to reverse the climate catastrophe. A safe, sustainable future for all is what they request, and with our daily work and long-term vision, *rare* is in the trenches of translating these ideas into local action with global impact.

I am grateful for the many community volunteers, partners, Elders, youth, advisors, professionals and others who are supporting our work and have made significant contributions to articulating and implementing the vision this plan is based on. Many have been with *rare* as founders since the very beginning, while others have joined us on the trail and have become new champions for our mission.

Together, we have forged a path that defines clearly what is at the centre of our work: to make the environment more relevant in people’s lives, we need to connect to the spirit of place through art, research and the many other forms of inquiry available to us, learning from and with each other, as we engage with and on the land.

Thank you for walking with us as we continue to make conservation a priority in the Upper Grand River watershed!

Dr. Stephanie Sobek-Swant
Executive Director



Dr. Stephanie Sobek-Swant. Photo by J. Quinn

Greetings from *rare*’s Board of Directors. With this document, we invite you to take part in shaping *rare*’s next phase of operations. So much has happened in the last five years that it’s difficult to select highlights; every little action contributes to a larger whole, a mosaic that gives us a glimpse of what is possible if we continue to steer and act on what conservation can be in five, 50, 100 years from now.

As we go to print with these draft plans for the next five-year phase of our work, the world has changed drastically. Rather than bringing about a need to change our plans, the crises have only strengthened our resolve to work ever harder toward our goals, designed to create a shift in the world, to highlight our connectedness, perhaps making possible a just society that would end environmental degradation, the kind of world envisioned by the Sustainable Development Goals that, so far, have seemed beyond our reach.

But now, at the same time, the whole world has had its attention turned to one goal — defeating and recovering from Covid-19 — and our global connectedness has come to the fore. In addition, the growing global outrage about racial injustice spurred by the murder of George Floyd and others has brought into the spotlight the need for anti-racist systemic change that is led by those most affected by these injustices.

Over the past few years, we and one of our key partners, Musagetes, have approached the transformation of our societies, starting with attempts to transform ourselves and our organizations. We have come to call our work ‘Braiding’ — bringing together different ways of knowing and being that allow us to unlearn deep-seated patterns and to shift our desires in ways that will lead toward systemic change. We have looked to scientists, Indigenous knowledge keepers and artists to spur our imaginative thinking so we can cross barriers in ourselves and in society.

We hope you find this guide to the next phase of our strategy and plans to be inspiring. Thank you for the many ways in which you support our work and the goals we share. We invite you to continue this journey with us.

Dr. Joy Roberts
Chair of the Board of Directors



Dr. Joy Roberts. Photo by Geneviève Caron

Why *rare*? Because everything is connected...

“Earth’s living systems as a whole are being compromised. And the more humanity exploits nature in unsustainable ways and undermines its contributions to people, the more we undermine our own wellbeing, security and prosperity.”

Elizabeth Maruma Mrema, Tanzanian lawyer & United Nations Biodiversity Head



As a land trust and environmental institute, *rare*’s ultimate goal is to make the world a more sustainable place. We do this by making the environment more relevant in peoples’ lives through conservation, research and education in ways that are inclusive of different world views and all forms of inquiry. This ‘braiding’, or bringing together, of diverse knowledge systems and approaches enables us to see today’s environmental and social challenges through a lens of diversity, justice and innovation.

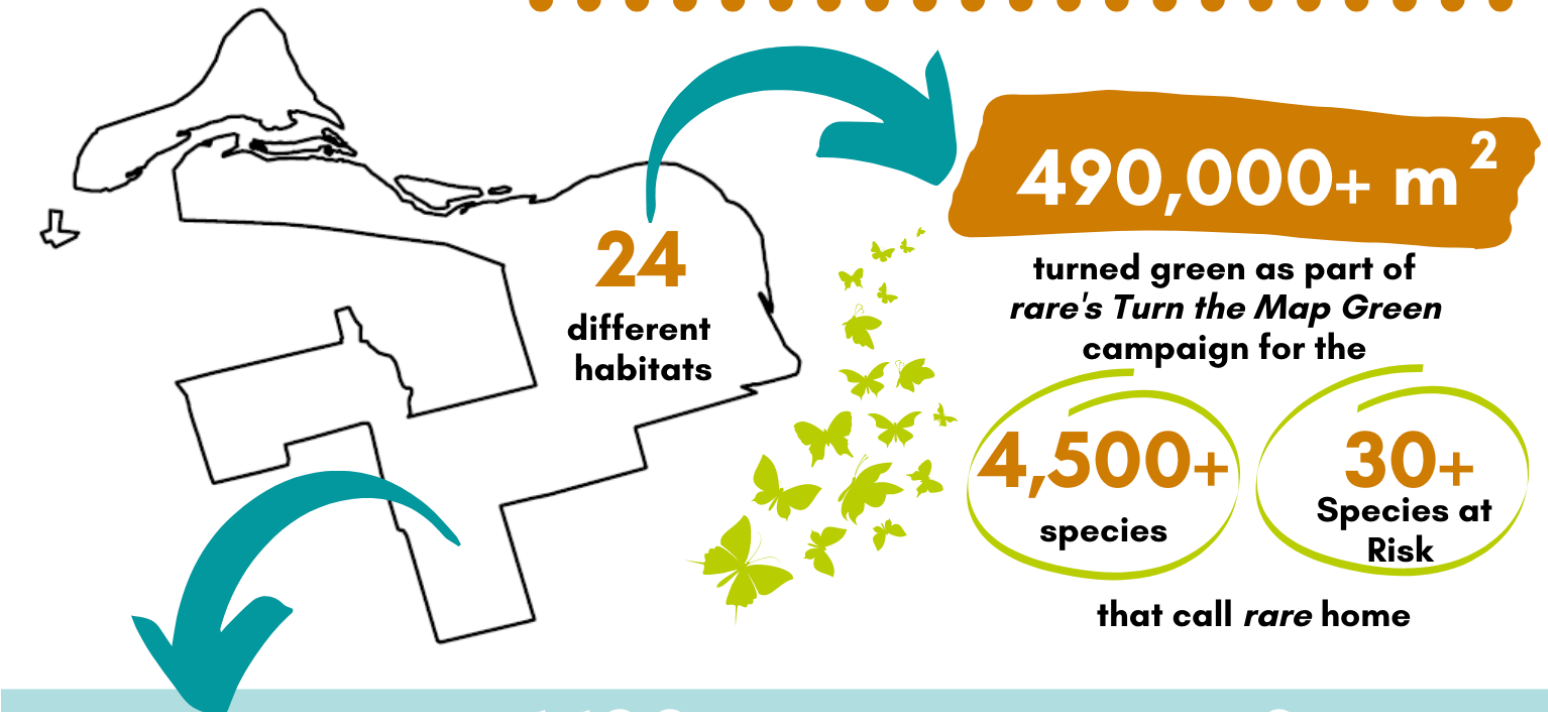
Our reserve is not a land trust with fences and gates to keep people away from engaging with place — it is a land trust where the community finds land-based programs that are informed by place and its histories as well as by community needs. Our institute is not an institution where unapproachable academics spend sleepless nights behind heavy desks and surrounded by grey walls, in isolation, trying to find answers to the world’s problems. We are an institute where the land becomes a living laboratory and outdoor classroom, where researchers and knowledge keepers of all ages, disciplines

and world views connect with each other and the community. Most importantly of all, *rare* is a place where children and youth are at the centre of the hope our work creates — hope for more people who won’t be bystanders, but who are ready to shift their lives towards a carbon-neutral society and a future where we live, once again, in reciprocity with the planet.

Around the world and here at home, inspiring youth leaders like 16-year-old Autumn Peltier, the Anishinaabe Nation Chief Water Commissioner whose home territory is in Northern Ontario, are taking the lead. They are urging the UN General Assembly to “warrior up” and take a stand for our planet; kids are following Greta Thunberg in droves, leaving classrooms behind for climate strikes that are taking place across the planet. Kehkashan Basu, a *rare* International Ambassador and Founder of Green Hope, is empowering children around the world to mitigate climate change and gender inequality by working for sustainable consumption, peace and justice. The volume is rising — and we are listening!

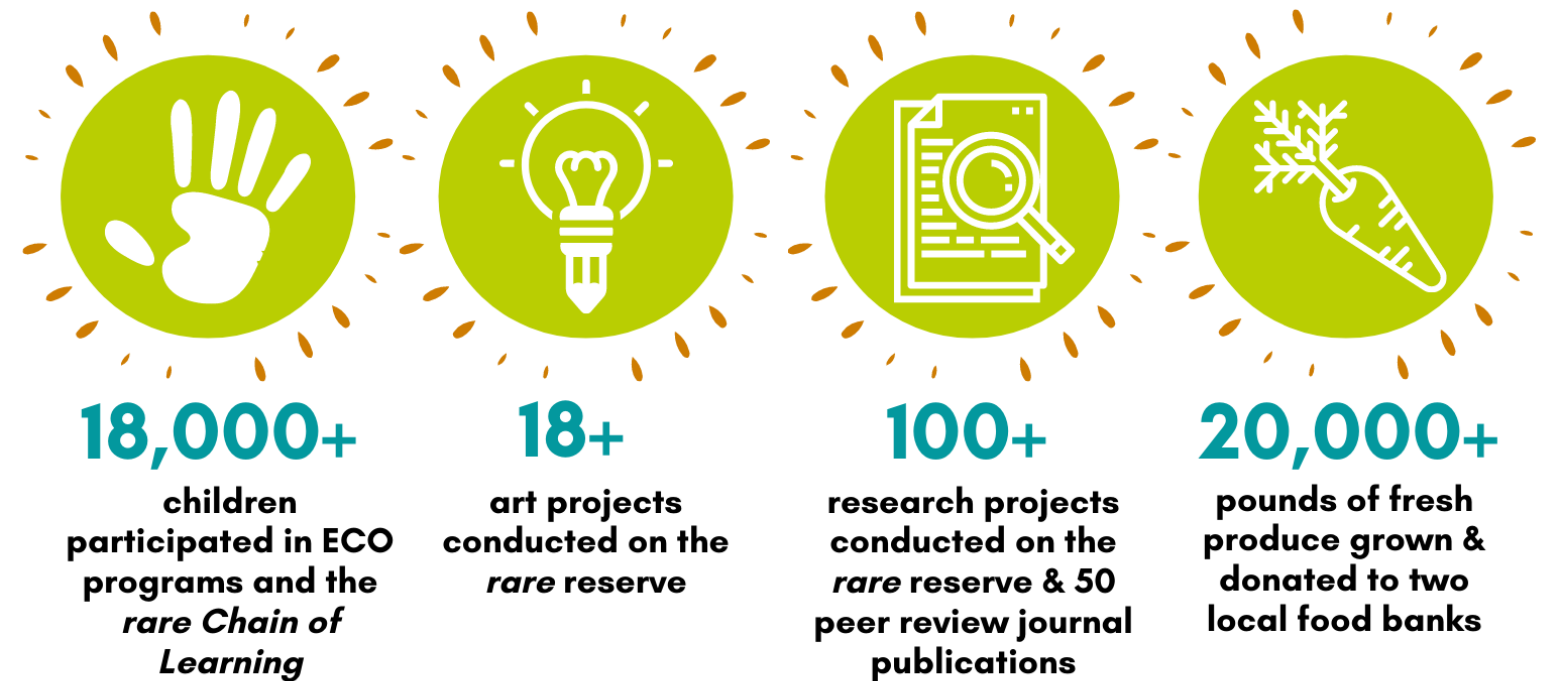
We want to be part of the solution to the complex problems our planet is facing by creating space for the collision of unique ideas and actions. Indigenous scholars like Dan Longboat and researchers in Social Innovation stress that complex problems require complex solutions and the urgent need for interaction among different knowledge systems. We are a **connector that forges links** between obvious and new partners; an **attractor that pulls in the brightest and most caring minds** from all sectors and communities; and a **catalyst that seeks opportunities for change** through collaboration. Through hands-on experiences and the support of the land and the many people who make up *rare*, we are creating an organization that is a **thought leader** — an innovative source of ideas and practices that aim to establish more meaningful relationships while making tangible why **the environment matters** and how **everyone plays a part** in its protection.

ra re DID YOU KNOW?



by the end of 2021, over 1,100 acres will be protected on 8 properties in Waterloo Region / Wellington County

Over the years...



Blooming in Springbank Gardens

*“...at Huron Heights Secondary School, we started a program called Connecting Youth for the Future. One of the goals of this initiative was to have students enter their senior grades with confidence, gained from work or volunteer experience. The *rare* Charitable Research Reserve was pivotal in providing an excellent work and volunteer experience for our students on our harvest day in October. This important community project provided a wide range of experiential learning growth for our students. They were able to build relationships, work toward common goals and give back to the community. As a group, on that day, we were able to harvest nearly 200 pounds of fresh produce for the [Cambridge Self-Help Food Bank]. We want to thank everyone at *rare*.”*

Thomas, Waterloo Region District School Board

Canada's New Approach to Conservation — the Need is Urgent



By December 31, 2019, only 12.1% of Canada's land and freshwater was conserved, which made Canada dead last of all G7 countries. Although progress has been made in Canada's environmental and reconciliation efforts, missteps have also occurred. There is much to do and *rare* is determined to lead the way with a new approach to conservation. We take seriously the values embedded in the above national commitments: respect; inclusiveness and collaboration; transparency; innovation and creativity; and evidence-based decision making, grounded in science and traditional knowledge. In this Strategy and Planning report, we discuss what *rare* intends to do to show leadership in all aspects of these important national goals.

In August 2019, a special report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) warned that human activity, particularly the unsustainable overuse and abuse of natural resources such as lands and forests, has damaged once fertile grounds and thriving ecosystems beyond recognition. With widespread environmental degradation threatening every aspect of life as we know it, there is growing evidence that the Earth is dying — and if we do not take positive action, we will die out too.

Already, humans have changed over 70% of the planet, which has affected every aspect of our lives and led to tremendous loss. Animals and plants continue to disappear at unprecedented rates, and the climate crisis has shown us that we need to reconsider our daily choices and start to develop and implement alternative ways of living and interacting with the planet in a reciprocal manner. 'Ecological grief' has become a recent phenomenon, describing the desperation and sense of loss many of us feel in the face of what seem to be insurmountable challenges. But giving up is not the answer, and *rare* is ready to support everyone who joins in on our journey to turn the ship around. Our education and community outreach efforts go far beyond entertainment — although we hope they are also enjoyable! — by inspiring thousands of individuals in the community to turn their daily practices into activities that reach local, national and international goals — in time to protect the future for their children and grandchildren.

In Canada as a whole, our conversations with community members and partners have shown that one of the most glaring issues remains our lack of formally protected lands and waters. Given the diverse Indigenous communities that have upheld many of their traditions throughout millennia, fostering a strong sense of respect for and reciprocity with nature, and given Canada's strong outdoor culture, ranging from cottagers to campers, this is in stark contrast to the story we tell ourselves, and the rest of the world, about the importance of the natural landscape to the Canadian sense of self. Our efforts to save more lands are being met with considerable community support that we will work to enlarge in the coming five years. We see the national effort to save lands as the start of a movement. Already many experts and activists alike call for a new goal and deadline to be set at 30% of land protected by 2030, which is approaching what many environmentalists have stressed for years: the earth needs half, and only once 50% of the entire globe is protected have we really made progress towards a more sustainable way of life, past arbitrary goals and deadlines that are neither based on Indigenous knowledges nor sound science.

"We must always work together to make positive change for the continuance of Life."
Roronhiakewen (He Clears the Sky), Dan Longboat, Mohawk Scholar, Trent University

The new approach to conservation in Canada that *rare* is modelling, also includes support for Canada's commitment to Aichi Target 18: "By 2020, the traditional knowledge, innovations and practices of Indigenous and local communities relevant for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity, and their customary use of biological resources, are respected, ... and fully integrated and reflected ... with the full and effective participation of Indigenous and local communities, at all relevant levels."

Drawing from the UN declaration, *rare's* work recognizes that "respect for Indigenous knowledge, cultures and traditional practices contributes to sustainable and equitable development and proper management of the environment." It reinforces that we apply an anti-colonial approach to our work, described in the Calls for Justice as "a way of doing things differently, ... recognizing inherent rights through the principle that Indigenous Peoples have the right to govern themselves ... with respect to their special relationship to the land."

In particular, as a not-for-profit charity, we emphasize that the TRC Call to Action No. 92 directly applies to our work environment: we have and will continue to implement the recommendations, providing training to staff and volunteers on the histories of Indigenous Peoples in Canada, including residential schools, treaty rights and responsibilities, and other related matters. We are committed to adjusting our education programs to include this information and to being a resource for educators and parents.

Once you finish reading this 2020-2024 Strategy and Plans report you will see that our work truly touches an amazing array of national and international goals that on first sight one might not expect to be furthered by a conservation organization. However, *rare's* unique position as a land trust and environmental institute addresses a broad spectrum of community needs and challenges, ranging from curbing hunger to reducing inequalities. Throughout the following document, we may refer back to these reports, goals and recommendations to highlight the relevance of *rare's* work in their local, national and international contexts.



Global Report Cards: Improving Canada's Grades

Why the need for our work is urgent and how it addresses challenges in our communities

"Every time we allow a species to go extinct, we're destroying a huge part of the Earth's biological library. ... The tragedy unfolding in our generation is human action destroying diversity ... [and species] before we even knew they existed."

E. O. Wilson, biologist and "father of biodiversity"

At *rare*, we are rooted in our community and take seriously its ability to contribute to national and international goals. In particular, we address:

- **Pathway to Canada Target 1**, the nation-wide initiative which was to help Canada reach its international biodiversity commitments, coming out of the Aichi Targets set in 2010, to conserve at least 17 per cent of its land and freshwater by 2020 through a coordinated network of protected areas, Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas (IPCAs), and other conservation measures; and
- **Sustainable Development Goals** (SDGs) as outlined in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, a plan of action for people, planet and prosperity, resolved to free the human race from the tyranny of poverty and to shift the world onto a sustainable and resilient path.

Recognizing the integral role of Indigenous Peoples as the first leaders in conservation, all of Canada's conservation goals are tightly linked to reconciliation with First Nations, Inuit and Métis Peoples. Likewise, at *rare*, we build our conservation efforts on the:

- **United Nations Declarations on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples** (UNDRIP), a universal framework of minimum standards for the survival, dignity and well-being of the Indigenous Peoples of the world;

- **Truth and Reconciliation Commission** (TRC), with 94 calls to action;
- **Calls for Justice** coming out of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls; and the
- **We Rise Together** report, coming out of the International Circle of Experts (ICE), formed in 2018 as part of the Pathway to Canada Target 1 effort. It provides advice to federal, provincial, territorial and Indigenous governments on how to achieve Canada Target 1 through the appropriate recognition of Indigenous leadership and knowledge systems in the conservation of land and water.

Learning from and working with these frameworks has begun to create a culture throughout the organization that is refreshingly aware of environmental issues in their fullest sense, issues that closely intersect with related social injustices and how, ultimately, these matters will need to be resolved together if we want to have long-term success in making the world a more sustainable place for all. We see a major opportunity for conservation in Canada to find a new path to reconciliation and to engage with Indigenous communities by enabling resurgence of the original stewards of the land and by moving away from the traditional Western approach of 'fortress conservation' that keeps people off the land and out of the equation.

Conservation and Connectivity — Celebrating another five years of advancing science, protecting land and forging new relationships

The launch of *rare*'s 2020-2024 Strategy and Plans means that the previous five-year planning cycle comes to end. We look back with a sense of pride, feeling inspired and empowered by the many people who have crossed our paths, enabling us to meet community needs and to grow as a land trust and environmental institute across Waterloo Region/Wellington. Our Annual Reports for each year from 2015 to 2019 can be found at raresites.org/annual-reports. They tell a vibrant story of the many programs that were successfully implemented and some of the barriers and challenges we faced. We learned from these challenges and they were an incentive to revise our programs to address what the community is asking for and to shape the work for the years ahead.

Please enjoy the following highlights of the implementation of the 2015-2019 Strategy and Plans.



Highlights

2015 - 2019



2015: Prescribed Burn

rare successfully implemented the first prescribed burn on the tallgrass prairie, Blair Flats; a second burn is planned for 2021.



2015: Blair Flats & Bauman Creek Restoration

rare planted nearly 500 trees and shrubs in the riparian area: allowing Bauman Creek to reach the Grand River again for the first time in many years.

2015-2019:

58

new research and art projects began at *rare* and 23 studies were published in peer-reviewed journals

MILESTONE

100

research projects in 2018



2016: *rare* presented with the Ontario Land Trust Alliance (OLTA) Land Trust Leader Award



2017: Launch of the *rare* Turtle Rescue Project

2019 saw the rearing and safe return of 1,839 hatchlings to local Waterloo Region/Wellington County habitats.



Launch of the Corporations for Conservation (C4C) program



2019: Land Securement Strategy & Acquisition of Property One: *rare* protected its first property in Wellington County with 87 acres: starting the *rare* Eramosa River Conservation Corridor.



BioBlitzes

In the past five years, we have hosted six bioblitz events on three different properties with a combined 1,000+ participants and nearly 35,000 wildlife observations made.



Indigenous ways of knowing and being and inquiry through the arts became an integral part of *rare*'s Chain of Learning

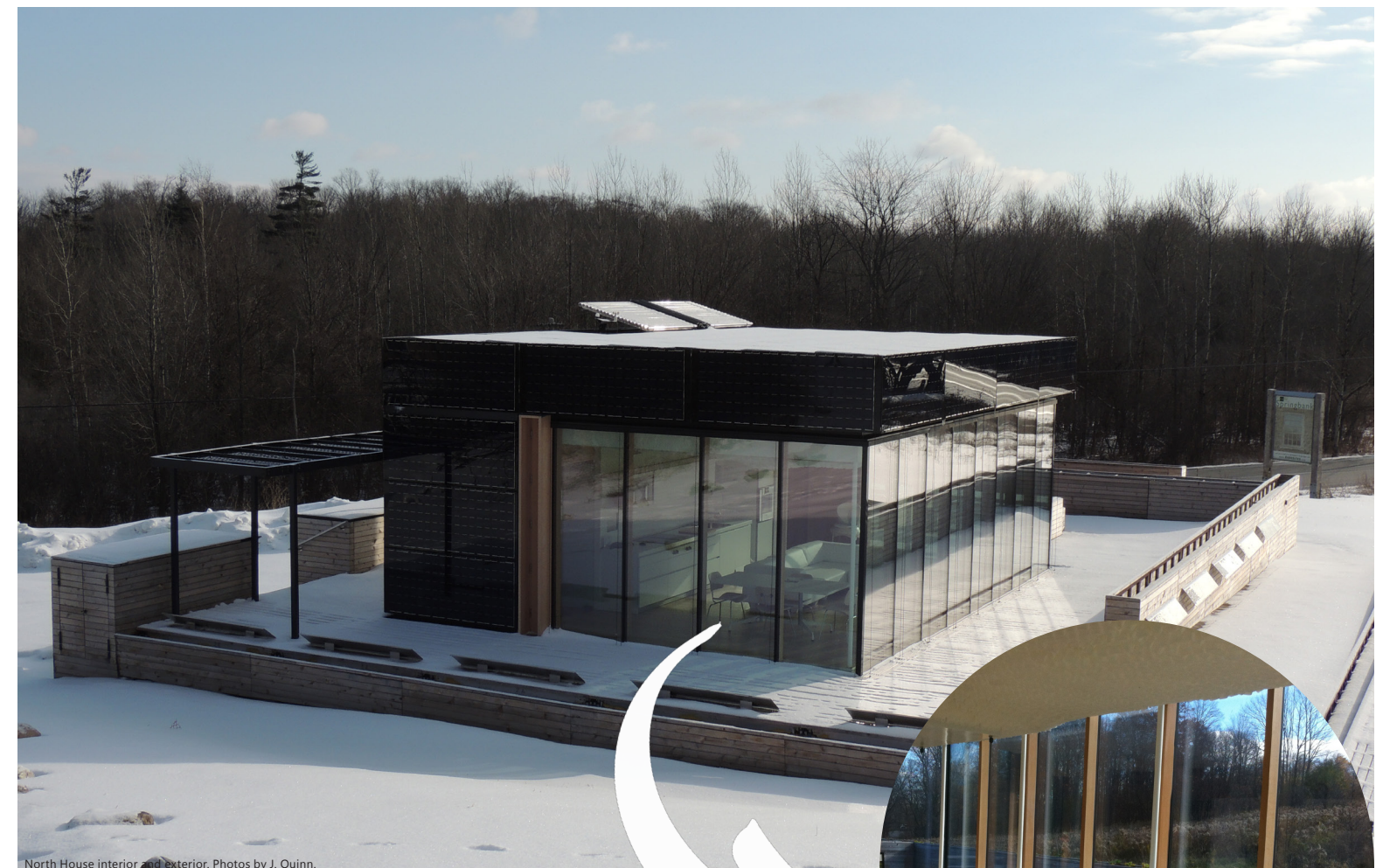
Learn more at raresites.org

rare 2020-2024 Strategy & Plans 11

Our organizational goals for 2020-2024 — Growth and Amplification

1. **Stewardship & Place** — Conservation and restoration of land is *rare's* core priority. We will launch and begin to implement the *raresites* land securement strategy; being on the land and with the land will form the basis for everything else we do.
2. **Braiding & Belonging** — We will continue to invite, make space for and engage with different forms of knowing and being from diverse communities. This includes enabling Indigenous leadership and resurgence while challenging settler assumptions and privileges. It also means making space for the worldviews of youth, newcomers, the Black community, LGBTQ+ identifying peoples, to name only a few communities who have not previously felt they had access to our institutions.
3. **Learning & Inquiring** — Because everything is connected, we will listen to the land, its people, youth and elders. Land management, research and education will move closer together and we will share what we know, how we feel and what we hope for, thereby amplifying our programs and partnerships. We will continue to ask questions, create great art, science and community. “*How do we want to live?*” is at the core of these explorations.
4. **Abundance** — Celebrating our supporters, advisors, volunteers and staff. We will foster further transparency and accountability, create systems and processes that generate a culture of support and shared responsibility for our common goals.

Eramosa Corridor Property One. Photo by A. Zeberek



North House interior and exterior. Photos by J. Quinn.



Spaces that help us achieve our goals: North House

As we plan for new spaces at Lamb's Inn conducive to our programs and our efforts to work together, we also look back on North House, *rare's* solar-powered generator that has hosted many Artists-in-Residence over the years as part of the Eastern Comma Artist-in-Residence program in partnership with the Musagetes Foundation. We want our facilities to allow for collaboration between the creative arts, Indigenous ways of knowing and being, sciences and the environment. Poet and philosopher, Karen Houle, was the first Artist-in-Residence to live at North House, where she spent much of the fall in 2014 writing poetry while immersed in the landscapes at *rare*.

Since then, Karen's work has taken her to Paris as a keynote presenter of *Ecopoésie: Writing Ecological Poetry for Mixed Audiences and Users, A Case Study* at L'École des Hautes Études Sciences Sociales, as part of the Forms to Live the Environment conference in October 2015. In 2019,

Karen was a shortlisted finalist for the Governor General's Award for English-language poetry for her 2019 poetry collection, *The Grand River Watershed: A Folk Ecology*. Here is a draft poem written by Karen during her time at North House, featured in Ayr News in 2014:

*The sun dancing on the roof,
Heat quivers the anodes,
Seven kinds of temperature gradients are
Weathering the planking
Inside, which is almost outside,
Each step a slide,
On the back of a seedpod.
Curly dock, tick-
Tock, off to bed.
My bed without a floor, in the sky*

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS



Climate change and habitat loss remain key threats to biodiversity and cause a wide range of issues threatening human health and well-being. Many of the goals that were a focus in the last planning effort remain relevant and are long-term commitments for *rare*.

Our programs play a key role in addressing these threats and will continue to tie into the related national and international policy framework.

Over the past few years, new conservation programs that were only envisioned five years ago have moved from the planning stage to a success:

The *raresites* land securement team and strategy, and a flourishing turtle nursery, are examples of programs that have significant impact on the environment and that have also been successful community engagement opportunities.

Springbank Farm has grown into a sustainability hub and is a case study demonstrating the braiding of our programs. This work has entrenched food as a significant vehicle to communicate conservation messages while at the same time having a positive impact on the land and the community, particularly from a health, well-being and social justice perspective.

In the next five years, we want to **continue to make stewardship of the land and a focus on place even more explicit in our work**. The *rare* lands are very special to many people in our community and contribute positively in many ways to sustain us through food and by storing carbon, thereby addressing food security and mitigating climate change. Learning from other cultures, particularly Indigenous Elders, has created awareness of values in the land and the work that is not easily measured by Western means, including Spirit and the relationality of all beings. This is not to be confused with new-age spirituality, but rather is a different way of experiencing the land and how we approach working with the land and all its inhabitants, a way that must include humility and gratefulness for what the land provides and what our responsibilities are in return. The land is the biggest storyteller. What can we learn from engaging with it more closely? **Protecting these special places has never been more important.**



The Grand Trunk Trail and Grand River. Photo by D. Crowell

Our goals for sustainable conservation and stewardship of place:

1. We will implement the next phase of the *raresites* land securement strategy that has identified 365 properties in 17 target areas across Waterloo Region/Wellington that are of high ecological significance, connectivity and worthy of protection in perpetuity. **We aim to protect an additional 400 hectares (almost 1,000 acres) in the next five years.**
2. We will continue to build relationships and engage Indigenous communities around land management issues to enable resurgence of the original stewards of the lands and we will honour inherent rights by giving access to ceremony, food and medicines to Indigenous partners. Directly linked to the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, this work is **paving the way for other land trusts to adopt similar approaches and is of national and international relevance.**
3. We will maintain, restore and enhance habitat with methods that are based on Indigenous knowledges and/or scientific research. This will be **inclusive of an increase in sustainable farming and Indigenous land stewardship methods.**
4. We will mitigate risk and damage to all property *rare* stewards and share our approaches with others for **healthy, thriving and connected lands across Waterloo Region/Wellington.**



Bioblitz celebrating Eramosa Corridor Property One. Photo by S. Davison

Our strategies for sustainable conservation and stewardship of place:

- We will develop and use Environmental Stewardship Plans for each *rare* property, based on feedback from community volunteers, Indigenous knowledge keepers, naturalists and other experts.
- For each property to be acquired, we will create plans including maps and other descriptions, narratives and art and share them with a caring community, thereby creating a place-based approach to supporter engagement for funding and stewardship.
- We will adopt and tailor a conservation easement process that works in *rare's* regional context and is also reflective of Indigenous rights and responsibilities.
- We will direct visitors to our community hubs that allow for a safe and sustainable experience of the land and its relations.
- Where possible and desired, we will remove invasive plants and focus on restoration that re-creates a balanced state of habitat, while also accepting and planning for predicted landscape changes resulting from climate change. This means when we plan restoration projects, we look not just at what native species were there or are there now, but also what the landscape will look like in the future as we experience shifting ranges and other challenges.
- **We will explore opportunities to work together with individuals and corporations to provide sites for carbon and other environmental offsets.**
- We will work with the Alternative Land Use System (ALUS) program to support farmers in the sustainable use of farmland ecosystems.
- We will continue to build the Springbank Farm community hub by bringing together gardeners, researchers, Indigenous knowledge keepers, volunteers and artists from all parts of the world, who share a variety of sustainable land use and growing methods. We will work together to save seeds and varieties of foods and medicines and provide food donations to the local food banks, Indigenous feasts and community members in need.

Freure Homes

Freure Homes has been a fixture in the Region of Waterloo for more than 60 years, providing homes for our fast-growing population under the guidance of Harold Freure and, more recently, his son David. Here in southern Ontario where biodiversity is among the highest in the country, development often occurs where significant ecological features also exist. The Freures have embraced their responsibility to the community by not only providing good homes for people but also by attempting to make clear the importance of good homes for other species. They are donating three areas totalling more than 150 acres, consisting of valuable wetlands and floodplains in the cities of Cambridge and Kitchener. These ecologically significant properties will be conserved, providing wildlife habitat and ecological services, such as carbon and nutrient management and flood mitigation, in perpetuity. One gift also includes an area of recharge — collecting clean runoff from residential roofs and yards to support recharge of adjacent significant wetlands. Freure Homes is also working with *rare* to ensure that our new neighbours fully appreciate and respect the green spaces near their homes, seeing them not just as neighbourhood amenities, but rather as parts of the working landscape that provide value to all.



Braiding & Belonging

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS



As acclaimed Sto:Lo writer Lee Maracle put it during her residency at *rare*, “No one in Canada has their original landscape.” We acknowledge that what we consider natural landscapes today, in most areas of the country, are landscapes that have been used and modified by humans for thousands of years. Many alterations of landscapes and habitat in Canada, particularly since European settlement, have been detrimental and led to loss of habitat and biodiversity. Sustainability is an attainable goal, and it can be reached if we recognize people as part of the environment. We must work together towards responsible stewardship.

To this end, community education and engagement based on living together in reciprocity is key to our conservation priority, thereby creating a place where everybody can belong. The human component in our work, always part of our unique method of conservation, has gained an even stronger focus and we will continue to engage a broad cross-section of people, including Indigenous Peoples, newcomers, youth, artists, scientists and other diverse groups with a broad range of worldviews.

More than ten years ago, *rare* began to build relationships with Indigenous Peoples, acknowledging that *rare*’s first three properties are located along the Grand River on lands within the Haldimand Tract, spanning six miles on either side of the Grand River from source to mouth. The early archaeology program uncovered objects on the lands going back more than 10,500 years, confirming the rich, diverse Indigenous presence since time immemorial.

Today, *rare* employs Indigenous staff, engages Indigenous advisors and is renovating to welcome our first Elder-in-Residence program. All of our programs have been opened up to make space for Indigenous knowledges to have an equitable footing with Western scientific knowledges, an approach for which *rare* has long been, and will continue to be, known. Starting with the organization’s Mission, Vision and Values, and extending to all areas of *rare*’s Chain of Learning, Indigenous ways of being and knowing are recognized.



Community gathering at Stone, Clay and Fire. Photo courtesy of D. Russell

Our goals for Braiding & Belonging to build healthy communities:

1. We will build greater diversity across the organization, reflecting community and increasing resilience, program relevance and potential.
2. We will continue to broaden the scope from “academic excellence” to being inclusive to other knowledge systems, including the arts and different forms of learning, teaching and inquiry.
3. We will focus our messages to be accessible to a broader spectrum of the community and to have a broader reach in national and international publications.
4. We will develop a land-based program approach that fosters healing and health through experiencing and engaging with the land and each other. This is a first step to address the many crises we are facing including homelessness, opioid use, suicide rates and mental health issues.



Peter and Chelsea Ramgolam working in their community garden plot. Photo by J. Roberts

Our strategies for Braiding & Belonging to build healthy communities:

- We will tell stories and synthesize ideas in an engaging, even gripping way. What are the stories coming out of the work and the people who are engaged through the work that demonstrate how local impact has global significance?
- We will create an Anti-Racism and Equity Task Force to implement staff trainings and to steer systemic change within our organization to make our work and work environment equitable.
- We will critically review our work with a diversity lens and change processes, including hiring of staff and recruitment of volunteers, to be inclusive and accessible to marginalized peoples.
- We will remove barriers to program participation by subsidizing fees where possible.
- We will create intentional accountable spaces for marginalized peoples.
- We will continue to seek out learning opportunities for anti-colonial approaches and implement recommendations from *Toward Braiding*, a resource developed by Elwood Jimmy and Vanessa Andreotti, in partnership with Musagetes.
- We will work with local social justice and health organizations through an Inner City Health Alliance to make our community more livable by developing an eco-health program, particularly Indigenous-led healing circles for people of all nations.
- We will identify program needs for underserved groups and adults, for example by working with newcomers, people with disabilities and people from the LGBTQ+ and BIPOC community.

Stone, Clay and Fire: Making A Circle

As part of CAFKA 18, internationally acclaimed Indigenous artist, Don Russell, engaged with the community and welcomed Indigenous Elder Peter Schuler from the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation who spoke about the history of the land.

After digging a narrow circular trench and lining the edges with rings of stones, Russell filled the trench with red clay, on top of which he placed firewood. With three weeks in June for this preparation, Russell and a team

of volunteers then lit the firewood and ensured the fire burned 24/7 for a week to bake the clay.

He says he conceived of the project to act as a point of connection between Indigenous and settler populations. The public was invited to spend time on the land at this meeting place of contemplation and sharing. The form of the artwork was inspired by historical Indigenous trails and their influence on the physical networks of today. Its lasting presence on the land is a

symbol of the Indigenous presence and its lasting wisdom. The colour red was chosen as a connection to the earth though our mothers. The fire brings us together in a celebratory way.

Don Russell and photographer, Alex Ortega, have made a limited edition of the image available to support *rare*’s programs. To learn about how you can purchase a limited-edition print, contact Chris Ainsworth, Sponsorship & Events Manager at Chris.Ainsworth@raresites.org.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS



Since inception, *rare* has worked hard to foster inclusiveness, which has become an integral part of how we learn on the land. Researchers, for example, are part of the community and engage on a peer-to-peer level with old and young alike. We provide hands-on experiences and our learning is active, problem-based and driven by inquiry. At *rare*, everything is a research opportunity, and every research opportunity is also a learning opportunity for the community as a whole — including for the researchers themselves who are challenged to learn from other lines of inquiry and ways of knowing, and to recognize and understand the implicit biases of their own cultures and training. In fact, we believe that everyone is born a researcher, and the way children appreciate the world with a sense of wonder and ask inquisitive questions demonstrates this every day.

Conservation is our priority and research is our priority program, feeding into our education program via the *rare Chain of Learning* that extends from the most senior scientists and Indigenous knowledge keepers to the youngest children. Over a dozen universities are represented on our list of partners, with over 100 research projects listing *rare* as their site or case study. More than 40 of these studies are published in international peer-reviewed journals.

The outdoor environmental education component of the *Chain of Learning* is called *Every Child Outdoors* (ECO), reflecting *rare*’s belief that every child should have the opportunity to be in nature, guided by strong role models who promote an enthusiasm for learning and a caring for our natural environment. Their time with scientists, Indigenous knowledge keepers and practitioners in many fields, including artists or storytellers, opens their eyes to different ways of knowing and being and even to career possibilities. This ensures that a new generation understands their responsibility to protect the Earth and undertake a process of healing through being on the land.

As we commit to listen to the land, its people, youth and elders, we hope that we see research and education move closer together as we share what we know, how we feel and the futures we hope for. The next five years will see *rare* amplifying programs and partnerships. We will continue to ask questions, create great art, do creative science and build community. Rather than defining specific research focus areas in this plan, the question at the core of all of these explorations will be: “*How do we want to live?*”

Already, huge gains have been made in research with regard to the quantity and diversity of projects in the last five years. The establishment of two in-house research fellowships in addition to a student bursary program, have affirmed *rare* as a collaborative, multi-disciplinary environmental institute with local, national and international recognition.



A lesson for ECO Campers. Photo by E. Leslie

Our goals for learning and exploring to discover new ideas and sustainable solutions:

1. We will increase the amount of applied research by creating a network of research sites and opportunities.
2. We will build direct relationships with universities and other research partners through collaboration.
3. We will review all education modules and camp programs and launch a revised ECO program, deeply rooted in *rare*’s *Chain of Learning*. These programs will be land-based and inclusive of different forms of inquiry while they meet the requirements of the curriculum and reflect community interests and needs. One such need that has been identified is the importance of de-colonial education and including the education recommendations from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.
4. We will build strong relationships with all local school boards and private schools, demonstrated through growing student participation as well as formal partnerships.
5. We will create new programs that are reflective of *rare*’s work as a growing international environmental institute. This will include fellowships, a revised internship program and residencies for Elders, artists and researchers.
6. We will continue to build momentum around community-building by creating events and other engagement opportunities that offer many touch-points and different ways of participation.



ECO Camper with bug. Photo by E. Leslie

Our strategies for learning and exploring to discover new ideas and sustainable solutions:

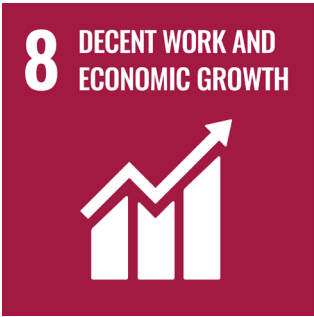
- We will continue to build and liaise with our network of researchers and work with universities and colleges on applications for government grants such as NSERC and SSHRC, while creating proposals for individual support that would result in new research opportunities at *rare*. This includes working in close collaboration with Musagetes and GIER (Guelph Institute for Environmental Research), growing art-science collaborations in climate change, creating a young science writers program and highlighting interdisciplinary research.
- We will work towards growing a partnership with the public school board by supporting the U-Turn program, designing land-based learning opportunities for high school students who struggle to be successful in a traditional academic setting.
- We will work with local school boards to find meaningful ways to support their EcoSchools Canada certification participation.
- Where desired, we will develop tailored programs for private schools that currently have no access to formal environmental learning outdoors.
- Indigenous education consultants, teachers, youth and knowledge keepers will be engaged to ensure the Indigenous program pieces are based on truth, are culturally relevant and not appropriated. The program will be supported by purpose-built spaces, such as a tipi and Elder’s room.
- We will increase our outreach and collaboration with other organizations to increase the engagement of youth in conservation. We will grow our partnership with Musagetes and apply what we have learned from previous joint projects to amplify joint programs, including hosting academic and non-academic fellows, creating a lecture series and a festival for *rare*.
- We will re-launch *rare*’s Research Forum as *rare*’s Community Showcase for Art and Science.
- We will work more closely with local social services organizations to engage new Canadians in land-based programs.
- We will form a planning committee and launch *rare*’s first International Women’s Summit for the Environment — Planet Femme, bringing together female leaders from the arts, science, Indigenous community and industry.

Engaging students in Indigenous land-based art

Last fall, *rare* was pleased to host the Founding Chair of the Indigenous Visual Culture program and an Associate Professor Emerita at OCAD University, Bonnie Devine, as the 2019 Artist-in-Residence. During her time at *rare*, she also worked with 20 students from Preston High School to explore the issues of land and environment using image-making traditions. The students created prints using natural dyes, wildflowers and plants found on the *rare* reserve. Both students and teachers were thrilled with the results and the experience of bringing nature to paper.

Bonnie is an installation artist, sculptor, painter, video maker, curator and writer. A descendant of the Anishinaabe of Genaabaa-jing (Serpent River First Nation), on the north shore of Lake Huron, Bonnie develops work that emerges from the storytelling and image-making traditions that are central to the culture of the Anishinaabek peoples. Using cross-disciplinary approaches and iterations of written, visual and performative practice, Bonnie explores issues of land, environment, treaty, history and narrative.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS



As our vision and work is growing, so does our responsibility to make the protection of land intact in perpetuity truly a promise kept. To accomplish this, we need to continue to build staff and volunteer capacity that is reliable, allows for continuity and ensures an organizational culture that people want to commit to long-term. This includes an ability to keep up with inflation and the increasing costs of living and doing business by offering decent work conditions for employees and advisors, offering benefits, and paying honoraria and living wages. It also means that collegiality and support to overcome barriers is a key element of how we work with each other and succeed as a team. What can we do as an employer to make *rare* one of the most attractive places to work for the environment? This is a question we need to continue to ask constantly, pursuing new ideas and incentives to retain highly skilled and experienced staff, while training new interns and graduates.

We need to put appropriate systems and processes in place to manage the organization through a period of growth that will also require increased accountability and transparency to the supporters who make our growth possible. Fostering a culture of philanthropy will be key to our success, ensuring that our donors and volunteers receive recognition for the fantastic support that is the foundation for all work at *rare*.

The organization has undergone many technological upgrades that make our work more efficient and we will continue to improve our equipment and facilities to keep up with the demands of growing programs and a growing number of staff and volunteers. We like to approach our work from a perspective of abundance: not only do we have many challenges and opportunities, especially in the time of a global pandemic, but we also are excited by the creative new ways of working that are developing and we are optimistic that we can diversify our funding sources to support this work, approaching individuals, foundations, corporations and government. Entrepreneurial opportunities exist that can contribute earned revenue; for example, through facility rental opportunities.



KPMG and rare staff volunteering and working in the rail garden. Photo by A. Frazer

Our goals for a thriving organization that fosters a culture of support:

- 1. We will improve management and administrative processes with clearly defined responsibilities and oversight.
- 2. We will continue to improve hiring, training and performance evaluation processes for staff and volunteers to ensure a diverse workforce with a diverse skill-set and a team that works collaboratively toward joint goals.
- 3. We will continue to stress the importance of volunteer support, including board development and improved volunteer recognition and retention.
- 4. We will implement a communications plan that is interactive and inclusive of community engagement opportunities.
- 5. We will complete master planning, including plans for Lamb’s Inn Phase 3 (addition) and Springbank Farmhouse to continue to increase purpose-built program spaces.
- 6. We will create an endowment fund, a major milestone towards greater financial sustainability for the organization.



rare staff on the Grand Trunk Trail. Photo by L. Klein

Our strategies for a thriving organization that fosters a culture of support:

- We will hire a Manager of Finance, Fundraising and Administration to oversee the work of the fundraising and administrative team, with a focus on producing monthly and annual reports that allow us to understand our supporters and to make the most appropriate management decisions.
- We will train staff in human resources and volunteer management and continue to improve policies for a culture that fosters diversity and accessibility of our services.
- We will engage the local newcomer and BIPOC community in developing training and placement programs for skills used in the environmental sector to increase the diversity of participation and career paths for marginalized individuals in the industry.
- We will organize an annual volunteer celebration event and work with key volunteers as organizers for stewardship and other volunteer groups.
- Our communications will seek engagement organizing opportunities and include avenues for multi-way conversations through our website, surveys, social media and community events. This includes interactions with donors and volunteers.
- We will bring a team of architects and advisors together and produce a master plan for the organization, including design and fundraising plans for Lamb’s Inn and the Springbank Farmhouse.
- We will include in our fundraising plans for future projects and programs opportunities to also support the endowment; for example, we will have a stewardship endowment fund for every new parcel of land that is acquired and for our operations on the original lands. We will also invite donors to consider supporting *rare*’s work well into the future through a legacy gift in their wills.

The power of ‘social learning’

Madhur Anand, Professor; Director of the Guelph Institute for Environmental Research at the University of Guelph and *rare* Board Member has been researching the power of human behaviour to shape environmental trajectories. Madhur suggests that ‘social learning’ is a powerful tool for lasting change, because humans learn from each other and change their behaviour accordingly. Our behaviour as individuals and as a species has the power to shape climate change. But how can we change our behaviour to mitigate the climate crisis and build a sustainable community?

In an article for the World Economic Forum, Madhur shared that in times of crisis such as the Covid-19 pandemic, we

connect even more strongly with our natural surroundings. Many became aware of how crucial natural refuges are to their wellbeing, especially as natural and green spaces became closed to control transmission of the virus. We have been learning valuable lessons in resilience and human adaptability as we worked to respond to the pressures of the pandemic, creating new social norms with new respect for the natural world. When we imagine how we might be able to harness these lessons and our choices to reduce the risk of catastrophes such as the climate crisis, Madhur states we can move closer to long-term solutions to meet the Sustainable Development Goals.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank and acknowledge all staff, volunteers, board, committee and community members who took the time to reflect thoughtfully on the accomplishments and lessons of the last five years and who looked forward with us to the next five years with determination, hope and pride. This report is the result of many discussions, town hall input and community survey responses, all helping to ensure that we devise the most inclusive plans as we work towards building a more sustainable and resilient community together. Every step of our progress is thanks to you, our readers and supporters — thank you!

Springbank Farm entrance Photo by D. Crowell

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