



**Ottawa Rural Clean  
Water Program  
2021-2025 Review and  
Renewal**

March 24, 2026



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## **1. Background**

### **1.1. Purpose of the Review**

The Ottawa Rural Clean Water Program (ORCWP) provides cost-share grants to farmers and other rural landowners for projects that protect surface and groundwater quality. The program has operated since 2000 through a partnership with the South Nation, Rideau Valley, and Mississippi Valley Conservation Authorities. As part of the City of Ottawa's Grants and Contributions Policy, the ORCWP must be reviewed and re-affirmed in each new Term of Council. The 2021-2025 Program was last renewed in 2021 at \$200,000 per year ending in 2025.

A Program Review was undertaken to:

- Review the current Program design, delivery, and feasibility.
- Evaluate the Program against its goals, objectives, and expected outcomes.
- Evaluate the overall allocation, monitoring, and reporting framework.
- Examine opportunities to streamline and/or standardize the grant process.

This report shares the findings of the review and proposes recommendations for a renewed Program for 2026-2030.

### **1.2. Overview of the Ottawa Rural Clean Water Program**

The City of Ottawa established the Ottawa Rural Clean Water Program in 2000 and renewed it in 2004, 2010, 2015 and 2021 following Program Reviews. The 2021-2025 Program was delivered in partnership with South Nation Conservation, Rideau Valley Conservation Authority, and Mississippi Valley Conservation Authority. South Nation Conservation leads the Program's administration, and the Program is funded by the City through a Conservation Authority special levy of \$200,000 per year.

The ORCWP offers grants of up to \$15,000 for 19 project types that include a variety of agricultural best management practices, erosion control, septic system repair/replacement, and well decommissioning (Table 1). Since the ORCWP began in 2000, the Program has supported over 1,600 projects with nearly \$3.3 million in grants. Landowners contributed an additional \$11.3 million towards those projects at an average rate of \$3.43 for every dollar granted by the City (Annex 1).

**Table 1** - Eligible projects from 2021-2025

<b>Eligible Projects</b>	<b>Maximum Grant</b>	
Chemical or fuel storage	50%	\$2,000
Clean water diversion	50%	\$5,000
Cover crops <sup>1</sup>	N/A	\$3,000
Educational initiatives	75%	\$5,000
Erosion control	90%	\$7,500
Forest and wetland management plan	75%	\$750
Innovative projects	50%	\$5,000
Land retirement incentive <sup>2</sup>	N/A	\$4,500
Manure storage and treatment	50%	\$15,000
Natural windbreaks	75%	\$6,000
Nutrient management plan/precision farming	50%	\$2,000
Septic system repair/replacement	50%	\$2,000
Tile drain control structures	75%	\$5,000
Tile outlet erosion control	75%	\$2,500
Washwater treatment	50%	\$5,000
Watercourse buffers	90%	\$7,500
Watercourse fencing	90%	\$7,500
Well decommissioning	90%	\$3,000
Wetland restoration	50%	\$5,000

<sup>1</sup>Performance incentive of \$50/acre/year; maximum of 20 acres, 3 years

<sup>2</sup>Performance incentive of \$150/acre/year; maximum of 10 acres, 3 years

Grants are available for:

- Any property in rural Ottawa
- Agricultural, well decommissioning, and septic projects within Ottawa’s urban boundary
- Non-profit organizations for demonstration and other educational projects

The 2021-2025 Program included several significant changes, as follows:

- Wetland restoration was introduced as a new eligible project type.
- Project criteria were modified for cover crops, septic system repair/replacement, and erosion control.
- Grant structures were modified (increase to cost share or grant amounts) for tile drain control structures, chemical/fuel storage, nutrient management plan/precision farming, and septic system repair/replacement.

- Staff level approvals were implemented, and site visits reinstated, for forest management plans, septic system repair/replacement, and well decommissioning.
- Application form was updated to accept online submissions and electronic signatures.
- Program Committee membership was offered to agricultural organizations not currently involved and interested citizens and/or Review Committee members.
- Opportunities to complete an online survey were provided immediately following grant payment.

### 1.3. Methodology

A Project Charter detailing the methodology for the Program Review was approved in June 2025, taking into consideration the City's Grants and Contributions Policy. The Review was led by the City of Ottawa and supported by the Conservation Authority partners, with input from Program Committee (Annex 2) and Review Committee members.

The Review focused on:

- *Environmental Scan*: review of 2021-2025 projects and participants, other clean water stewardship programs across Ontario, and water quality monitoring data.
- *Program Goal*: review of the current goal and objectives.
- *Program Design*: review priority project types and consider the addition and/or removal of specific project types.
- *Program Delivery*: review current administration procedures, promotion and communication methods.
- *Governance, Monitoring and Reporting*: review effectiveness of Program Committee structure and evaluate monitoring and reporting framework.
- *Interest Holder Engagement*: conduct interviews with key interest holders and surveys of participants to gather insights on the program from diverse perspectives.
- *Analysis of Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Barriers (SWOB)*: based on interest holder interviews and surveys of program participants.
- *Integrated Analysis and Program Recommendations*: based on the above, determine the effectiveness of the Program, while identifying opportunities and gaps, and develop recommendations for improvement.

A key task as part of this five-year Program Review involved undertaking a web-based review of 34 other rural clean water stewardship programs across Ontario. The results of this assessment are summarized in Section 2.2, with details available in Annex 3.

Key interest holders for the ORCWP, including Conservation Authority partners, Program Committee members, Review Committee members, and City of Ottawa staff, were given the opportunity to provide feedback on the 2021-2025 Program between June 2025 to September 2025. Interest holders were invited to complete a questionnaire to assess their insights and experience with the ORCWP, and they were given the option to respond to the questions during a verbal interview or using an online form. Seven respondents participated in a verbal interview, and another seven provided feedback using the online questionnaire (a response rate of 33%). Feedback from interest holders is included throughout the Program Review Findings, with details available in Annex 5.

Program participants had the opportunity to share their feedback through an online survey following project completion and grant payment. Conservation Authority staff sent email notifications to grant recipients with a link to the survey and encouraging them to take part. The survey gave participants an opportunity to share their experiences with the Program, their reasons for completing projects, and the benefits that they observed. Survey participants were also encouraged to suggest improvements in how the Program is delivered, administered, and promoted. Seventy-five participants completed the survey (a 28% response rate). Feedback from participants is included throughout the Program Review Findings, with details available in Annex 5.

The review categorized and analyzed the feedback and ideas shared by interest holders and program participants in terms of strengths, weakness/challenges, opportunities, and barriers (SWOB analysis). Several broad themes emerged from this analysis, and these are summarized in Annex 5. The review used this information to guide the development of recommendations for the 2026-2030 Program.

## **2. Program Review Findings**

The following sections examine:

- Program outcomes
- Environmental scan
- Program goal and objectives
- Program design
- Program delivery, including administration, promotion and budget
- Program governance, monitoring and reporting

## 2.1. Program Outcomes

### Completed Projects

Since 2021, the Program has supported 271 grants totalling \$671,425 (Table 2). A further 28 projects are currently underway and represent another \$142,262 in committed funding. The total value of grants (allocated and committed) from 2021 to 2025 represents \$813,678. Some landowners have carried out multiple projects, as eligible landowners could receive up to \$25,000 in combined grants for the 2021-2025 term. A total of 231 individual landowners received funding under the ORCWP over this 5-year period.

The project types with the highest uptake were forest and wetland management plans, natural windbreaks / watercourse buffers (grouped together for reporting purposes), erosion control, and well decommissioning. Over half of all grant funds (60%) were allocated to erosion control projects, and well decommission projects received 14% of funding. The remaining funds (26%) were allocated to natural windbreaks / watercourse buffers, forest management plans, watercourse fencing, wetland restoration, nutrient management plans/precision farming, land retirement incentives, septic system repair/replacement, cover crops, and tile drain control structures. No projects were completed in the following categories: chemical or fuel storage, clean water diversion, educational initiatives, innovative projects, manure storage and treatment, tile outlet control structures or washwater treatment. There was no support among interest holders to discontinue any project types; all were viewed as worthy, even those with lower uptake.

Many projects reflect considerable investment by landowners; in 2021-2025 landowners contributed more than \$1 million for a total project value of over \$1.7 million. In addition, projects that are currently underway represent over \$200,000 that landowners plan to invest towards rural land stewardship. For further details on program outcomes, see Annex 1.

**Table 2** – Projects completed or underway from 2021-2025

Project Type	Projects Completed			Projects Underway <sup>1</sup>		
	Number of Projects	Grant Amount	Total Project Cost	Number of Projects	Grant Amount	Estimated Project Cost
Chemical or fuel storage	0	\$0	\$0	0	\$0	\$0
Clean water diversion	0	\$0	\$0	0	\$0	\$0
Cover crops	5	\$4,700	\$4,700	0	\$0	\$0
Educational initiatives	0	\$0	\$0	1	\$5,000	\$60,336
Erosion control	56	\$400,417	\$951,800	12	\$86,750	\$214,218
Forest and wetland management plan	79	\$42,926	\$61,817	1	\$450	\$600
Innovative projects	0	\$0	\$0	0	\$0	\$0
Land retirement incentive	8	\$6,713	\$6,713	1	\$1,500	\$1,500
Manure storage and treatment	0	\$0	\$0	0	\$0	\$0
Natural windbreaks/watercourse buffers	57	\$60,907	\$194,551	3	\$15,090	\$20,885
Nutrient management plan/precision farming	5	\$7,766	\$61,416	2	\$3,592	\$22,284
Septic system repair/replacement	7	\$11,000	\$230,094	1	\$2,000	\$28,800
Tile drain control structures	1	\$2,991	\$5,981	0	\$0	\$0
Tile outlet erosion control	0	\$0	\$0	0	\$0	\$0
Washwater treatment	0	\$0	\$0	0	\$0	\$0
Watercourse fencing	4	\$26,676	\$70,879	0	\$0	\$0
Well decommissioning	46	\$92,330	\$109,256	2	\$2,880	\$3,200
Wetland restoration	3	\$15,000	\$41,274	5	\$25,000	\$135,000
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>271</b>	<b>\$671,425</b>	<b>\$1,739,289</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>\$142,262</b>	<b>\$486,823</b>

<sup>1</sup>Projects underway based on data available on January 27, 2026 and subject to change

As a result of projects completed between 2021-2025:

- Over 50 hectares of sensitive land have been retired from agricultural production.
- Nearly 40 hectares of farmland have been protected from erosion by cover crops.
- Over 450 hectares of farmland have improved nutrient management with precision farming techniques and Nutrient Management Plans.
- Over 2 kilometres of streambanks have been protected from erosion.
- 1,752 hectares of forest were protected through forest management plans.
- Over 112,000 trees have been planted along 6.9 kilometres of watercourses or natural windbreaks.
- The risks of surface and groundwater contamination at 55 sites have been reduced through well decommissioning.
- Repairs and replacements of septic systems have reduced nutrient runoff into local watercourses by an amount equivalent to 13.8 kilograms of phosphorus each year<sup>1</sup>.

### ***Program Participation***

Projects have been undertaken across the City in all rural wards and some urban wards (Table 3 and Annex 1). More traditional agricultural projects such as cover crops, nutrient management plans, and precision farming occurred Orléans South-Navan. All rural wards benefitted from projects to retire marginal land from production. Most forest management plans were completed in West Carleton-March and Rideau-Jock, in areas of Ottawa with higher forest cover and less productive agricultural lands.

Most erosion control projects, along with many projects to create or enhance natural windbreaks and/or watercourse buffers, were completed on rural residential properties along the Rideau River (Figure 1). Twenty-two projects have occurred within the City's urban wards, including 6 for well decommissioning and for 7 windbreaks/buffers.

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<sup>1</sup> Calculated by South Nation Conservation's Phosphorus Trading Program

**Figure 1.** Shoreline erosion control (before and after) along the Rideau River



**Table 3** – Projects completed or underway from 2021-2025 by City of Ottawa ward

Ward	Agricultural Projects	Erosion Control	Forest Management Plans	Well Decommissioning	Other Projects	Total
<b>Orléans East-Cumberland</b>						
No. of Projects	2	0	2	2	1	7
Grant Amount	\$6,445	\$0	\$1,200	\$5,638	\$1,000	\$14,283
<b>Orléans South-Navan</b>						
No. of Projects	8	0	7	2	0	17
Grant Amount	\$10,304	\$0	\$4,538	\$2,610	\$0	\$17,452
<b>Osgoode</b>						
No. of Projects	16	22	14	11	1	64
Grant Amount	\$32,142	\$156,326	\$7,186	\$19,631	\$5,000	\$220,285
<b>Rideau-Jock</b>						
No. of Projects	31	41	25	22	6	125
Grant Amount	\$23,232	\$296,612	\$13,058	\$39,206	\$18,000	\$390,107
<b>West Carleton-March</b>						
No. of Projects	21	3	31	5	4	64
Grant Amount	\$41,498	\$19,230	\$16,946	\$19,323	\$12,000	\$108,997
<b>Other Wards</b>						
No. of Projects	8	2	1	6	5	22
Grant Amount	\$16,312	\$15,000	\$450	\$8,802	\$22,000	\$62,564
<b>Total</b>						
No. of Projects	86	68	80	48	17	299
Grant Amount	\$129,933	\$487,167	\$43,376	\$95,210	\$58,000	\$813,686

Beginning in 2015, the program database began recording information on property type, such as farm, rural non-farm, and residential. Along with property size, information on property type can provide insights on the type of landowners that utilize the program.

Of the 297 projects approved since 2021, 60 (20%) took place on farms, 99 (33%), took place on rural non-farm properties and 133 (45%) took place on residential properties. This represents a 6% decrease in the proportion of farm projects when compared with the period from 2016-2021.

Landowners of all property sizes have completed projects (for both farm and non-farm properties), reflecting the range of property sizes across the City. Most farms that carried out projects were less than 50 hectares in size (62%), and most rural non-farm properties that carried out projects were less than 20 hectares in size (57%) (Annex 1).

While the Program has successfully engaged a diversity of farm and non-farm property owners, some interest holders expressed the view that the ORCWP seems more geared towards large rural farms. There is a perception that not a lot of funding opportunities are available for properties in rural villages, and it's not clear if rural non-farm businesses are eligible.

## **2.2. Environmental Scan**

### ***Other Clean Water Programs in Ontario***

Many municipalities across Ontario offer similar clean water programs in partnership with their local Conservation Authorities. In addition, three agricultural stewardship programs for farm businesses are available in Ontario and were included as part of this review (ALUS Ontario East, ALUS Mississippi-Rideau, and the Ontario Soil and Crop Improvement Association's (OSCIA) Resilient Agricultural Landscape Program). A web-based scan of 34 programs was undertaken to summarize overall trends across the Province and to identify possible areas of improvement for the ORCWP (see details in Annex 3).

Table 4 shows the types of grants available through the programs that were reviewed. Projects are organized according to those offered and not currently offered by the ORCWP. Table 4 also shows the percentage of programs that offer each project type along with the range of grants and cost-share amounts that are available.

Projects that are directly related to the protection of water quality are common across most programs and include grants for erosion control (85%), cover crops (71%), and watercourse buffers (77%). Agricultural best management practices in connection with nutrient management are also widespread and include grants for watercourse fencing to restrict livestock (79%), clean water diversion (68%), and manure storage and treatment (41%). Well decommissioning prevents groundwater contamination by sealing unused wells, and 71% of programs offer funding for this project type. Many programs (53%)

incentivize the creation or restoration of wetlands on rural properties to increase percentage of wetland cover on the landscape; the ORCWP added a category for wetland restoration beginning in 2021 (Figure 2).

**Figure 2:** Wetland restoration project completed near North Gower in Rideau-Jock ward



Funding offered by the ORCWP is generally in line with or greater than other programs across the province (based on median values). The grant amount available through the ORCWP for well decommission projects is 90% up to \$3,000, and this is one of the most generous amounts of all programs reviewed. Funding amounts for two project types are on the lower end of the range, when compared with other programs, including cover crops and septic system repair/replacement.

One project category frequently offered by other programs but not the ORCWP includes natural habitat creation and restoration (65%). Many programs encourage farmers and rural landowners to restore or enhance woodlands, native grasslands and meadows and to create pollinator habitat. Some programs offer funding to create nesting and shelter structures for wildlife such as bird boxes, bat boxes, basking areas and snake hibernacula. A few programs offer funding for stream restoration projects such as dam/barrier removal, on-line pond decommissioning and the construction of fish ladders.

Well upgrading, replacement and protection is another category regularly offered by other programs (44%). Funding for well upgrades was previously offered by the ORCWP but was discontinued in 2011 to prioritize Program resources for projects that protect water quality for the greatest public benefit. A small number of programs include additional project types such as deadstock composting, invasive plant species management, and stormwater management (urban or rural). While beneficial to the local environment, projects such as these are not directly related to rural water quality.

Most programs reviewed (85%) target their funding for farm and non-farm rural landowners in a manner similar to the ORCWP. Five programs are exclusively for registered farm businesses and agricultural landowners that file farm business taxes in

Ontario. Fourteen programs offered to farms require the completion of an Environmental Farm Plan (EFP), and three programs strongly encourage farm-based applicants to complete an EFP. Four programs require non-farm landowners to complete an action plan like the Healthy Homes Guidebook or Rural Landowner Stewardship Guide.

**Table 4 - Summary of grants available through other clean water programs in Ontario**

Project Type	Programs to Offer <sup>1</sup>	Range of Grants Available	Range of Cost-Share Available
<b><i>Projects available through the Ottawa Rural Clean Water Program</i></b>			
Chemical or fuel storage	35%	\$500 - \$4,000	50% - 70%
Clean water diversion	68%	\$1,500 - \$15,000	50% - 75%
Cover crops <sup>2</sup>	71%	\$500 - \$30,000	N/A
Educational initiatives	24%	\$500 - \$4,000	50% - 100%
Erosion control	85%	\$1,000 - \$20,000	30% - 100%
Forest and wetland management plan	15%	\$500 - \$2,000	30% - 75%
Innovative projects	50%	\$2,500 - \$10,000	50% - 100%
Land retirement incentive <sup>2</sup>	56%	\$2,000 - \$10,500	50% - 80%
Manure storage and treatment	41%	\$2,500 - \$30,000	30% - 75%
Natural windbreaks	50%	\$2,000 - \$10,000	50% - 100%
Nutrient management plan	44%	\$500 - \$15,000	50% - 100%
Precision farming	9%	\$1,000 - \$50,000	50% - 75%
Septic system repair/replacement	35%	\$400 - \$10,000	30% - 50%
Tile drain control structures	15%	\$1,000 - \$5,000	50% - 80%
Tile outlet erosion control	9%	\$3,000 - \$40,000	30% - 90%
Washwater treatment	29%	\$2,000 - \$20,000	30% - 50%
Watercourse buffers	77%	\$1,000 - \$20,000	50% - 100%
Watercourse fencing	79%	\$2,000 - \$20,000	50% - 100%
Well decommissioning	71%	\$500 - \$4,000	50% - 100%
Wetland restoration	53%	\$3,000 - \$20,000	50% - 100%
<b><i>Projects not available through the Ottawa Rural Clean Water Program</i></b>			
Deadstock composting	12%	\$4,000	50%
Integrated pest management	6%	\$5,000	50%
Invasive plant species management	9%	\$3,000 - \$10,000	30% - 100%
Irrigation water management	6%	\$10,000	50%
Natural habitat creation, restoration	65%	\$2,000 - \$20,000	50% - 100%
Silage storage enhancement, relocation	6%	\$10,000 - \$18,000	50%
Tree planting	59%	\$2,500 - \$15,000	50% - 100%
Stormwater management (urban or rural)	21%	\$750 - \$7,500	50%
Well upgrading, replacement, protection	44%	\$500 - \$4,000	50% - 100%

<sup>1</sup>Based on an online review of 34 active rural clean water programs

<sup>2</sup>Often available as a performance incentive on per acre per year basis

### **Water Quality Indicators**

The City of Ottawa has an extensive network of watercourses, and the Ottawa, Rideau, and Mississippi Rivers are prominent features across the landscape. There are close to 4,700 km of watercourses in Ottawa, where 3,500 km are natural and 1,200 km are Municipal Drains. More than 80% of these watercourses are in the rural areas and villages, and 88% of rural watercourses run through private property.

The City's Stormwater Management and Environmental Monitoring branch, in partnership with the three local Conservation Authorities, monitors water quality at 131 locations across 51 rivers and streams<sup>2</sup>. Technicians carry out monthly sampling during the ice-free period, and each sample is analyzed for 52 different chemical parameters. Each location is assessed using provincial and federal guidelines, including Provincial Water Quality Objectives (PWQO), the Canadian Water Quality Guidelines (CWQG) for the Protection of Aquatic Life, and the Canadian Council of Ministers of the Environment (CCME) Water Quality Index.

Overall, the water quality in the City's larger rivers is good and rarely exceeds objectives. Locations with poor water quality tend to be smaller streams in areas that are heavily influenced by urban runoff or agriculture. Apart from the main channel of the Ottawa River and naturalized areas upstream of the urban area, phosphorus is a concern in all the City's rivers and streams. The 75<sup>th</sup> percentile values for total phosphorus regularly exceed water quality targets in many locations right across the City (See Annex 4 for details).

Many factors influence water quality and watershed health, and it is difficult to measure the impact of the ORCWP, or individual projects, using the monitoring data. This data is useful for guiding Program outreach activities and showing that there continues to be many opportunities to improve water quality in both rural and urban areas. Working with landowners to reduce erosion, maintain natural shorelines, and manage nutrients through agricultural best management practices are well established ways to continue to protect and improve water quality and overall watershed health.

### **2.3. Program Goal and Objectives**

The overall goal of the ORCWP is to protect Ottawa's streams, rivers, wetlands and groundwater by providing cost-share grants to Ottawa farmers and rural landowners, including rural villages. The ORCWP focuses on the following Objectives<sup>3</sup>:

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<sup>2</sup> City of Ottawa – Baseline Water Quality Monitoring 2024 Summary Report (Draft)

<sup>3</sup> Ottawa RCWP Terms of Reference (Revised January 31, 2022)

- To focus on priority Best Management Practices that directly protect and enhance surface water and groundwater quality for recreation, livestock watering, irrigation, aquatic habitat and drinking water supplies.
- To increase awareness and encourage adoption of practices that protect water quality.
- To streamline the application process by partnering with other cost-sharing programs, when appropriate.
- To guide the Program based on changes in water quality and stream health.
- To adapt the Program based on continued performance monitoring.

Most respondents agree that the Program continues to meet the program goal as stated above. Protecting the quality of surface water and groundwater through cost-share grants to landowners remains a relevant program goal, and the existing suite of projects is well-aligned with this goal. Some interest holders expressed the sentiment that project types are focused on protecting surface water quality with less obvious links to the protection of groundwater quality (aside from well decommissioning).

Interest holders acknowledged that society's environmental concerns have shifted since clean water programs were implemented over 25 years ago, and new regulations and technologies have made some existing project types redundant. To remain relevant, the Program needs to expand to include projects that target water quality indirectly and/or have broader environmental sustainability benefits. Respondents highlighted this review as an opportunity to reevaluate the program's goals and to consider broadening into areas not directly related to water quality such as climate change adaptation and resilience, environmental stewardship, and ecosystem services.

## **2.4. Program Design**

### ***Priority Projects***

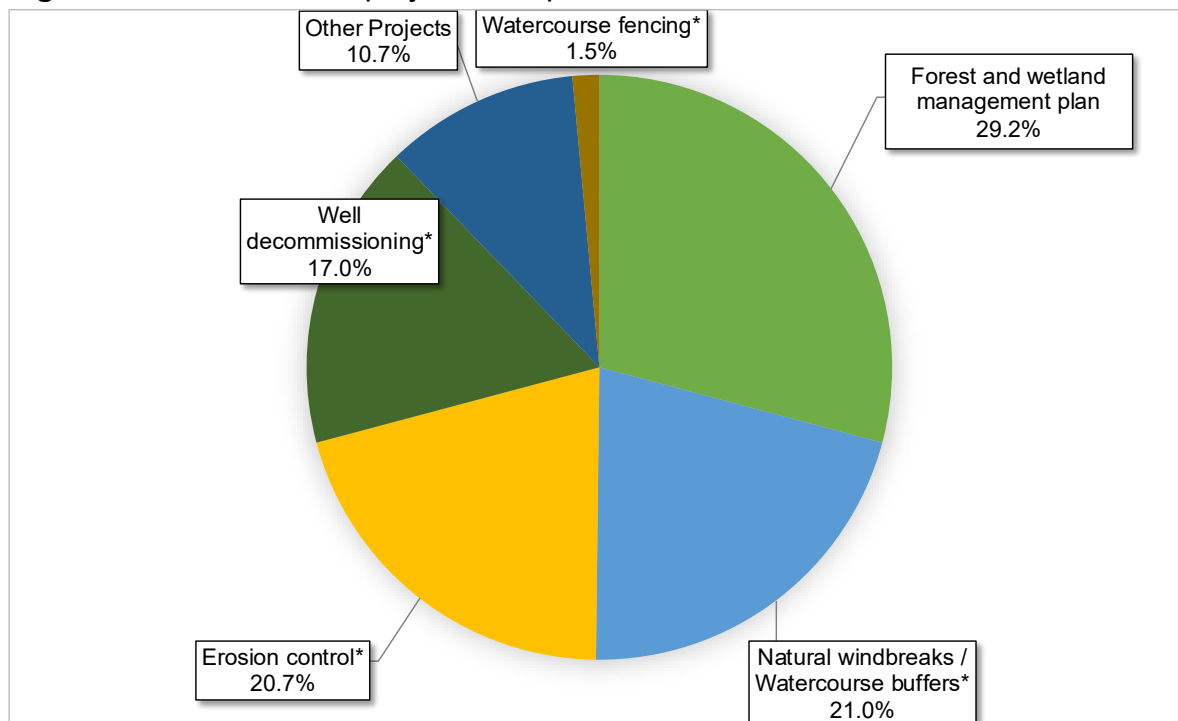
Previous program reviews have identified several project types that have the greatest positive impact on water quality and are worthy of prioritization. These projects have historically included education initiatives, erosion control, land retirement, precision farming, tile drain control structures, watercourse buffers, watercourse fencing, and well decommissioning. The intent was to focus efforts on promotion and communication for these project types to encourage greater uptake.

Most interest holders for the 2021-2025 review continued to rank erosion control, watercourse buffers, watercourse fencing and well decommissioning as high priority projects. Some viewed natural windbreaks as a higher priority project as well due to the generous grant amounts available. It was noted that forest management plans continue to generate a high volume of applications. Some respondents expressed uncertainty

with the prioritization, as it's not clear that grant rates (e.g., 50%, 75% and 90%) are related. The top four projects identified above all have maximum grant rates of 90%.

As shown in Figure 3, 60% of projects completed from 2021-2025 were considered high priority projects and mainly included natural windbreaks / watercourse buffers, erosion control and well decommissioning. Along with forest management plans, these projects have also received the majority of grant funds (Table 2).

**Figure 3** - Breakdown of projects completed from 2021-2025



\*Identified as a high priority project in the 2021-2025 program review.

Although watercourse fencing is viewed as high priority project, and restricting livestock access to watercourses has direct environmental benefits, this category has seen very little uptake over the past five years with only 4 projects completed. Interest holders mentioned there have been significant increases in the cost for fencing over last few years, as materials are more expensive, and contractors are harder to find. Fencing length determines the magnitude of the costs, and some programs in other jurisdictions cover up to 100% of material costs if the landowner supplies the labour. New technologies, such as virtual cattle fencing that pairs collars with an audible beep and a deterrent shock with satellite technology, may also start to become more prevalent.

### **Modifications to Existing Projects**

The current suite of projects, including farm projects, is seen as comprehensive and complementary to other programs offered by Conservation Authorities and the City of Ottawa. Several ideas to improve the existing project types were gathered through

discussions with interest holders, surveys of grant recipients and program trends across Ontario.

The following minor updates to the eligibility criteria and project descriptions for several project types were suggested to improve project uptake and streamline administration:

- Expand the eligibility criteria for septic repair/replacement beyond 50 m from a waterbody or within a wellhead protection area and consider soil geology, karst topography, and proximity to wetlands.
- Introduce flexibility for the land retirement incentive, in terms of grant amount, maximum acreage and number of years, to better align with other funding sources (e.g., ALUS, RALP).
- Expanding the eligibility criteria for wetland restoration to include retention ponds, irrigation ponds or livestock watering to align with programs (e.g., RALP).
- Combine the project guidelines for natural windbreaks and watercourse buffers, as these projects are similar and linked for reporting.
- Update project guidelines for nutrient management plan/precision farming to target areas of improvement unrelated to yield monitors and yield mapping.

While interest holders recognized that funding amounts available for erosion control, forest management plans, watercourse buffers and well decommissioning projects are generous, some project types have high overall costs and an increase in grant amounts could help drive project uptake. Between 2021-2025, while an average of 42% of the costs for erosion control projects was covered by grants, less than 5% of the costs associated with septic system repair/replacement was offset by grants. Consideration should be given to adjusting the funding available for certain project types to account for increased financial pressures, inflation, and the costs of undertaking projects.

The following considerations for project funding amounts and grant rates were suggested by interest holders:

- The cost to repair or replace septic systems generally starts at \$20,000, and ORCWP grant recipients have averaged over \$32,000 in project costs in the past 5 years. Consider increasing maximum grant rate and amount (currently 50% up to \$2,000) and removing the annual overall funding cap of \$20,000.
- Precision farming projects are getting more expensive, and some recent submissions were approximately \$20,000. Consider increasing the grant amount to \$5,000 (from current \$2,000).
- The costs for watercourse fencing have been increasing significantly over last few years; consider increasing the grant amount to \$10,000 (from current \$7,500).

- Typical costs for wetland restoration projects range from \$10,000 to \$25,000, and costs are closer to \$20,000 if excavation is involved. Without a funding partner, the current grant rate and amount (50% up to \$5,000) is too low to incentivize these projects; consider increasing maximum grant to \$10,000.
- Consider adjusting the incentive payment for cover crops to improve uptake and align with other programs across the province. The median value of other programs is \$2,400, while the ORCWP offers a maximum of \$3,000 over 3 years (\$50 per acre up to 20 acres for 3 years).
- The cost of tile drain control structures can be significant, and multiple structures are needed depending on field size. Consider increasing grant rate from 75% to 90% and funding amount up to \$7,500, especially if aligning with climate resiliency.

### ***Living Snow Fence Pilot***

Beginning in 2024, a new project type involving the creation of living snow fences on rural properties was piloted by Rideau Valley Conservation Authority staff in partnership with the Councillor for Ward 21 (Rideau-Jock). Although their primary intent is to reduce blowing snow and improve road safety, living snow fences can help manage soil moisture for the next growing season, reduce soil erosion, and improve wildlife habitat.

Rideau Valley Conservation Authority's Forestry staff, in consultation with City staff and other conservation authorities, designed a living snow fence pilot featuring three different configurations of trees and/or shrubs. These design options followed best practices established by other municipalities and conservation authorities in various jurisdictions across Ontario. In 2025, initial site visits were completed at six suitable properties where landowners had expressed an interest in participating. Three sites were selected to proceed in spring 2026, and these living snow fences will be prepared, planted, and maintained by Conservation Authority staff. These sites will be eligible for survival assessments, refill planting, and tending for a five-year period.

Landowners participating in the pilot program will receive a land retirement incentive payment of \$700/acre/year for a minimum period of 10 years. This payment is intended to compensate landowners for the loss of productive land and to encourage the establishment of living snow fences on private land. The costs associated with establishing and maintaining the plantings will be entirely covered (100%) by the pilot program, with an expected maximum of \$15,000 per property (in addition to the annual incentive payment). Initial funding for this pilot will be drawn from surplus funds available under the ORCWP's existing budget.

Although the living snow fence pilot is still in the initial phase, some key lessons emerged in relation to planting plans and motivational factors, and the pilot continues to attract additional landowners. Planting plans require some flexibility, and compromises

or modifications may be necessary to complete projects that benefit landowners and reduce drifting snow. Optimal setbacks distances are a limiting factor and should be flexible based on the snow load potential and adjacent land uses. A key motivating factor for landowners was a desire to improve local roads in the winter, while financial compensation, costs, and maintenance concerns were not high priorities.

To date, the living snow fence pilot program has been positively received by rural landowners and continues to generate interest and participation. However, the demand for this initiative is not high enough to justify establishing a stand-alone program. The ORCWP currently offers grants to rural landowners for similar stewardship projects such as fragile land retirement and windbreaks, and this program is well-positioned to include living snow fences as a new project type within its existing administrative framework.

### ***Expansion of Program Scope***

Opportunities to expand the ORCWP beyond traditional water quality-focused projects to include environmental stewardship, ecosystem health, and climate change adaptation and resilience were highlighted on multiple occasions during this review.

Program staff noted that some landowners have expressed an interest in undertaking projects related to environmental stewardship including natural habitat improvements and protection for species at risk habitats. One survey respondent highlighted the possibility of funding to leave field edges and corners as meadows. Other examples of potential project types include pollinator strips, grassland creation, and delayed hay cutting to support nesting species at risk birds.

Several respondents expressed a desire to include projects that support adaptation to a changing climate. A range of project categories and types were suggested including nature-based solutions to reduce stormwater runoff (e.g., rain gardens, bioswales, and bioretention ponds) and agricultural adaptations (e.g., technologies and practices for soil and water conservation, runoff management, use of drought-sensitive crops, stormwater irrigation ponds, and no till technologies). One interest holder suggested broadening the scope even further to provide support for extreme weather preparedness (e.g., preparing properties for flooding, wildland fires, drought, large storm events, power outages, and livestock evacuation).

Respondents acknowledged that incentives for environmental stewardship beyond improvements to water quality, such as natural habitat creation and restoration, and support for climate change adaptation and resilience, could be achieved through various mechanisms. One approach could involve refocusing or enhancing existing ORCWP materials to highlight links to habitat improvement and climate change. Some respondents underscored that the addition of brand-new project types or separate funding streams would involve comprehensive program planning before launching.

## **2.5. Program Delivery**

### ***Program Administration***

The ORCWP is administered by the South Nation, Rideau Valley and Mississippi Valley Conservation Authorities. Interested landowners contact the Landowner Resource Centre to determine their eligibility and to be directed to the appropriate Conservation Authority. An initial screening and site visit are carried out by a Site Representative (local farmer or Conservation Authority staff with knowledge of agricultural industry). Once an application is submitted, it is reviewed and approved by a Review Committee comprised of local farmers and landowners. These Committees also review and approve applications for Rideau Valley and South Nation clean water programs that are delivered outside of the City boundary.

The Program maintains a streamlined delivery approach for complementary programs, as this enables City resources to leverage external private, provincial and federal funding sources. For example, projects are identified and administered through partnerships with Green Acres (the City of Ottawa's rural tree planting program) and the Conservation Authorities' shoreline naturalization programs. The Program also has the flexibility to collaborate, as feasible, with other complementary rural stewardship programs such as ALUS Ontario East, ALUS Mississippi-Rideau, the OSCIA's Resilient Agricultural Landscape Program, and Ducks Unlimited Canada.

Several measures were implemented in 2021 to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of the Program. Staff level approvals were brought in, and site visits were reinstated, for forest management plans, septic system repair/replacement, and well decommissioning; these measures have improved turnaround times and reduced workload for staff. The application process was updated to allow the application form to be completed and submitted online and to accept electronic signatures.

Feedback gathered through surveys of program participants was extremely positive. Respondents highlighted that staff were informative, friendly and professional, and the process to obtain a grant was smooth and transparent. Eighty-nine percent of respondents expressed satisfaction with how well the Program is run and indicated that their application was approved promptly. Many interest holders also highlighted that the administration of the Program by Conservation Authority staff is a significant strength. The structure of smaller Review Committees to review approve projects is also working very well.

Interest holders proposed the following ideas to further enhance the administration and delivery of the program:

- Update the funding pre-requisites to include the 4th or 5th Edition Environmental Farm Plan (EFP) for farm projects and to provide a web-based link to a digital version of the Health Home Guidebook.
- Update the online application form to clarify that an EFP (or equivalent) is required for farm projects and to highlight that staff are available to assist with application completion.
- Simplify program materials by removing references to the Landowner Resource Centre.
- Increase the funding limit from \$25,000 to \$35,000 per property between 2026-2030 to offer more flexibility to landowners.

### ***Promotion and Outreach***

The Program is promoted using a range of methods including print, social media, attendance at fairs and events, distribution of partner signs, and presentations (see Annex 6 for details). Ads are published in community and agricultural newspapers annually in the spring, and announcements are made through the City's Rural Connections newsletter and rural Councillor newsletters. Postcards highlighting both the ORCWP and Green Acres were delivered to over 75,000 rural and village homes between 2021-2025. Social media posts reached over 122,000 individuals and generated over 3,000 engagements between 2021-2025.

Program staff participated in 26 rural fairs and events, including the Ottawa Valley Farm Show, the Eastern Ontario Crop Conference, and Eco Farm Day, and provided information on the ORCWP to attendees. The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in many event cancellations in 2021, 2022 and 2023, although a few events and conferences (e.g., Kemptville Woodlot Day) pivoted to a virtual format. Over 60% of the events that Program staff attended were held in 2025.

Targeted promotional activities, such as demonstration projects, targeted subwatershed promotion, and presentations to agricultural groups and other interest holder groups, were also curtailed during the 2021-2025 period largely due to restrictions imposed during the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2025, information on the ORCWP was featured in three stewardship-related presentations to agricultural groups.

Despite these on-going efforts to diversify promotion and outreach, over half of grant recipients surveyed felt that the ORCWP is not effectively promoted. Interest holders also felt that more promotion would be beneficial, and they emphasized the importance of continuing to use different touchpoints to spread the word about the Program. Several survey respondents mentioned that they were completely unaware of the Program learned about it by chance when communicating with Conservation Authority staff or a contractor (e.g., well driller, septic installer). This feedback is supported by the

fact that agency and contractor referrals continue to be the most common source of new applicants (see Annex 6).

Promotion and outreach are challenging given the geographic extent of the City and the diversity of landowners and project types. Interest holders recognized that successful marketing campaigns can cost a lot of money, and there are limits to what can be achieved on a modest budget. Many ideas were shared, by interest holders and grant recipients alike, for improving overall promotion and communications on the ORCWP. Some ideas are simple and cost-effective, while others would require additional effort and funding.

The following suggestions were proposed to help ensure that landowners are aware of the Program:

- Continue promoting the Program through printed materials, social media posts, Councillors' newsletters and presence at community and agricultural events.
- Consider shifting the funding used for mail drops, postcards and small project signs towards larger signage in highly visible locations to create more impact.
- Focus messaging on targeted project types or rotate feature projects as part of a promotional campaign, to encourage uptake on the lowest cost, highest impact projects. For example, targeted messaging to landowners ahead of spring floods, winter planting, biosolids application, or as part of the well water testing process could help raise awareness.
- Increase targeted advertising using social media and other non-conventional media platforms, as these are gaining broader appeal. Examples include video ads and shorts on YouTube and Instagram, ads in movie theatres, targeted ads on agricultural websites, rural focused websites, and hardware stores, and interviews with rural news organizations and radio stations (earned media).
- Host local forums to showcase a farm or project location where landowners can learn from the experiences of past program participants. Examples include lunch and learn events, twilight tours and workshops. Work directly with agricultural societies and landowner associations to help promote and organize events with property owners who are willing to champion and advocate for the Program.
- Work directly with community partners on communications, promotion and networking to increase awareness and uptake for the educational initiatives project type.

### ***Program Budget and Expenditures***

Total ORCWP funding for 2021 to 2025 was \$1,153,571. This amount includes \$153,571 in funding carried forward from the 2020 program for approved projects and an annual special levy to South Nation Conservation of \$200,000 across 5 years.

Total ORCWP expenses from 2021-2025 were \$893,857 including grants and program delivery expenses. Program delivery expenses were 26% of total expenditures (Table 5 and Annex 6).

**Table 5** – Ottawa Rural Clean Water Program revenue and expenditures (2021-2025)

<b>Revenue</b>	<b>2021-2025</b>
Special Levy	\$1,000,000
Carry-forward from 2020	\$153,571
<b>Total Revenue</b>	<b>\$1,153,571</b>
<b>Expenses</b>	
Grants	\$662,991
Program Delivery	\$230,866
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>\$893,857</b>
<b>Balance</b>	<b>\$259,714</b>

The remaining balance of \$259,714 includes \$142,262 in funding that is encumbered for approved projects that have not yet been completed. Surplus funds of \$117,452 that are unencumbered will be carried forward to 2026 and are available for new grants. A motion from Councillor Brown in June 2024 provided direction to allocate some surplus funding for the living snow fence pilot, including the three sites planned for Spring 2026.

Many higher cost projects such as erosion control and wetland restoration are carried forward for completion in a subsequent year, often due to time or cashflow constraints. Landowners are required to cover all initial costs and are reimbursed once the project has been completed and receipts have been submitted and verified.

Demand for funding under the ORCWP has diminished somewhat since the last Review in 2021, as the Program experienced an average surplus of \$23,500 each year. It's possible that demand for the Program was influenced by factors related to the COVID-19 pandemic, as total grant amount paid out in 2021 (\$78,323) was approximately half of the grant amounts paid out in the subsequent years (\$133,909 to \$157,549).

## 2.6. Governance, Monitoring and Reporting

### Governance

The 2021-2025 Ottawa Rural Clean Water Program was approved by the Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee (ARAC) and Council in May 2021. City staff report annually to ARAC on program outcomes and performance indicators.

The Program Terms of Reference (revised in January 2022) outline the responsibilities and function of the Program Committee and delivery agents and provide the framework for partnerships and grant top-ups for complementary programs (e.g., Green Acres,

shoreline naturalization projects). Details on eligible projects, applicant eligibility, an applicant guide, and application form are available online.

An external Program Committee composed of representatives of agricultural and environmental organizations, provincial agencies, local Conservation Authorities, and community members-at-large (Annex 2) provides guidance on program design and delivery. Committee members also serve as ambassadors of the Program, assist with promotion and outreach, and identify opportunities to meet the Program goals. In previous 5-year terms, the Program Committee has typically met annually, with additional meetings as required. Two smaller Review Committees meet quarterly to review and approve projects, but these committees have an administrative function and are not part of the governance structure.

During the 2021-2025 period, a variety of external factors led to difficulties with establishing and maintaining the Program Committee. Restrictions on in-person gatherings due to the COVID-19 pandemic coincided with the timing for launching the new Program Committee. Engaging committee members to share constructive feedback on staff reports and recommendations was challenging with meetings being held annually, and a virtual or hybrid meeting format only amplified these issues. Program staff experienced obstacles in recruiting representatives from agricultural organizations, and this could reflect the membership challenges that agricultural and other external groups are experiencing more broadly.

While the governance structure has worked well in the past, it has become apparent that the Program Committee is no longer functioning the way it was intended when the Program was established in 2000. The 2016-2020 program review also emphasized that inconsistent participation and vacancies from Program Committee members, particularly from agricultural organizations, was an ongoing challenge. Several interest holders recognized this reality, but they also stressed the value in engaging with diverse organizations, agencies, and groups, and want to see this overall philosophy maintained.

If the Program Committee is to be disbanded, interest holders proposed the following alternatives to facilitate engagement and solicit feedback on program design and delivery from external organizations with relevant expertise:

- Form an advisory panel to connect and work with relevant external groups, including existing Review Committee members. City and Conservation Authority staff could take on more decisions about the Program, pull in the advisory panel members as needed, and provide regular updates or reports.
- Rather than establishing a formal panel or committee, seek feedback on specific items through reports and meeting agendas of existing committees, such as Conservation Authority review committees, watershed advisory committees, or

ALUS committees. Program staff could also reach out directly to agricultural organizations when their input is needed.

### ***Monitoring and Reporting***

A framework for monitoring and evaluating the ORCWP is described in the program's Terms of Reference (2022). Briefly, the Program is monitored and evaluated through a range of methods:

- Program database tracks and retrieves project statistics, including project status, project type, landowner type, farm type, property location and size, project costs, referral method, and environmental benefits of projects.
- Program representatives visit a select number of completed projects up to five years after completion to ensure projects are maintained and to examine benefits.
- Semi-annual and annual reports are prepared by the lead Conservation Authority and submitted to the City's program coordinator.
- Annual reports are brought to ARAC on the number of projects completed, funds allocated, and education and promotional efforts.
- Program Reviews are undertaken on a five-year cycle to summarize project and program outcomes, collect feedback from participants and interest holders, review water quality and environmental indicators, and provide recommendations for the future Program and possible modifications.

This current framework is comprehensive and has been well received by Program interest holders. The Program database contains information going back 25 years and is useful for generating statistics on a variety of project metrics. The opportunity for grant recipients to complete a feedback survey following project completion is also valuable. Annual reports provide a snapshot on a regular basis and allow for fine-tuning of promotion and communications when needed. The five-year Program Reviews offer a deeper examination of both strengths and challenges, provide an opportunity to ensure that the Program remain relevant, and recommend ways to adapt when necessary.

Interest holders highlighted several opportunities to enhance Program monitoring and reporting and to ensure the database remains effective into the future:

- When adding new project types, identify relevant data and key performance indicators up front to maintain consistency in reporting.

- Microsoft Access is currently being used to manage the database, and there are many issues with reliability and difficulties sharing and syncing datasets. There are also concerns that MS Access will soon be discontinued.
- Transition the Program database away from MS Access towards a modern platform (e.g., MS SharePoint) that can easily be accessed by Conservation Authority and City staff.

### **3. Ottawa Rural Clean Water Program Recommendations**

The following recommendations stem from analyses of the program review findings, and all recommendations are subject to Council approval. These recommendations are based on feedback provided by interest holders and grant recipients and a scan of similar programs across Ontario. Except where related to the proposed Program expansion, these recommendations fit within the existing Program budget and are feasible to implement within the 2026-2030 Program. If approved by Council, implementation of recommendations related to Program expansion will be detailed in a separate report to be brought to Council in 2027.

#### **3.1. Recommendations for the 2026-2030 Program**

##### ***Eligible Project Types***

1. Modify existing eligible project types to streamline administration, improve uptake, and address increasing financial costs according to the following:
  - Expand eligibility criteria for septic system repair/replacement to enhance coverage within environmentally sensitive areas. Increase maximum grant amount from \$2,000 to \$3,500 and remove annual overall funding cap of \$20,000.
  - Introduce flexibility for the land retirement incentive, in terms of grant amount per acre and maximum acreage, and increase number of years from 3 to 5, to better leverage other funding sources.
  - Combine project guidelines for natural windbreaks and watercourse buffers and align the grant rates and maximum amounts.
  - Update project guidelines for nutrient management plan/precision farming to target areas of improvement unrelated to yield monitors and yield mapping. Increase maximum grant amount from \$2,000 to \$3,500.
  - Update project guidelines for watercourse fencing to include new and emerging technologies (e.g., virtual cattle fencing). Increase maximum grant amount from \$7,500 to \$10,000 and include a grant rate of up to 100% for materials/supplies when fencing is self-installed by landowner.

- Increase maximum grant amount for wetland restoration from \$5,000 to \$10,000.
  - Adjust incentive payment for cover crops to better align with similar programs, up to a maximum amount of \$2,000 per year for 3 years.
  - Increase maximum grant amount for tile drain control structures from \$5,000 to \$7,500 and grant rate from 75% to 90%.
2. Introduce living snow fencing as a new eligible project type. Funding would be available to plant trees and/or shrubs in fields to reduce blowing snow, improve road safety, and compensate landowners for the loss of productive land. Program staff will assess proposed site locations and develop appropriate planting plans for suitable sites. The maximum grant amount will be set at \$15,000 with a grant rate of 100%, and a land retirement incentive payment of \$700 per acre per year for a minimum period of 10 years will also be awarded.

Remaining project types will continue to be offered with no changes proposed to the eligibility criteria, grant rate, or maximum grant amount. See Table 6 for the proposed suite of eligible projects for 2026-2030. Where recommended, project guidelines will be developed or revised in 2026 in consultation with Conservation Authority staff, review committee members, and subject matter experts at the City of Ottawa.

**Table 6** - Proposed eligible projects for 2026-2030

Project Type	Grant Rate	Maximum Grant	Proposed Revisions
<b>Nutrient Management</b>			
Manure Storage	50%	\$15,000	
Washwater Treatment	50%	\$5,000	
Nutrient Management/ Precision Farming	50%	\$3,500	Increase maximum grant from \$2,000 to encourage uptake.
Watercourse Fencing	90% to 100%	\$10,000	Increase maximum grant from \$7,500 to address higher costs; provide up to 100% for materials when self-installed.
<b>Soil Protection</b>			
Erosion Control	90%	\$7,500	
Tile Outlet Erosion Control	75%	\$2,500	
Cover Crops	\$40/acre/year Max 50 acres, 3 yrs		Increase maximum amount to \$2,000 per year; adjust maximum amount from \$50 per acre and maximum acreage from 20.

Project Type	Grant Rate	Maximum Grant	Proposed Revisions
Living Snow Fencing	100%	\$15,000	New eligible project type to be based on pilot from 2024-2025.
	\$700/acre/year Minimum 10 years		
<b>Water Management</b>			
Clean Water Diversion	50%	\$5,000	
Tile Drain Control Structures	90%	\$7,500	Increase maximum amount from \$5,000 and grant rate from 75% to encourage uptake.
Chemical or Fuel Storage	50%	\$2,000	
Well Decommissioning	90%	\$3,000	
Septic System Repair/ Replacement	50%	\$3,500	Increase maximum grant from \$2,000 to address higher costs; remove funding cap of \$20,000.
<b>Land Stewardship</b>			
Watercourse Buffers	90%	\$7,500	Combine with natural windbreaks.
Natural Windbreaks	90%	\$7,500	Increase maximum amount from \$6,000 and grant rate from 75% to align with watercourse buffers.
Land Retirement Incentive	\$150/acre/year Max 10 acres, 5 yrs		Increase flexibility and maximum number of years from 3-5; total incentive amount of \$7,500.
Forest & Wetland Management Plan	75%	\$750	
Wetland Restoration	50%	\$10,000	Increase maximum grant from \$5,000 to address higher costs.
<b>Education and Innovation</b>			
Educational Initiatives	75%	\$5,000	
Innovative Projects	50%	\$5,000	

**Program Administration**

3. Enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of the Program in the following ways:
  - Update the funding pre-requisites to include the 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> Edition Environmental Farm Plan (EFP) for farm projects and provide a web-based link to a digital version of the Health Home Guidebook.
  - Update the online application form to clarify that an EFP (or equivalent) is required for farm projects and to highlight that staff are available to assist with application completion.

- Simplify program materials by removing references to the Landowner Resource Centre.
- Increase the funding limit from \$25,000 to \$35,000 per property between 2026-2030 to offer more flexibility to landowners.

The main pillars of the Program's administration will remain unchanged. Local Conservation Authorities will continue to deliver the Program with South Nation Conservation as the lead agency. Local farmers and stewardship advisors will continue to be invited to participate as site representatives and review committee members, and City of Ottawa staff will continue to have a role on review committees and provide oversight and support for the Program.

#### Promotion and Outreach

4. Explore new methods to engage landowners and community groups to increase awareness and encourage uptake of the Program in the following ways:
  - Shift funding used to produce small project signs towards larger signage and install in highly visible locations.
  - Focus communications and messaging on higher impact project types and rotate feature projects as part of promotional campaigns.
  - Work with community partners on communications, promotion, and networking to increase awareness and uptake for the educational initiatives project type.
5. Increase targeted advertising using social media and other non-conventional media platforms. Aim to develop and release one of the following annually:
  - Video ads and shorts on YouTube and Instagram
  - Ads in movie theatres, agricultural websites, rural focused websites, or hardware stores
  - Interviews with rural news organizations and radio stations
6. Host local forums or events to showcase farms or project locations in partnership with agricultural societies, landowner associations, and property owners willing to champion and advocate for the Program. Aim to host one event annually e.g., lunch and learn events, twilight tours and workshops.

The Program will also continue to be promoted using traditional platforms such as printed materials (e.g., mail drops, postcards), social media posts, Councillors' newsletters, City newsletters, and a Program staff presence at community and agricultural events.

### **Program Budget**

7. Continue to fund the Program at \$200,000 per year for 2026-2030 through a special levy to South Nation Conservation.

### **Program Committee**

8. Replace the formal Program Committee governance structure with a more informal, flexible approach to solicit feedback on program design and delivery from existing committees and external organizations with relevant expertise. Engage with existing committees, such as Conservation Authority review committees, watershed advisory committees, and ALUS committees, to seek input when needed.
9. Review and update the ORCWP Terms of Reference to align with all new recommendations as approved by Council.

### **Monitoring and Reporting**

10. Identify relevant data and key performance indicators up front for all new project types (e.g., living snow fencing).
11. Explore alternatives to Microsoft Access for managing the Program database that can easily be accessed by local Conservation Authority staff and City staff.

Current monitoring and reporting practices will continue, including annual reports to ARAC detailing Program performance such as the number of projects completed, funds allocated, and education and promotional efforts. Program reviews will continue to be undertaken on a five-year cycle to summarize project and program outcomes, collect feedback from participants and interest holders, review water quality and environmental indicators, and provide recommendations for Program renewal.

### **3.2. Recommendations for Program Expansion in 2027**

The following recommendations are aimed at exploring and developing the expansion of the Program's scope and are subject to additional study and consultations prior to releasing details for a preferred approach.

1. Expand the Program's goal and objectives beyond water quality improvements to capture environmental sustainability initiatives and build climate preparedness. Consider ways to foster increased environmental stewardship and support climate change adaptation and resilience efforts in rural Ottawa.
2. Undertake a comprehensive study to ensure that proposed new project types represent best management practices and will make positive contributions towards improving environmental sustainability and climate preparedness in rural Ottawa. Include consultations with internal and external interest holders, including residents. Where feasible, explore options for integrating climate adaptation measures for rural Ottawa residents within other existing City programs.

3. Based on the results of the above recommendations, develop an enhanced suite of projects, including eligibility criteria, maximum grant amounts, and grant rates, to expand the Program's scope. Consider project types in the following general categories: natural habitat improvements, protection for species at risk habitats, nature-based solutions to reduce stormwater runoff and protect against flooding, agricultural adaptations, and extreme weather preparedness.
4. Bring a report for the Agriculture and Rural Affairs Committee and Council in 2027 with recommendations that may include an expanded Program scope and enhanced suite of projects. Include a rationale and recommendations for any increased funding needed to support the expansion of the Program.

#### **4. List of Annexes**

Annex 1 – Program Outcomes

Annex 2 – Program Committee Membership for 2021-2025

Annex 3 – Review of Other Rural Clean Water Programs in Ontario

Annex 4 – Maps of Water Quality

Annex 5 – Summary of Interest Holder Feedback

Annex 6 – Program Delivery