

# **Severn Sound Environmental Association Strategic Plan - 2018 - 2023**

## **Building An Environmental Legacy**





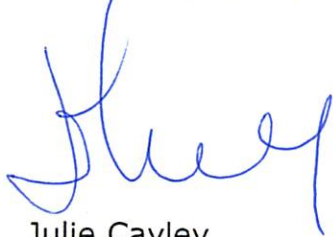
# A Joint Message from the Executive Director & the Chair of the Board of Directors

Our world is ever-changing. Today, we face challenges that we were unaware of even 10 years ago, we don't know what new challenges we will face in the next 10 years. The pace of change is relentless and yet, there is one aspect that remains constant: the environment upon which we depend has finite limits. For this reason alone, it is imperative that we build an environmental legacy that we can be proud of, that we leave Severn Sound better than we found it. There is a deep connection that exists between the human and natural worlds, and moreover there is a critical nexus between our own human health, of our communities and our economy, and the health of our environment. Improving the quality of the Severn Sound area, leaving a positive environmental legacy, defines our purpose and provides a critical frame for the work that we do at the Severn Sound Environmental Association (SSEA).

We have had tremendous success in improving the water quality of Severn Sound. Our success in large measure comes from an innovative and collaborative governance model that has, since its inception, focused on partnerships and producing results. This combined with our dedicated team of expert staff has allowed us and our partners, to be champions for Severn Sound.

This Strategic Plan sets a course of action for the SSEA. It identifies the critical priorities that will guide our work for the next five-year period and beyond. Our individual and collective efforts, our actions will be focused on making a difference in our world. This Strategic Plan represents our blueprint – our plan of action. It strategically identifies the decisions that we believe will allow us to shape our future. In the pages that follow, you will see that we are aligning ourselves to be adaptive and to make a difference. We invite you to be part of the positive changes that will continue to shape Severn Sound, and our organization. We invite you to work with us to build an environmental legacy that we are all proud of.

We look forward to working with you.



Julie Cayley  
Executive Director, SSEA



Steffen Walma  
Chair, SSEA Board of Directors  
Deputy Mayor, Township of Tiny





# Who Are We?

## Severn Sound Environmental Association: A Brief History of our Organization

Severn Sound Environmental Association (SSEA) is the organization dedicated to the management, monitoring and stewardship of the Severn Sound area. Concerned with wise stewardship and environmental quality, our roots date back to 1997 when we were established as a federal, provincial and municipal partnership to support the completion of the Severn Sound Remedial Action Plan (SSRAP), and to oversee its implementation.

The SSEA has remained steadfast in its focus, and true to its original mandate. That said, we have continued to evolve. Our structure as a Joint Municipal Services Board is unique. We have remained a local, community-based environmental organization in the Severn Sound watershed and, with sound science, we continue to 'act as a neutral informed voice', building partnerships, creating connections and collaborating on projects and initiatives all designed to improve the environmental quality of the Severn Sound watershed.

Working with others, we have been successful in having the Severn Sound area delisted as an Area of Concern. We continue to monitor water quality, fish and habitat and our efforts with others have resulted in extensive tree plantings, land stewardship, erosion control and source water protection initiatives all designed to leave a lasting and improved environmental legacy for the next generation.

*Severn Sound is a group of bays covering approximately 130 km<sup>2</sup> in southeastern Georgian Bay, Lake Huron. The Severn Sound watershed covers an area of approximately 1000 km<sup>2</sup> made up of small urban and rural areas with pressure from urban growth south of its border and a population that triples in size in the summer.*

**SSEA...Keeping Severn Sound healthy...for  
the next generation and beyond**



# What Do We Do?

## At SSEA, We...

- Provide exceptional service to our partners
- Work hard with our partners to make Severn Sound better for generations to come
- Protect and restore water quality and habitat in Severn Sound
- Monitor the environment, collect and analyze data and share our findings
- Monitor for early warning signs of changes in the Severn Sound environment
- Connect people to the watershed
- Provide environmental advice to our watershed municipalities through land use planning and policy

## SSEA Services

Environmental Monitoring

Expert Data Collection & Analysis

Report Writing

Drinking Water Source Protection – Risk Management Services

Municipal planning & policy review & advice

Habitat & Natural Heritage Assessments

Stewardship Project Development & Facilitation

Tree planting & Seedling distribution

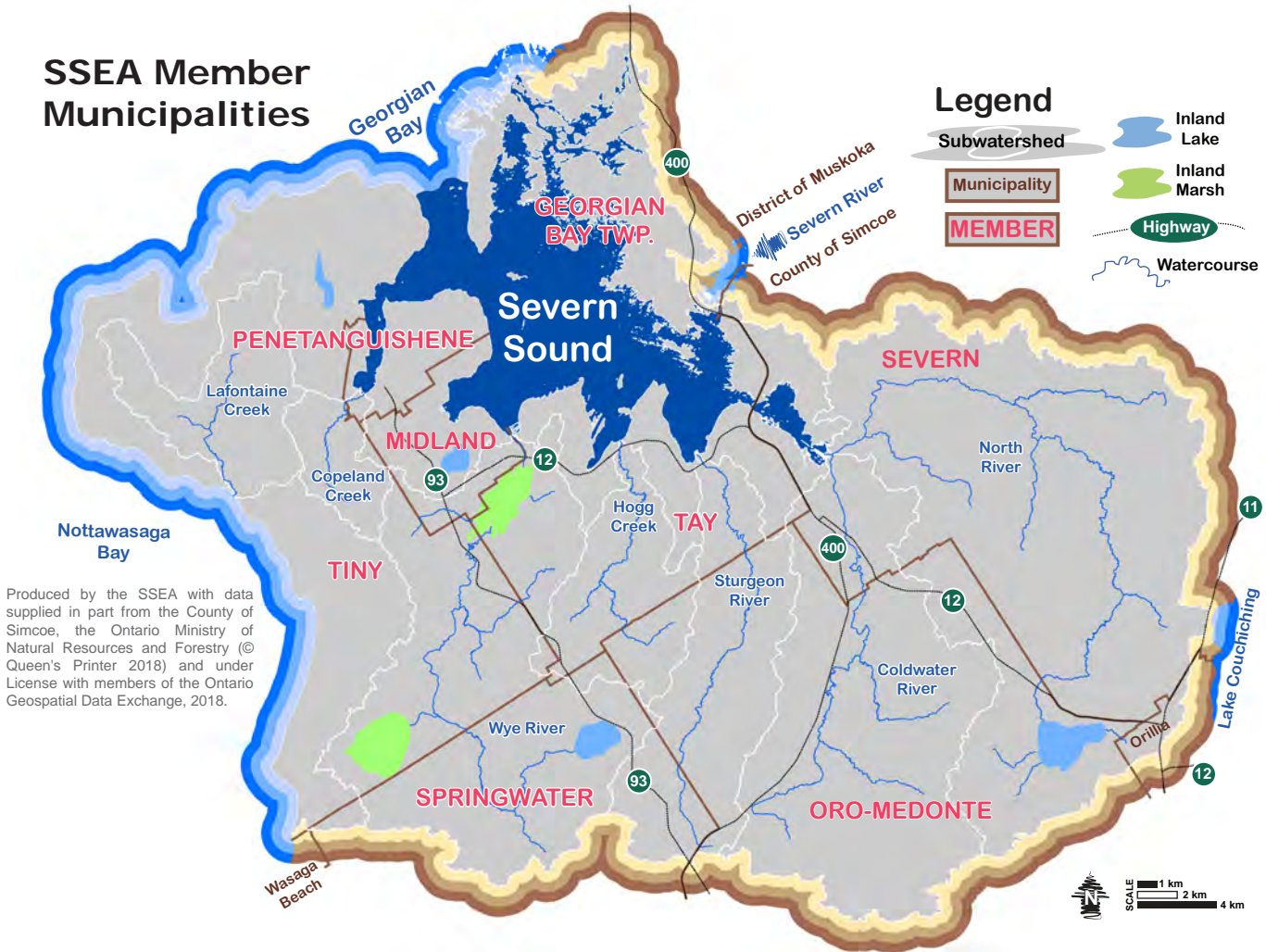
Biological Expertise (incl. Invasive Species)

Remedial Action Plan Commitments



# Our Vision

We see the future...Severn Sound will be  
the most resilient and thriving  
Great Lakes watershed.



# Our Mission

At Severn Sound Environmental Association, we are committed to ensuring exceptional environmental quality and exemplary stewardship of the Severn Sound area through sound science, collaboration and partnerships.



# Our Corporate Values Statement

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

## Honesty & Integrity:

We are an open and transparent organization that operates with impeccable integrity in all aspects of our work. We offer neutral, objective and fact-based technical expertise and sound scientific evidence and information.

## Exceptional Service:

We are creative and innovative, and we are committed to consistently provide service that is professional, responsive, relevant and timely.

## Accountability:

We are fiscally responsible, accountable and sustainable and we provide well-recognized and value-added services. We are responsible for taking action, and for the actions we take.

## Respect & Responsibility:

We work with other stewards to build respect and a sense of shared ownership across the Severn Sound area. Severn Sound belongs to all of us.

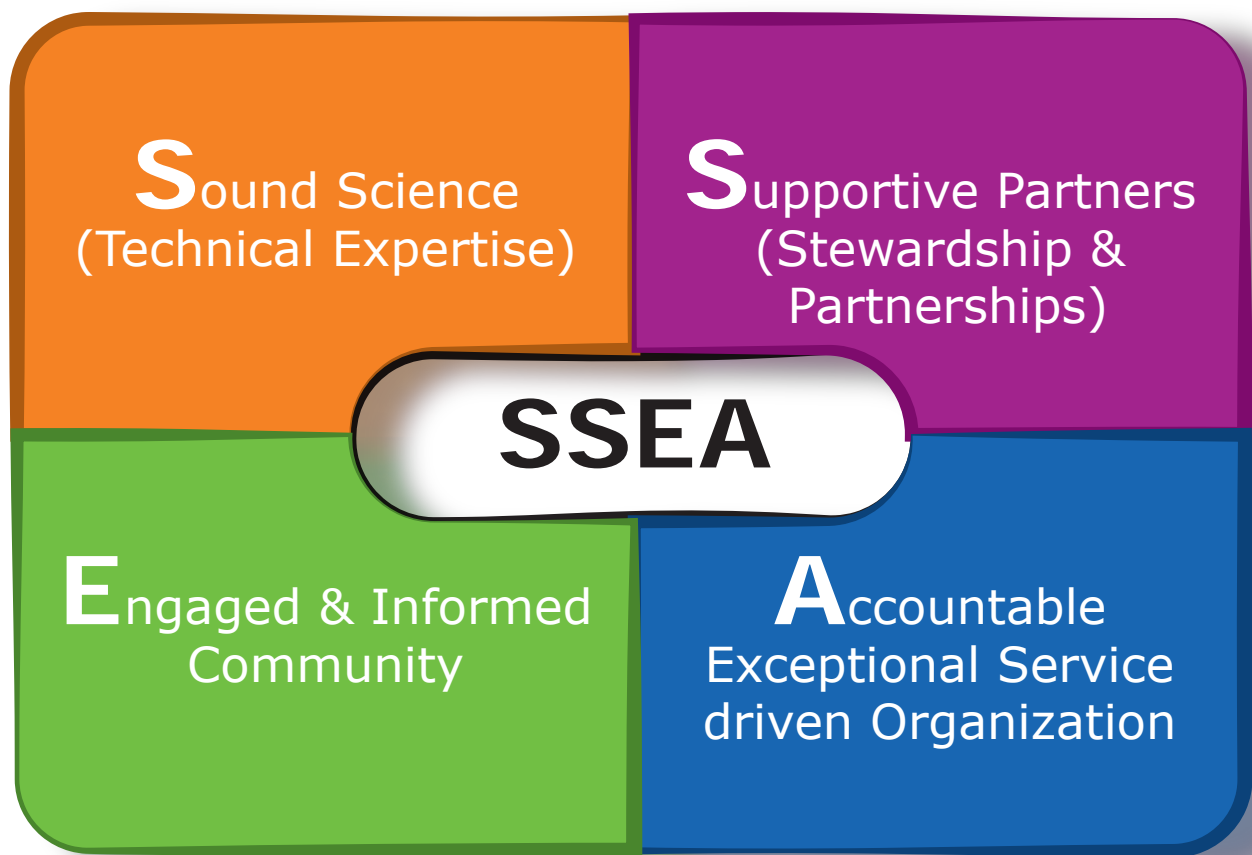
## Teamwork:

We value the wisdom, knowledge and contributions of our staff, our Board, our partners and our community. We make a great team.

# Goals

## THE SSEA...

A service-driven, results-focused organization offering leading-edge scientific expertise. We are working in collaboration with our partners and stewards to improve knowledge and understanding across the Severn Sound area. Together, we are building an environmental legacy by improving Severn Sound to leave it in better condition for the next generation.





# Goal 1: Sound Science



## Key Outcomes:

- **More knowledge and information is obtained about Severn Sound**
- **The “state of” the watershed is better understood**
- **Technical expertise is continually refined**
- **Information gaps are filled**
- **The environment, including water quality, improves**

## Priority Actions

<b>Address Priority &amp; Legacy Issues</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish a Scientific Advisory Team to review science projects and establish priorities.</li> <li>• Establish priorities and address legacy issues (e.g. restoration of walleye fishery, managing nutrients)</li> <li>• Establish a Great Lakes Centre of Excellence (e.g. research portal/hub and information repository)</li> </ul>
<b>Build Scientific Knowledge &amp; Understanding</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Address new ‘chemicals of concern’ (COC)/emerging contaminants (ECs) (i.e. Strategy/inventory)</li> <li>• Invasive Species monitoring and management</li> <li>• Habitat and natural heritage evaluations to assess current conditions/identify opportunities</li> <li>• Continue the commitment to current monitoring programs (PWQMN, PGMN, stream invertebrate communities, Severn Sound and inland lake water quality)</li> <li>• Identify streamlining opportunities to ensure SSEA is measuring the right things, in the right places, at the right time</li> <li>• Track trends to anticipate emerging changes/ challenges</li> <li>• Continue to commit to sharing information and progress by reporting on results (e.g. State of the Bays Reports)</li> <li>• Continue to offer exceptional service as the Source Protection Authority for Severn Sound</li> <li>• Develop Municipal Guidelines (e.g. natural plantings) for Plan Input &amp; Review</li> </ul>
<b>Build Resilience Across Severn Sound</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Climate Change Adaptation and Planning</li> <li>• Continue and evaluate tree seedling distribution and tree planting, invasive species management and Yellow Fish Road™ programs</li> <li>• Work with partners to develop a water quality/environment state of index for Severn Sound</li> <li>• Continue to provide planning and policy advice to municipal decision makers</li> <li>• Reduce nitrates in groundwater in Issue Contributing Areas</li> </ul>
<b>Commit to Filling Knowledge Gaps</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conduct a needs assessment to identify key data parameters not currently being assessed (e.g. snow, soil substrate) and develop methods to collect this critical information</li> <li>• Explore opportunities to enhance expertise in emerging areas (e.g. stormwater management, hydrogeology, land use planning, fisheries, Species At Risk)</li> <li>• Identify research opportunities (e.g. Natural Heritage, Ecological Economics &amp; Natural Capital, microplastics)</li> <li>• Stay on top of new and emerging issues/opportunities/connections (human health connections, emerging contaminants, etc.)</li> </ul>

# Goal 2: Supportive Partnerships



## Key Outcomes:

- **Partners are better engaged, more informed and empowered to take action**
- **Resources are leveraged and are in alignment**
- **More 'on-the-ground' results are realized**
- **Knowledge is shared**
- **SSEA is known broadly as a 'Partner of Choice'**

## Priority Actions

<b>Strengthen Existing Partnerships</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strengthen the relationship with municipal partners by regularly convening a CAOs Round Table to discuss watershed-based issues and opportunities of interest to all</li> <li>• Reconvene the Planning Directors meetings to identify existing and emerging issues of environmental concern across the watershed</li> <li>• Work with academia to develop a curriculum-connected Education Strategy to promote ecological literacy (e.g. A Watershed Textbook)</li> <li>• Re-engage the rural agricultural community</li> <li>• Identify opportunities to bring Board, staff and alumni together to create a Connected Cadre of Champions</li> <li>• Strengthen &amp; build relationships for the implementation of Part IV of the Clean Water Act</li> </ul>
<b>Build New Alliances</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Convene conversations with Francophone, Metis and First Nation communities to identify opportunities to work more closely together on initiatives that are of mutual interest and benefit</li> <li>• Meet with the County of Simcoe and District of Muskoka and explore opportunities to strengthen the relationship</li> <li>• Complete a stakeholder map to identify potential new partnership opportunities across the watershed and beyond (e.g. Health Unit, schools, etc.)</li> <li>• Explore opportunities to collaborate with the arts and culture community across the watershed to build ecological literacy and interest in Severn Sound</li> </ul>
<b>Empower Others to Take Action</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work with partners to identify new opportunities for landowners to support the management of invasive species</li> <li>• Investigate opportunities for early intervention to support landowner and partner efforts designed to improve environmental quality (e.g. reintroduction of Well Aware, Natural Shorelines, Stormwater management and Low Impact Design, soil health)</li> <li>• Develop a Volunteer Strategy (incl. school co-ops)</li> <li>• Explore opportunities to improve water &amp; land stewardship</li> </ul>



# Goal 3: An Engaged & Informed Community



## Key Outcomes:

- **More people are connected to the Severn Sound watershed**
- **Better understanding of the issues facing Severn Sound**
- **SSEA is more visible and better understood**
- **People are engaged**

## Priority Actions

<b>Increase Watershed Awareness &amp; Understanding</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop a Public &amp; Stakeholder Communications and Engagement Strategy</li> <li>• Develop an 'Outreach Program/Curriculum' with partners, identifying potential topics of priority and develop a roster of public workshops and/or educational events including webinars and videos (e.g. Species At Risk, Natural Heritage Value, Invasive Species)</li> <li>• Develop and deliver a Board Orientation Program for new members</li> <li>• Develop and deliver an SSEA Orientation Program for Municipal Councils</li> </ul>
<b>Enhance SSEA Profile &amp; Visibility</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop a Branding Strategy for SSEA to create commitment to and increased understanding of the organization</li> <li>• Develop a calendar of community-based events across the watershed and identify opportunities for SSEA 'Pop Up Events' to enhance profile and visibility</li> <li>• Make regular presentations to watershed municipalities to document value-added SSEA-driven and supported services and projects in their respective jurisdiction</li> </ul>
<b>Learn from Others</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work with partners to develop a Citizen Science Strategy</li> <li>• Complete a best practice review of other jurisdictions to identify exemplary outreach, education, communication and marketing initiatives (e.g. Evidence for Democracy)</li> <li>• Explore partnership to establish a Great Lakes Centre of Excellence (education/outreach/action)</li> </ul>

# Goal 4: An Exceptional Organization



## Key Outcomes:

- **Universally respected by clients and partners**
- **Well-run and well-managed organization**
- **To be known as a partner of choice and an employer of choice**

## Priority Actions

<b>Consistently deliver exceptional, exemplary service – for all, by all</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use technology to full advantage by identifying opportunities to modernize services in order to offer full access to partners and clients full access (e.g. 24/7 access) to critical services)</li> <li>• Secure organizational independence through the establishment of a ‘permanent home’ for SSEA</li> <li>• Identify and implement opportunities to ensure funding for SSEA is secure and sustainable over the long-term</li> <li>• Explore grant opportunities for SSEA, and for SSEA in partnership with others</li> <li>• Review Fee Structure to ensure it is 100% cost-recoverable</li> <li>• Review &amp; update Board Governance</li> <li>• Review &amp; update internal SSEA Governance</li> </ul>
<b>Commit to a Culture of Continuous Improvement</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conduct an SSEA Governance Review in anticipation of the 2020 Financial Agreement Renewal</li> <li>• Complete a Board &amp; Staff ‘Team’ Evaluation</li> <li>• Explore opportunities to enhance public and stakeholder representation in current governance model</li> <li>• Explore opportunities for greater alignment with Sustainable Severn Sound</li> <li>• Develop and implement standardized reporting formats</li> </ul>
<b>Be An Employer Of Choice</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop an HR Recruitment and Retention Strategy</li> <li>• Develop a Succession Plan</li> <li>• Explore opportunities to increase internal capacity through co-ops, internships and partnerships</li> <li>• Standardize HR processes and procedures</li> <li>• Develop standardized Performance Appraisal process and protocols</li> <li>• Review pay grade to implement pay grid and equity across the organization</li> <li>• Develop Staff Training Needs Assessment &amp; Staff Development Program to deliver Core Competencies &amp; leadership development</li> </ul>



# Advancing Our Strategic Plan & Measuring Success

Winston Churchill once said, “to improve is to change; to be perfect is to change often.” This Strategic Plan is our blueprint for change. We view this as a living, evolving document that must be reviewed – and revised – to ensure it remains current.

SSEA will review this Strategic Plan annually, with a view to turning our strategy into reality at the departmental level. We will develop our Operational Plans based on this document and we will develop and report on benchmarks that track our success.

Any staff reports that proceed to our Board will be required to identify the connection to the Strategic Plan, its vision, and its goals. Every year, we will prepare and present an Annual Report on Strategic Plan implementation to our Board of Directors. We will share the Annual Reporting with our community members and our partners so that you can follow along on our journey or, better yet, walk our strategic path with us.

This document represents our collective plan for action. It is our strategic plan for the next five-year period and beyond. Making Severn Sound exceptional...one step at a time.

# To Contact SSEA

## **Severn Sound Environmental Association**

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### **Acknowledgments:**

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

This Strategic Plan is Proudly Funded in part by the County of Simcoe.