



2024

Annual *Report*



SOUTH NATION
CONSERVATION
DE LA NATION SUD



Message

from the Board Chair and Chief Administrative Officer

As we reflect on 2024, we take great pride in South Nation Conservation's (SNC) achievements over the past year. This year has been a testament to our shared commitment to environmental stewardship, sustainable land management, and community collaboration.

Through innovative programs and strong partnerships, SNC continues to address evolving environmental challenges, from climate change resilience to development pressures. Our work in watershed management, environmental education, and land stewardship has had a meaningful impact across the communities we serve.

Collaboration with our member municipalities remains at the heart of our efforts. In 2024, we celebrated exciting partnerships that advanced wetland restoration, helped landowners recover from storm damage through the Woodlot Recovery Program, and secured historic funding to expand protected conservation lands. These initiatives not only preserve and restore natural spaces but also ensure the long-term ecological health of our region for future generations.

None of this would be possible without the dedication and hard work of our staff, municipalities, volunteers, and funding partners who support conservation efforts. Your continued support and collaboration make a tangible difference in protecting and enhancing our natural environment.

As we look ahead, we remain steadfast in our mission to conserve and protect the natural resources that define our region. With the support of our partners and the dedication of our team, we are confident that SNC will continue making a lasting impact in the years to come.

Thank you for your commitment to conservation. Together, we are building a healthier, more sustainable future for our watershed.

Sincerely,

Steve Densham
Chair, SNC Board of Directors

Carl Bickerdike
Chief Administrative Officer



2024 Year in *Review*

Conservation Land Securement

Purchasing and donating land is a meaningful way to contribute to local conservation efforts. SNC strategically acquires properties in accordance with its Land Securement Strategy, ensuring the protection of natural heritage, enhancing forest cover, safeguarding waterways, and expanding public recreational spaces.

In 2024, SNC secured approximately \$3.9 million in funding to support the purchase and donation of 275 acres of land across the watershed. These acquisitions align with long-term conservation goals and reflect a commitment to environmental sustainability.

Whether for conservation, recreation, or community benefit, both land purchases and donations leave a lasting natural legacy. Donating land offers a powerful way to support conservation initiatives, contribute to charitable organizations, and ensure land protection for future generations.

SNC's lands are 40% donated in whole or in part, while the remaining 60% are acquired with financial contributions from partners.

Over 4,800 hectares (12,000 acres) are federally recognized as protected and conserved for their biodiversity and natural heritage values.



Restoring the Riverbank at the Oak Valley Pioneer Park

Severe erosion at Oak Valley Pioneer Park in North Dundas was causing tree loss, parkland degradation, and threatening both habitat and visitor access.

To address this, SNC partnered with river restoration experts to re-slope and stabilize the riverbank, ensuring long-term protection. This section of the South Nation River, owned by SNC, has historically supported river channelization efforts to improve water flow and drainage. Today, SNC continues to manage the area with a focus on conservation and habitat restoration.

The project transformed a steep, 2-meter vertical drop into a stable, gradual slope using bioengineering techniques. SNC reinforced the shoreline, seeded native grasses, and planted over 2,000 willow live stakes to strengthen the bank. Removed trees were strategically placed at the river's edge to absorb high water flows and prevent further erosion.

SNC will continue monitoring the site and adjust erosion control methods as needed. Future enhancements, including tree planting, interpretive signage, and trail upgrades, will further improve the park for both visitors and wildlife.





New Strategies for Conservation Land and Watershed Management

In 2024, SNC developed two key strategies to guide its conservation efforts: the Watershed-based Resource Management Strategy and the Conservation Lands Strategy. As required under the *Conservation Authorities Act* and Ont. Reg. 686/21, all Conservation Authorities must complete these strategies by December 2024.

The Watershed Strategy provides a comprehensive review of SNC’s programs, services, and technical studies, outlining key principles, objectives, and monitoring initiatives. It also establishes a process for periodic updates, ensuring an adaptive approach to resource management.

The Conservation Lands Strategy focuses on property management, setting a framework for decision-making, conservation priorities, and future goals. It highlights land ownership, management activities, and the importance of natural heritage systems, while identifying risks and opportunities for stewardship and education programs.

Together, these strategies reinforce SNC’s commitment to environmental sustainability, responsible resource management, and community engagement in protecting natural areas across the watershed.

Learn more:
nation.on.ca/resources/publications/watershed-strategies



SNC Approvals Programs

Planning and Development Reviews, Conservation Authority Regulations, and Municipal Septic Services

The way we plan and build our communities affects our natural environment. Environmental planning is an important part of protecting our land and water resources.

SNC ensures people and property are protected from natural hazards by participating in local planning and development review to support local municipalities.

With expertise in natural hazards and natural heritage, municipal drinking water source protection, and private servicing, the team also supports development projects and environmental studies.

SNC's Regulations Program enables staff to work with municipal and agency partners, developers, landowners, and contractors, to safeguard human life and property from natural hazards.

SNC's Septic Program through the Ontario Building Code (Part 8 - Sewage Systems) is delivered in 16 municipalities; working with landowners and contractors to ensure proper installation and repair of septic systems.



The following summary includes the development applications reviewed in 2024.

Planning and Development

- ▶ 331 development applications
- ▶ 49 property inquiries
- ▶ 19 applications reviewed for threats to municipal drinking water
- ▶ 0 risk management plans established to protect municipal drinking water

Technical Reviews

- ▶ 303 reviews were completed, including:
 - 52 stormwater management reports
 - 12 geotechnical, geomorphology and landslide reports

Conservation Authorities Act: Section 28 Permits

- ▶ 164 permits
- ▶ 55 occurrence reports investigated
- ▶ 69 drain maintenance notifications

Sewage Systems Review

- ▶ 432 permits
- ▶ 146 septic record searches
- ▶ 46 renovation reviews
- ▶ 20 occurrence reports investigated

2024 Highlights:

- ▶ Hosted the Annual Information Day for partner municipalities
- ▶ Worked with partner Conservation Authorities in Eastern Ontario for consistent policy, regulatory and municipal projects
- ▶ Public consultation for updates to the Raisin-South Nation Source Protection Plan
- ▶ Implementation of regulatory and legislative changes under the Conservation Authorities Act and Planning Act
- ▶ Hosted the annual septic contractor meeting
- ▶ Offered septic installer and designer training to local contractors





For all planning applications, timelines are established by municipalities depending on the type of development, applicable legislation, and municipal policies.

Conservation Authorities Act permit timelines are established by the Province of Ontario, including 21 days to determine Complete Applications, 30 days to review Minor Applications and 90 days to review Major Applications. SNC communicates with clients during the review process, and additional time is provided for resubmissions.

The following summary notes the number of permits issued within established timelines.



Protecting People and Property

Floodplain and Erosion Mapping

SNC updates natural hazard maps on behalf of municipalities, focusing on areas facing development pressures. In 2024, SNC completed updates for three areas:

- ▶ South Branch of the South Nation River (Stormont, Dundas & Glengarry and Edwardsburgh Cardinal) – 33 km of the Main Branch, 16.8 km of the South Branch, and 3.8 km of Black Creek.
- ▶ Bear Brook Watershed (City of Ottawa and Prescott-Russell) – 200 km of watercourses.
- ▶ Castor River (City of Ottawa and Prescott-Russell) – 51.5 km, covering a 740 km² drainage area.

Public consultation concluded in March 2024, ensuring updated maps reflect the latest data for flood risk management and development planning.

Water Response Programs

SNC monitors water conditions year-round to help municipalities and residents prepare for floods and droughts. In 2024, SNC issued 12 flood notices under the Flood Forecasting and Warning Program but did not issue any low water advisories under the Low Water Response Program.

Upgrades to climate monitoring stations continue to improve SNC’s watershed model and forecasting capabilities.

To enhance municipal preparedness, SNC expanded its training efforts in 2024. In addition to its annual municipal flood preparedness workshop, SNC began co-hosting specialized training for the City of Ottawa with the Ottawa Conservation Authority Partners.

Water Control Structures

SNC operates several water control structures including dams, weirs and berms to reduce risk to life and property from natural hazards. In 2024, investments were made at the Chesterville Dam to repair the log lifter and improve operations. New Operation Plans were also developed for all dam structures.



2024 Program Highlights

Endless Recreational Opportunities at SNC Conservation Areas

In 2024, SNC’s network of Conservation Areas (CA) welcomed a new record of over 250,000 visitors to hike, geocache, picnic, kayak, canoe, launch their boat, bird watch, fish, and enjoy their local outdoor environment.

The most popular destinations?

Year-Round Sites:

| | |
|-------------------------------------|------------------------|
| W.E. Burton CA in Russell | 54,603 visitors |
| J. Henry Tweed CA in Russell | 43,279 visitors |
| Findlay Creek Boardwalk in Ottawa | 42,541 visitors |
| Warwick Forest CA in North Stormont | 17,203 visitors |

Seasonal Sites:

| | |
|---|------------------------|
| High Falls CA in Casselman | 29,751 visitors |
| Jessup’s Falls CA in Alfred-Plantagenet | 20,452 visitors |
| Cass Bridge CA in North Dundas | 9,382 visitors |

In 2024, SNC was able to:

- ▶ Restore the original sugar shack at the Oschmann Forest
- ▶ Replace the original section of the Findlay Creek Boardwalk
- ▶ Create a new 1 km trail at the Two Creeks Forest
- ▶ Open the first fully serviced accessible washroom at the High Falls Park
- ▶ Restore trails and control invasive species at the Robert Graham Forest
- ▶ Reopen the trail system at the Jessup’s Falls Park
- ▶ Install a new play structure at the Oschmann Forest

Land Partnerships

SNC partners with area businesses and community members to sustainably harvest locally sourced products and support the local economy.

MAPLE SYRUP



In 2024, a record 9,626 gallons of sap was collected from the Oschmann Forest and sold to a local producer. 33 acres of land is also leased for sugar bush operations.



HUNTING

Nearly 9,000 acres of SNC land is used by hunters; 124 permits issued in 2024.

TRAPPING

Nearly 9,000 acres of land is used by trappers; 11 permits issued in 2024.



HONEY

SNC is gifted 10 lbs of honey annually from local beekeepers; 1 land lease in 2024.



FIRST NATIONS

Support for the “The Healing Place” and the “Miitig Healing Lodge” provide community access to public lands. Partnerships through the Eastern Ontario First Nations Working Group incorporate Traditional Knowledge and a Two-Eyed Seeing approach to conservation efforts and ensure the protection of culturally significant species.



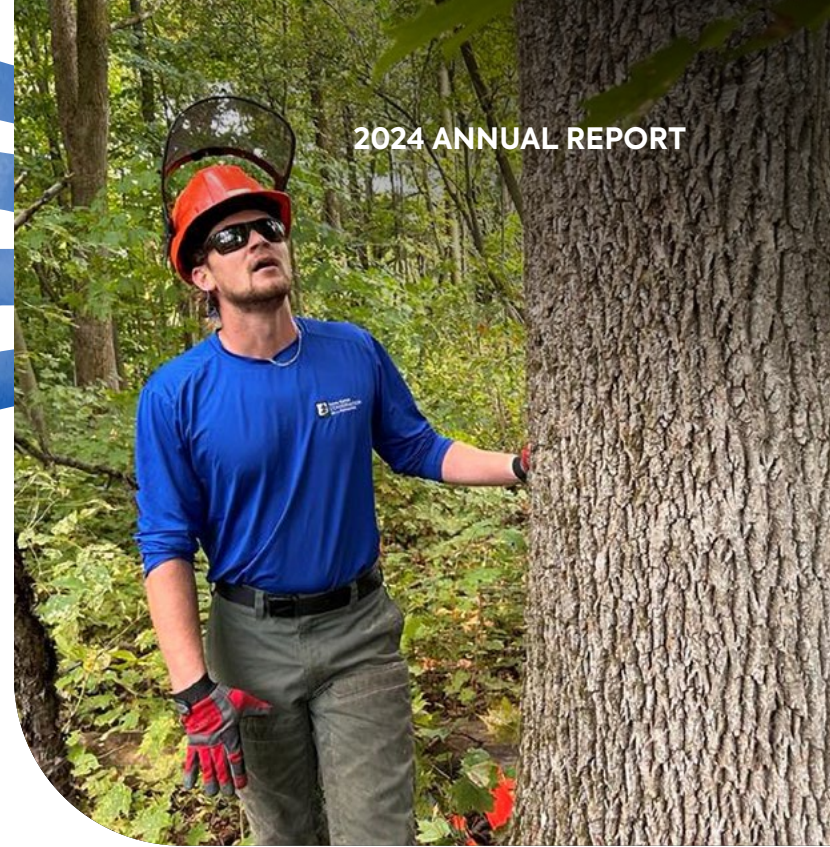
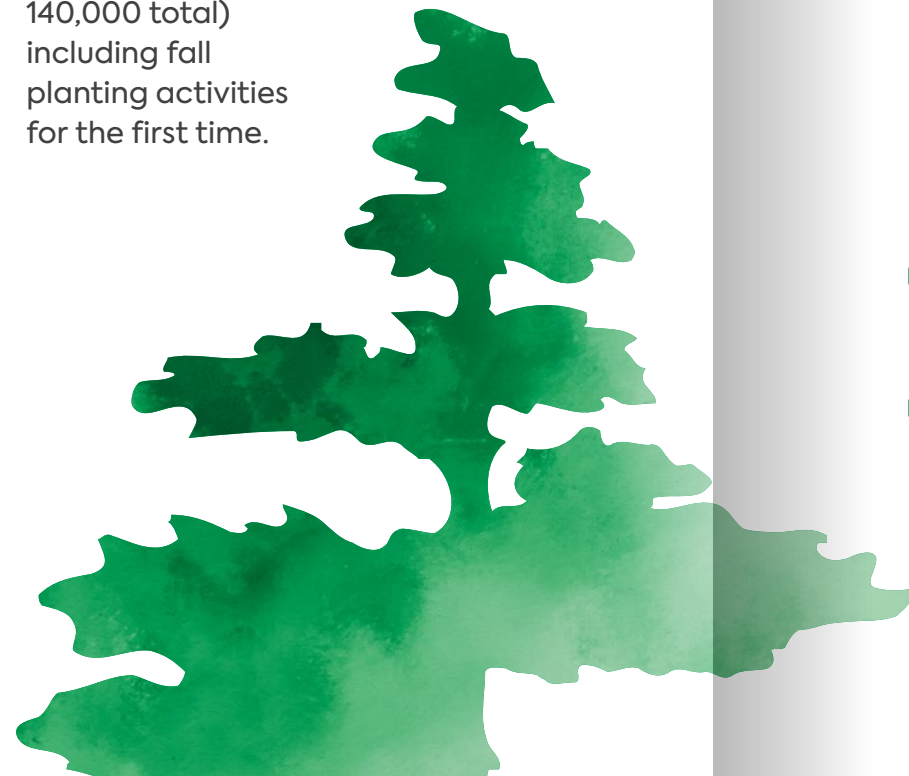
CROP PRODUCTION

30 acres of SNC land is leased to local farmers.

Woodlot Management and Tree Planting

In 2024, SNC:

- ▶ Planted over 140,000 tree seedlings, adding to the 4 million trees planted since 1990.
- ▶ Provided \$144,000 in grants from Forests Canada to help plant trees on private land.
- ▶ Provided \$84,624 in grants for 49 projects in the City of Ottawa that helped recover from storm damage and the invasive Emerald Ash Borer.
- ▶ Completed free Woodlot Advisory Service site visits in Prescott-Russell (UCPR) and Stormont, Dundas, and Glengarry (SDG).
 - In UCPR, \$23,180 of funding was distributed through 48 grants to support the management of 1,987 acres of privately owned forests.
 - In SDG, \$12,400 of funding was distributed through 25 grants to support the management of 1,600 acres of privately owned forests.
- ▶ Delivered the new Woodlot Storm Recovery Program:
 - Supported 140 properties with restoration efforts (126 in Prescott-Russell and 21 in Ottawa) and engaged over 30 local businesses in storm recovery efforts.
 - Restored over 40 hectares (100 acres) of forest within the Township of Alfred-Plantagenet and the City of Clarence-Rockland.
 - Provided \$300,000 to 32 property owners in Prescott-Russell for eligible forest restoration expenses from the May 2022 Derecho Storm.
 - Planted over 57,000 trees (included in the 140,000 total) including fall planting activities for the first time.



- ▶ Received \$25,000 in land use permits, maple sap collection and the sale of wood products.
- ▶ Due to mild winter conditions, forest operations were suspended to protect the sites from damage. No timber harvest revenues were received.
- ▶ The SNC Forest is managed sustainably with forest operations certified under the Forest Stewardship Council. A second international certification is being established under the Sustainable Forestry Initiative.
- ▶ SNC established forestry service agreements with member municipalities to support forest management and tree planting projects on municipal land.
 - Over 150 large trees were planted in the City of Clarence-Rockland.
 - Over 30 large trees were planted in the Township of Edwardsburgh Cardinal.
- ▶ 18 Forest Steward volunteers helped monitor forest activity on 45 SNC properties.
- ▶ SNC partnered with municipalities to fundraise \$4,000 and provide over 10,000 free tree seedlings to watershed residents.



Watershed Monitoring and Reporting

Our environmental monitoring programs focus on the quality and quantity of our land and water ecosystems including: surface and ground water; native, invasive, and at-risk species; stream assessments; and municipal drains.

SNC collects and provides scientifically accurate data for stakeholders and municipalities to make informed decisions; data also helps guide SNC stewardship projects and programs.

Clean Water Program

Water quality improvement programs and farm stewardship projects have helped provide cost-share funding (\$1,000 - \$8,000) to improve the environment on private property.

\$130,757 in cost-share grants supported 40 projects within the City of Ottawa and were delivered on behalf of the three Conservation Authority partners (South Nation, Rideau Valley and Mississippi Valley).

\$16,653 in cost-share grants supported 5 projects within the SNC jurisdiction outside of Ottawa.

Projects included wetland and grassland restoration, erosion control, cover crops, tree planting, and septic system replacements.

Habitat Restoration

SNC collaborates with funding partners to restore habitat on public and private lands, supporting both species at risk and locally significant wildlife.

Through the Grassland Stewardship Initiative, funding was available to help property owners create, enhance, or maintain grasslands, benefiting grassland bird populations such as the Bobolink and Eastern Meadowlark.

With support from the Canadian Wildlife Federation, SNC continues to restore pollinator habitat across the watershed. Wildflower meadows were established on newly acquired conservation lands in the City of Ottawa, with additional restoration efforts at SNC properties in North Dundas and Augusta Townships. These meadows provide critical habitat and food sources for pollinators, enhancing local biodiversity.



Education and Outreach

SNC delivers a range of education and outreach programs designed to foster environmental stewardship and raise awareness about local conservation efforts. These programs provide hands-on learning opportunities for people of all ages, helping communities connect with natural resources, wildlife, and sustainable practices.

Programs like Summer Fish Camp give youth the chance to explore their local waterways and wildlife. In 2024, 100 youth participated, gaining a deeper understanding of aquatic ecosystems. SNC also offers school programs, field trips, community events, and volunteer opportunities, engaging the public in conservation education and the importance of protecting the environment.

In 2024, SNC supported 20 community-led projects through the Community Environmental Grants Program. These grants helped fund local environmental initiatives, strengthening the connection between people and nature while encouraging shared responsibility for protecting the watershed.



Invasive Phragmites Control Fund

Invasive species continue to threaten Ontario’s ecosystems. In 2024, SNC secured funding through the Invasive Species Action Fund and Invasive Phragmites Control Fund to manage invasive plants on conservation lands.

As part of this initiative, 1,156 acres were mapped for invasive phragmites as part of a regional collaboration in Eastern Ontario. Control efforts focused on invasive buckthorn removal at the Robert Graham Forest and Oschmann Forest Conservation Areas. Early detection, integrated control strategies, and post-removal restoration are key to reduce spread and re-establishment.

Invasive Water Chestnut Control Efforts

In 2022, invasive European Water Chestnut was discovered in the South Nation and Castor Rivers, outside its previously known range in Ontario. This fast-spreading species forms dense floating mats with barbed spines, threatening aquatic ecosystems and recreational access.

Since its discovery, SNC has prioritized monitoring and control efforts. In 2024, approximately 18,000 plants were hand-pulled to limit its spread.

Given the plant’s persistence, long-term monitoring and management will be essential to prevent re-establishment and protect local waterways.



Findlay Creek Boardwalk

Over \$1.7 million was invested in the two-year revitalization project (2023–2024) to rebuild aging sections and expand public access to the Findlay Creek Boardwalk, in the City of Ottawa. This project was supported by the Government of Canada through the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario (FedDev Ontario).

In 2023, the boardwalk was extended by 540 m, completing a 1 km looped pathway with two entry points and multiple viewing platforms.

In 2024, SNC rebuilt 340 m of the boardwalk, which was originally constructed in 2012, ensuring long-term sustainability and improved visitor experience.

This enhanced trail provides improved access to the 570-acre Leitrim Wetland, a Provincially Significant Wetland and Area of Natural and Scientific Interest.

Bear Brook Characterization Study

SNC is working with the City of Ottawa on a multi-year Bear Brook Watershed Study due to the urban expansion near the headwaters of the Bear Brook. The plan seeks to balance socioeconomic and environmental systems to ensure the long-term health of the watershed.

In 2024, SNC focused efforts on a Characterization Report developed from fieldwork, analysis, and environmental assessment processes to identify the existing conditions of the Bear Brook Watershed.

Scenario modelling, assessment and implementation plans will be completed in 2025.



Ducks Unlimited Canada

Ducks Unlimited Canada Partnership

The revitalization of lost and degraded wetlands in Eastern Ontario has been the focus of a three-year restoration project, led through a partnership between SNC and Ducks Unlimited Canada, with support from the Government of Canada’s Nature Smart Climate Solutions Fund.

SNC collaborated with municipalities, public agencies, and landowners to implement restoration efforts on both public and private lands. In 2024, SNC completed the partnership’s final phase, delivering four new projects, including a 7-acre mega-wetland on SNC property in The Nation Municipality.

These projects included pond design, construction, native seeding, and planting of trees and shrubs to enhance habitat and biodiversity. SNC will continue monitoring these sites to assess water retention, vegetation growth, and wildlife use in the coming years.

View the Eastern Ontario Wetland Restoration Story Map





2024 Board of Directors

The 2024 Board of Directors include:

- ▶ Steve Densham, Chair, Stormont, Dundas & Glengarry
- ▶ Adrian Wynands, Vice-Chair, Leeds & Grenville
- ▶ George Darouze, Past Chair, City of Ottawa

City of Ottawa:

- ▶ Catherine Kitts, Matthew Luloff, Linda Payant

United Counties of Prescott-Russell:

- ▶ Geneviève Lajoie, François St. Amour, Mike Tarnowski

United Counties of Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry:

- ▶ Bill Smirle, Tom Smyth

United Counties of Leeds and Grenville:

- ▶ Deb Wilson

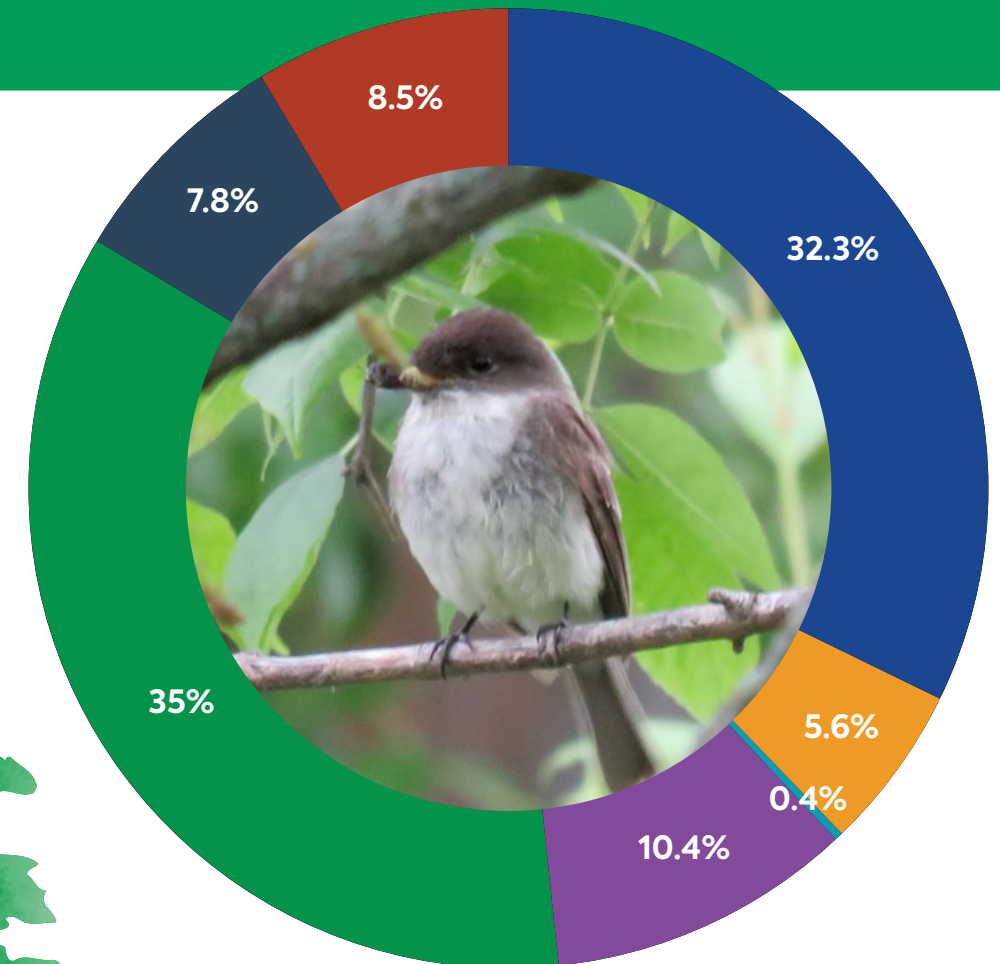
SNC's Board of Directors consists of 12 appointed representatives from SNC's 16-member municipalities who govern and provide direction for all the work completed by SNC staff.

Budget Summary



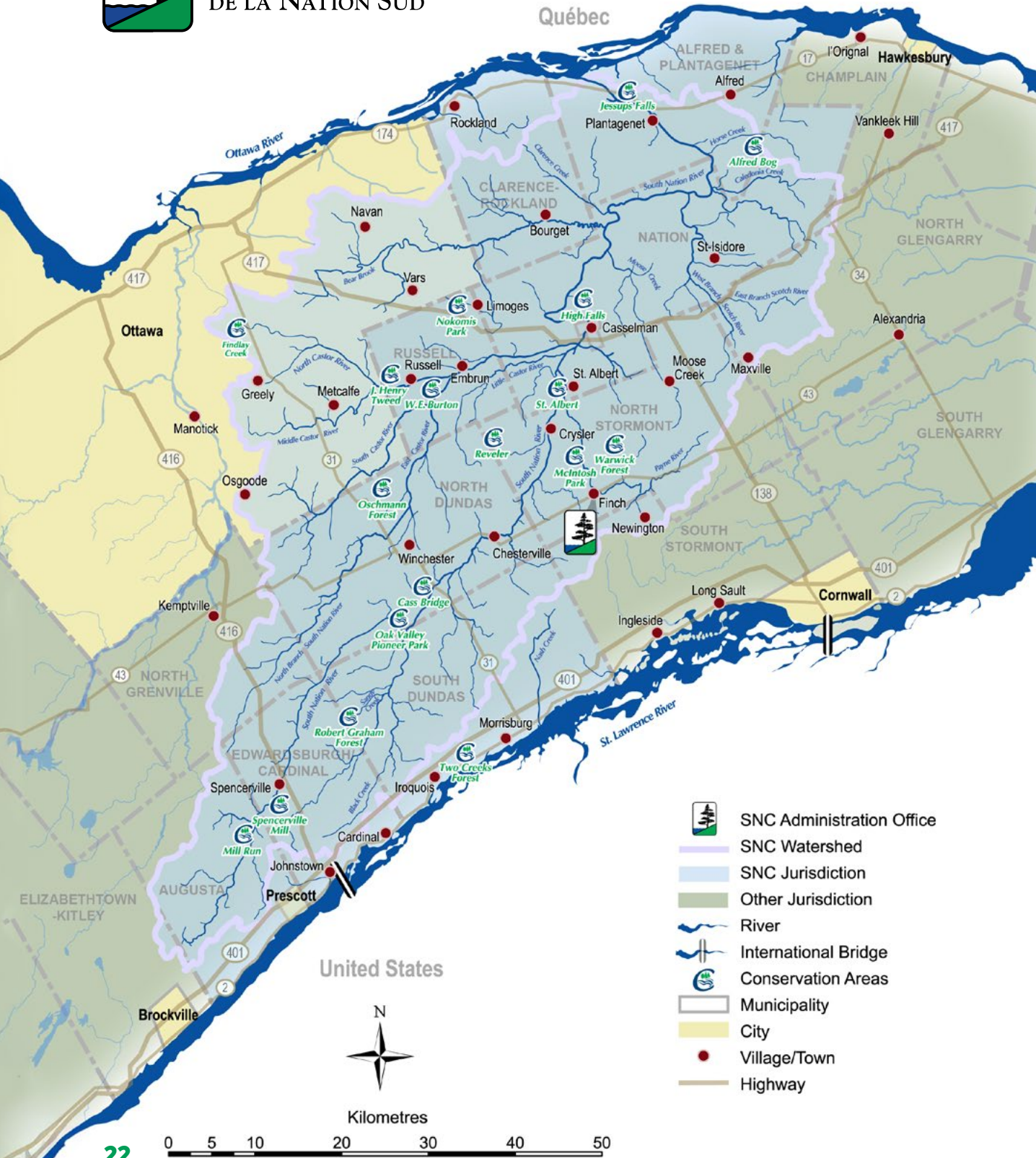
2024 Budget: \$13,759,129

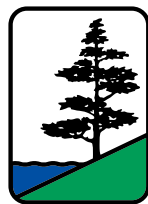
- General Levy: \$4,439,413
- Special Levy: \$763,868
- Capital Levy: \$50,000
- Government Grants: \$1,430,021
- Partners: \$4,825,860
- User Fees: \$1,068,577
- Other Sources and Donations: \$1,181,390





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