



2025 - 2030

# Strategy & Plans

Resilient Futures: Conservation for a World in Transition

Clouded Sulphur Butterfly (*Colias philodice*) at the Springbank Farm Hub Community Garden.  
Photo by Katherine Willis



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# Land Acknowledgement

At *rare*, we take care of over 1,550 acres of land—but we are not the first to do so. Most of the land we steward is on the Haldimand Tract, stretching for six miles on either side of the Grand River. This land belongs to the Onkwehon:we Peoples of the Six Nations of the Grand River. It is also the territory of the Mississaugas of the Credit Anishinaabe First Nation. The Mississaugas of the Credit also have a right to the land we care for located on the border of Treaty 3 and Treaty 19 in Wellington County.

We honour and respect the rights and sovereignty of these First Nations and their ancestors. Many other First Nations, Métis and Inuit Peoples from across Turtle Island (North America) also now live in this area. As an organization started and led by settlers, we make this land acknowledgement to recognize the harm caused by colonization and the taking of land from Indigenous Peoples without consent. These harms have caused pain and injustices across generations and continue to create unfair systems today.

We understand that we benefit from land that was taken. Our goal is to rebuild respectful and fair relationships with the Indigenous nations connected to the land where *rare* is located. We are committed to learning about our responsibilities as settlers and to unlearn the biases and histories that allowed these injustices to happen in what we now call Canada.

## Our Mission, Vision & Values

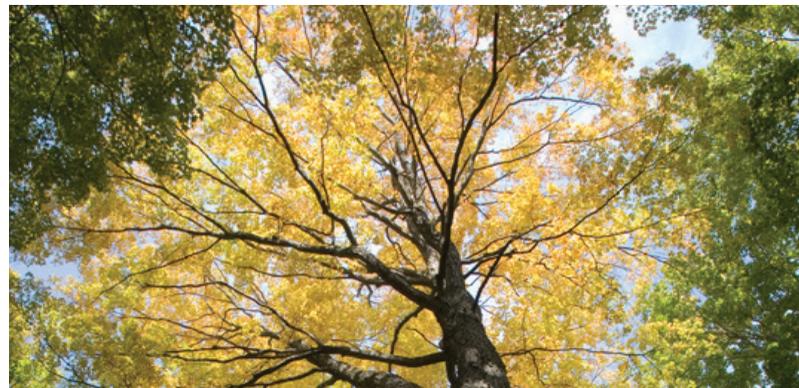


### Our Mission

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

### Our Vision

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



### Our Values

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



## Directors' Letter

Another five years have passed in what seems like the blink of an eye—five years during which many things happened that not even the wisest of us could have foreseen. When we embarked on writing our last Strategy and Plans in late 2019, it was business as usual, and little did we know that we would launch our new plan three months into the start of a global pandemic—a pandemic that saw what we took for granted turned upside down, forcing us to navigate unknown waters to our best abilities. But, as the saying goes, rough seas make for better sailors. We emerged on the other side humbled, perhaps with some scarring, but mostly unscathed and with a heightened understanding that our work to protect the planet is more important than ever—for our own health and well-being, now and for the future.

During a time when many organizations dismissed long-term staff, ceased to fundraise and shut down trails and conservation programs, our lands were a refuge not only for species but also for people. They were a beacon of hope

during lockdowns that seemed bleak and never-ending.

We had just celebrated the purchase of our first property beyond the original lands in Blair, starting what would become the Eramosa River Conservation Corridor in Wellington County, and we proved—even to ourselves – that, with your help and constant support, nothing could come between us and our relentless goal to protect more land for conservation. In the end, we did just that—with an additional 375 acres and seven properties that came under our stewardship from 2020 to the beginning of 2025.

It is with great excitement that we now share with you what we think the next five years could bring. We have learned, in a world that is constantly changing and transforming, that we need to keep on our toes and make sure we approach our work not with rigidity, but with a healthy dose of flexibility and a willingness to pivot when plans don't go as envisioned. As our communities change around us, we need to change

with them and make sure we meet the needs of generations yet to come, and to build new relationships through new approaches, while also tapping into our existing skillset and experience. The land *rare* protects offers much needed stability in a world full of uncertainty. We're here to work with you—and for you—to make *rare*, and protecting the environment, relevant in everyone's life.

Many of you told us what you would like to see in this new version of our Strategy and Plans as we approach 2030. We hope you enjoy reading this document that is chock-full of our successes, failures, hopes, worries and, most importantly, big ideas—with your support, we're up for it!

With gratitude,

Dr. Stephanie Sobek-Swant, Executive Director

Dr. Joy Roberts, Chair of the Board



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**Photos:** (Opposite Left): Ontario Nature, A day on the Grand. Photo by Devon Crowell (Opposite Right): Indian Woods yellow-wood maple. Photo by Peter Kelly. (Opposite Bottom): Heron eating a fish. Photo by Adam Gray. (Top) Mist on the Grand. Photo by Peter Kelly. (Bottom Left) Nature selfie of Dr. Stephanie Sobek-Swant, Executive Director at *rare*. (Bottom Right): Headshot of Dr. Joy Roberts, Chair of the Board. Photo by Geneviève Caron.

## Why rare?

### Grounded in the Land—Unlearn, Unwind and Grow

We are a community-based urban land trust and environmental institute that protects over **1,550 acres** of natural lands across ten locations in Waterloo Region and Wellington County. Conservation is our priority, promoting a biodiverse and sustainable world for everyone's health and wellbeing, now and for the future. **Everything is connected**—as a land trust and environmental institute, *rare's* ultimate goal is to make the world a more sustainable place. We do this by making the environment relevant in peoples' lives through conservation, research and education in ways that are inclusive of different world views and all forms of inquiry.

**One of the biggest current and future challenges our communities are facing is climate change.** At *rare*, our work responds to climate change by focusing on what makes both ecosystems and communities more resilient. Through land securement, ecological restoration and sustainable food growing, we strengthen biodiversity, sequester carbon and support climate-adaptive landscapes. Resilience also has ecological, cultural and social dimensions. By braiding together conservation, research, education, food

security and the arts, we help people **build lasting, meaningful relationships with the land and with each other.**

From protecting wetlands that mitigate floods, to training youth in stewardship practices, our work helps communities prepare for a changing climate not merely by reacting to it—but by living differently with the land, exhibiting hope, care and connection at the heart of our responses. Relational intelligence is at the core of everything *rare* does—it shapes how we connect with the land, with each other and with the complex systems of which we are a part. In our work, relational intelligence means understanding that **conservation isn't just about protecting species or habitats—it's about nurturing relationships: between people and ecosystems, between Indigenous and settler worldviews, between science and art, between generations and among communities.**

**Our unique method of conservation helps us continue to learn how to move beyond transactional or extractive models of working—**

whether in land stewardship, education, research or even fundraising and administration—and towards approaches that have created an organizational culture grounded in care, reciprocity, humility and trust. It influences how we build partnerships, how we teach and learn, how we share knowledge and how we honour the interconnectedness of cultural and ecological systems. **At *rare*, we recognize that land is not protected by simply fencing it off and leaving it alone—but through relationships and through forming entire communities of concern and support around these lands.**

**Photo: (above):** Viceroy butterfly (*Limenitis archippus*) Photo by Peter Kelly



Campers with butterfly nets at the ECO Centre.  
Photo by Michelle MacMillan

### Unplug & Reconnect: An Infinite Stroll

In a world of screens and scrolling, *rare* invites a different kind of connection. A visit here can feel like hitting a natural reset button. The *rare* lands offer free, year-round access to walking trails, community gardens, educational events and outdoor programs that support wellbeing and wonder.

This is especially important for children and youth, whose mental health is shaped by their relationship with the real world. At *rare*, land-based education, youth leadership, stewardship programs and arts-based exploration help build confidence, agency and belonging. We offer a place to grow, in the most literal sense—going beyond one-off programs offering ongoing, deeper points of engagement and belonging.

Rather than the "infinite scroll," *rare* proposes the "infinite stroll"—a slower, more connected way of being. No prescription needed!

**How rare fits into a Global Movement**

As a local land trust and international environmental institute, the work we do at *rare* supports global biodiversity goals such as the 30x30 Commitment (to protect 30% of land and water by 2030); the *rare* lands are listed in national and international conservation databases. But we also recognize that conservation must include Indigenous leadership, cultural knowledge and working towards just relationships with each other and the land. We are committed to ongoing learning and to shifting away from extractive practices, toward trust and reciprocity.

**Looking Back: 25 Years of Learning**

Over the past 2.5 decades, *rare* has grown from a single-site land trust into a national model of place-based conservation. We've secured significant land donations, renovated heritage infrastructure, become a certified living wage employer, launched new education and research programs and deepened our relationship with Musagetes through artist residencies and the Long Dash Festival. We've also learned to sit with complexity, embrace discomfort and let our values lead. These lessons will shape the path ahead as we continue to refine and implement our unique method of conservation.

Summer at Springbank Farm Hub.  
Photo by Peter Kelly



Garter Snake (*Thamnophis sirtalis*) at rare.  
Photo by Jeff Moser and Jeanette Dillon

## rare 2030: A Vision for Thriving Together

### Our Organizational Goals for 2025 to 2030—Stability, Visibility & Social Connection

As we look toward 2030, *rare* envisions a future where people, nature and knowledge thrive together—rooted in reciprocal relationships with the land and with each other.

By 2030, *rare* will be a national model for how conservation, inclusive education, community-linked science and equity-centred fundraising and administration can support one another. We will protect more land while building stronger relationships with it and with Indigenous communities, newcomers, youth and diverse knowledge systems. We will nurture transformative learning hubs, engaging people from kindergarteners to researchers in hands-on, hope-filled conservation. Our education team will expand in size, scope and welcoming and inclusive reach—geared towards younger learners, amplifying Indigenous voices and exploring new creative pathways into nature connection. Our research program will grow through *rare*-driven inquiry, bridging science and the arts and, through our *rare* Chain of Learning, connect with the community.

Through responsible use of technology, thoughtful infrastructure planning and inclusive hiring practices, we will create the backbone for *rare*'s long-term success. These New Ideas—such as:

- critically evaluating emerging Artificial Intelligence (AI) use and promoting a relational and responsible approach to it;
- designing summer academies to train students;
- creating programs to support landowners to become better stewards of their own lands; and
- developing a master plan for our facilities that is environmentally sound.

reflect our belief that sustainability must live in every decision we make.

We are laying the foundation to grow into a fully realized *rare* Conservation Campus—a combination of institutional programs and spaces that are welcoming, connected and alive with deep purpose. Rather than focussing on a single institutional building, the campus will

bring together *rare*'s Lamb's Inn Village, ECO Centre and Springbank Farm Hubs. It will reflect the richness of the land and the people who gather on it: buildings and outdoor areas will each have clearly defined, complementary functions, yet feel woven together by a riverine landscape, shared architectural features and shared values of stewardship, creativity and community. The design of the campus will centre sustainability—in the environmental sense, but also in terms of long-term care and adaptability. We envision a place that invites all ages and backgrounds to engage with land and learning in ways that are hands-on, joyful and unpretentious. We do not envision a traditional “visitor centre,” museum or academic institution, but rather a dynamic, evolving home for conservation-in-action.

Together, these Strategy and Plans form the bedrock of “*rare* 2030” and beyond—a living, evolving vision of what's possible when conservation becomes a lived culture. **We're not simply protecting nature; we're part of it!**

## In the next five years we will:

### 1. Deepen and Expand Our Relationships with the Land

We will protect, restore and care for the land not just through science or policy—but through relationships rooted in reciprocity, responsibility and respect. We will complete and begin to implement a revised Land Securement Strategy, support Indigenous-led stewardship and goals for land securement and transform “land management” into “land relations,” working across ecosystems and knowledge systems to support long-term biodiversity health.

### 2. Make Conservation and Sustainability Inclusive and Welcoming

We will centre justice, equity, diversity and inclusion in all areas of our work—land access, education, research, hiring and volunteer engagement. From creating additional fully funded internship opportunities to redesigning education programs to be more approachable and welcoming, we will work towards removing barriers and building belonging for historically excluded communities, including Indigenous Peoples, newcomers, BIPOC youth and people with disabilities.

### 3. Empower a Culture of Learning, Stewardship and Community Action

We will inspire a new generation of conservationists, scientists, artists and changemakers—whether through the *rare* Environmental Youth Network (rEYN), ECO camps, research mentorships or intergenerational partnerships. Our programs will connect people to nature through action and imagination, using mirrored research, the arts and hands-on learning to make the environment tangible and relevant in people’s lives.

### 4. Lead through Knowledge: Generate, Share and Apply Environmental Research

We will strengthen *rare’s* role as a living laboratory—designing *rare*-driven research, optimizing our monitoring program and sharing findings with land stewards, policymakers and communities. Our research will inform restoration efforts and contribute to national and global biodiversity databases and publications, while also being made accessible to the public through education, storytelling and data visualization.

### 5. Build the Infrastructure, Culture and Resources for Long-Term Resilience

We will grow *rare’s* internal capacity and community impact through thoughtful fundraising, data-driven decision-making, responsible use of technology and infrastructure that reflects our environmental values. From climate-conscious facilities to transparent community engagement and a strong digital backbone, we will ensure that *rare’s* foundation is as resilient and regenerative as the ecosystems we protect.

Chili Peppers (*Capsicum annuum*) growing at the Springbank Farm Hub.  
Photo by Devon Crowell

## *Conservation that feeds people*

Growing food for the community  
while improving soil health and  
supporting pollinators.

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**40,580+ lbs**  
of fresh food donated

## *A living laboratory*

Long-term research to advance  
conservation science.

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**184+** research projects  
**33** participating Institutions

# **Conservation is our Priority**

*and the basis for*

*Land is how we*

*More than 1,550 acres*

# Conservation Priority

for everything

how we relate.

resources protected forever.

## Art as an act of stewardship

Artists help connect people to the land and foster a culture of care.

**35+**

arts projects on *rare* lands

## Every Child Outdoors (ECO): Training the next generation of conservationists

Curriculum-based programs with hands-on environmental learning.

**30,000+**

Children and youth  
engaged

## Braiding Departmental Structure

What we articulated as our organizational goals in our last Strategy and Plans have become fundamental principles that guide our work across organizational departments (Land Relations, Food Security & Facilities, Research, Education, Fundraising, Communications & Administration). These departments are no longer silos but have started to become strong braids reflecting the interconnectedness of the work, and how everyone contributes to the success of the whole. Due to the braided nature of *rare*, while we tried to choose the most appropriate category for each goal and strategy, you will often find that items also fit and contribute to other areas.

In the following, we present our primary goals and strategies for the next five years across departments mapped against our core principles of **Stewardship & Place, Braiding & Belonging, Learning & Inquiring and Abundance**. Beyond these primary goals, there is work that has become an operational standard and ongoing commitment—these operational standards will continue and link into new ideas and directions as they develop.



rare staff, Candace Park removing Giant Hogweed (*Heracleum mantegazzianum*). Photo by Kathryn Power

## Land Relations

We are renaming our Land Management department to Land Relations to reflect better the values and responsibilities we hold as stewards of this land. “Management” implies control and ownership, whereas “Relations” acknowledges reciprocity, respect and connection. This shift moves us even further toward a more inclusive, relational understanding of conservation—one that honours Indigenous knowledge systems, invites collaboration across communities and recognizes that we are part of the ecosystems we care for. Land Relations speaks to the ongoing relationship we cultivate with the land, its beings and each other—not just what we do to the land, but how we live with it.

Over the next five years, *rare’s* Land Relations team will advance a vision of community-rooted stewardship. As *rare’s* protected land base grows, so too must our capacity to care for it—through bold restoration projects, inclusive partnerships with Indigenous communities, sustainable infrastructure and increased support for staff, interns and volunteers. Our goal is to conserve land and to help people understand to respect it and make them feel part of it.

### Stewardship & Place

- Complete a revised Land Securement Strategy (LSS) in 2026 and begin implementation of priority projects

*Strategy:* Engage municipalities, advocate for improved policy conditions and align with federal and provincial securement programs.

- Develop a regional Giant Hogweed management plan

*Strategy:* Partner across jurisdictions and organizations to build detection, safe removal and joint monitoring efforts.

- Revitalize the Native Plant Propagation Project (NP3)

*Strategy:* Expand seed collection and transplanting. Grow volunteer engagement through educational events, plant sales and community partnerships.

### Braiding & Belonging

- Build meaningful, reciprocal relationships with Indigenous communities

*Strategy:* Continue Indigenous-led collaborations such as the Old Mill Wetland project, Millpond sweat lodge and seed sharing with Kayanase Nurseries. Invite new relationships rooted in shared care and concern for the land.

### Learning & Inquiring

- Integrate research and monitoring into restoration planning

*Strategy:* Use monitoring data from the Research team (e.g., salamanders) in the design of restoration projects like the Forest Corridor.

### Abundance

- Strengthen stewardship capacity and support landowners

*Strategy:* Build landowner mentorship and stewardship support by adding a permanent Conservation Technician role and prioritizing seasonal roles in high-need areas.



**Photo:** (Left): Close up of snapping turtle (*Chelydra serpentina*) hatchling before release. Photo by Rosalind Snyder

# Food Security & Facilities

We are renaming our Gardens & Facilities department to Food Security & Facilities to reflect better the full scope and purpose of the work we're doing. While community gardens remain at the heart of our programs, our vision goes far beyond gardening. At *rare*, we recognize that food security and conservation are not separate goals—they are part of the same system. The health of our ecosystems directly affects the health of our food systems. When we protect and restore soil, water, pollinator habitat and biodiversity, we also protect the foundation of our food supply. Through programs like our Springbank Food Bank Gardens and seed-saving initiatives, we show that growing food can be a powerful act of stewardship. By offering free, local food to people facing barriers, while teaching about plants, sustainable growing and seed sovereignty, we help people build a relationship with the land that is nourishing, reciprocal and resilient. Supporting food security is one way we practice conservation with people at the centre—ensuring that healthy land can support healthy communities for generations to come.

Over the next five years, *rare's* Food Security & Facilities department will strengthen its role as a connector between land, people and place. To support our programs *rare* needs purpose-built spaces where people can come together. Guided by our commitment to community belonging and sustainability, we'll co-create built spaces that are functional and inclusive, expand opportunities to engage with art on the land and prepare our infrastructure for the future. The community gardens will become part of a vibrant farm hub and a place where restoration, learning and cultural expression are cultivated alongside kale and calendula—where the land grows food, ideas and relationships.



**Photo: (Above):** *rare* and Cambridge Food Bank Staff with Springbank Farm Hub volunteers showing off their garlic scape harvest. Photo by Taryn Jarvis

## Stewardship & Place

- **Responsibly steward Springbank Farm, using food security as a lens for conservation and equity**

*Strategy:* Grow and share food, seeds and knowledge by integrating diverse plants, reallocating greenhouse resources and hosting seasonal workshops to meet current community needs.

- **Launch the *rare* Conservation Campus: a Landscape & Facilities Master Plan including all Blair sites**

*Strategy:* Work with professional architects to complete a phased plan for future building projects. Engage staff and community members in co-creating a vision for *rare's* built and living environments, linking ecological function, research, learning, welcoming design and beauty.

- **Implement the first building project identified in the Master Plan that reflects art as a form of inquiry at *rare***

*Strategy:* Connect people to land and arts by bringing an Andy Goldsworthy installation to *rare*. Goldsworthy is an internationally renowned artist who, for 50 years, has been committed to working with available natural materials. Create a purpose-built space to host artists-in-residence and foster public engagement.

## Braiding & Belonging

- **Diversify community garden membership to reflect the cultural diversity of Waterloo Region**

*Strategy:* Foster inclusive gardens by partnering with BIPOC and newcomer communities, tracking participation and needs and developing ways to reduce barriers.

- **Improve access via public transit and active transportation**

*Strategy:* Advocate for a roundabout and bus stop at the ECO Centre; partner across jurisdictions to design and promote safe active transportation routes to *rare* that do not contradict

commitment to keeping ecologically highly sensitive areas protected.

## Learning & Inquiring

- **Host more artist-led workshops and community learning experiences rooted in nature**

*Strategy:* Offer honoraria for local artists, Indigenous knowledge holders and community members leading workshops. Apply a “pay what you can” model for events to ensure inclusive participation.

## Abundance

- **Build capacity to support our growing needs for professional facilities management and maintenance**

*Strategy:* Create a Food Security & Facilities Management role in addition to a full-time permanent Gardens Coordinator position to lead field work, supervise seasonal staff and support community gardeners and volunteers. Implement a Preventative Maintenance Plan for all buildings and facilities.

# Research

In the next five years, Research at *rare* will evolve into a dynamic hub of inquiry, innovation and application—deepening its role as both a knowledge generator and a conduit between disciplines, communities and ecosystems. Guided by a commitment to ecological integrity, relationship-building and multi-generational learning, the department will strengthen *rare*'s Chain of Learning by asking bold, *rare*-driven questions, enhancing technical training and ensuring that knowledge flows between researchers, practitioners and the public. By transforming Resource House into a functional research centre and strengthening academic partnerships, *rare* will increase its impact on the ground and across knowledge systems—helping protect nature not only through understanding it, but by actively living as part of it.

At *rare*, we believe that the arts are not separate from conservation—they are essential to it. Art allows us to ask questions that science alone cannot, to feel the weight of a changing climate, to see the spirit in a place and to imagine new futures for the land and for ourselves. Including the arts as a form of inquiry opens space for emotion, remembrance, culture and creativity in our work. It helps us connect more deeply with communities, amplify diverse voices and explore the complex relationships between people and nature. Through our partnership with Musagetes and initiatives like the Eastern Comma and Question Mark artist residencies and the Long Dash Festival, we're continuing to build a unique method of conservation that involves not only ecological stewardship transforming the land—but also transforming communities through cultural and personal engagement. This collaboration supports contemporary arts initiatives that highlight the interconnectedness of social and ecological systems. By working together, *rare* and Musagetes can develop programs that protect natural habitats while also enriching the sociocultural fabric of the communities we serve.

## Stewardship & Place

- **Publish an official Research Framework similar to the ECO Framework to guide research at *rare***

*Strategy:* Collaboratively co-develop a framework that reflects *rare*'s conservation priorities, interdisciplinary approach and values. Include both scientific and community knowledge perspectives and ensure alignment with the Land Relations and Education teams.

- **Prioritize applied, actionable research tied to real-world conservation needs**

*Strategy:* Prioritize applied research into three key areas: conservation targets, threats and solutions; share findings widely and create demonstration sites and activities for community learning.

## Braiding & Belonging

- **Make *rare*'s research programs more inclusive and representative of diverse knowledge systems**

*Strategy:* Broaden promotion of and access to research funding across disciplines, institutions and geographies and decolonize processes by supporting

diverse disciplines by identifying needs and reducing systemic barriers.

- **Re-invigorate *rare*'s research and environmental advisory committees**

*Strategy:* Reimagine and unify advisory committees into LANDWISE—the Land Advisory Network for Data, Wisdom, Inquiry, Stewardship and Equity to provide mentorship and support inclusive decision-making by bringing together diverse, multi-generational, cross-disciplinary perspectives that honour both scientific and relational ways of knowing.

## Learning & Inquiring

- **Establish a sustainable, cross-departmental, fully funded field and technical training program – the *rare* Summer Academy for Conservation Fellows**

*Strategy:* Create long-term, funded internships and fellowships across all departments through corporate and private partnerships. Offer hands-on training for students and recent graduates in fieldwork, data analysis, fundraising and project management building on the *rare* Chain of Learning model, fostering technical

skills, interdisciplinary thinking and mentorship in a co-learning environment.

- **Deepen Artist-in-Residence programs in partnership with Musagetes**

*Strategy:* Establish additional Eastern Comma residencies: two artist residencies annually (Spring and Fall), focused on Indigenous leadership, land-based practice and seasonal storytelling, with on-site stays. Expand Question Mark Butterfly residency: host at least four artists annually for 6–12 months each, fostering deeper integration with *rare*'s community and ecology.

## Abundance

- **Strengthen *rare*'s research capacity, visibility and long-term viability**

*Strategy:* Build a research core team of a Conservation Scientist and Monitoring Technician and provide infrastructure to secure major research funding, support publishing and storytelling to position *rare* as a visible “living lab.” Launch seed funding for early career researchers.

# Education Department

Over the next five years, *rare's* Education department will continue to grow into a vibrant, inclusive and transformative learning hub—rooted in land, science, art and community. Education at *rare* is about facts as much as it's about relationships: with the land, with each other and with the questions that shape how we want to live. We will engage learners of all ages, centre diverse voices and teachings, expand access and build deeper connections with research, restoration and creative exploration. Our goal is to empower all participants to see themselves as stewards, scientists, artists and agents of change, building a community of concern around conservation lands and goals and working towards prosperity for all. At *rare*, we understand that prosperity means economic wellbeing, but also includes the health of relationships—between people, land, knowledge and future generations. Our programs offer young people more than skills or career pathways; they offer a place to belong, to contribute and to grow in relationship with the world around them. Through hands-on conservation, research training, arts-based inquiry and food-growing programs, youth learn to care for ecosystems and communities in equal measure. They build confidence, competence and clarity in a time when many feel uncertain about their future. This is a different kind of prosperity—one rooted in resilience, reciprocity and perhaps most importantly, purpose. By investing in youth as stewards, storytellers, scientists and leaders, *rare* is helping to shape a future where both people and the planet can thrive.



## Stewardship & Place

- **Make environmental research and conservation relatable for young learners**

*Strategy:* Develop education programs that connect students directly with real-world conservation and research projects, using ethical practices and user-friendly community science tools like iNaturalist, Merlin and Seek. Integrate rEYN (*rare* Environmental Youth Network) participants into diverse *rare* operations and create a youth-led role that is focussed on meaningful engagement.

## Braiding & Belonging

- **Embed Indigenous teachings and leadership into education programs**

*Strategy:* Establish a formal partnership with organizations such as the Moccasin Identifier and, with permission and external leadership, integrate teachings across program offerings. Continue growing relationships with local Indigenous partners to co-create meaningful cultural learning experiences. Include hands-on Indigenous teachings at ECO Camp, such as traditional crafts, storytelling and knowledge-sharing with Elders and Knowledge Keepers.

- **Build partnerships that reflect the diversity of the communities we serve**

*Strategy:* Collaborate with organizations supporting newcomers to Canada to make outdoor learning more accessible. Partner with FREED, CitSci Schools and the Ontario Nature Youth Council to expand inclusive participation pathways and identify accessibility modifications for education modules.

- **Support newcomers to Canada to transition into meaningful conservation work**

*Strategy:* Launch a bridging program modeled after the Toronto Region Conservation Authority (TRCA) example to provide mentorship, skill-building and networking for Waterloo

Region newcomers interested in conservation careers, with placements across *rare* departments.

## Learning & Inquiring

- **Incorporate arts, technology and early learning into education programs**

*Strategy:* Continue hosting artists through partnerships with the Student Art Innovation Lab (SAIL), Canadian Clay and Glass Gallery and Musagetes and explore expanded workshop offerings. Integrate technology thoughtfully—for example, for data collection, video and photography—in a way that complements nature-based learning. Develop and launch an Early Learning Program (e.g., Parent & Tot) led by a qualified Early Childhood Educator.

## Abundance

- **Increase capacity and foster cross-department collaboration**

*Strategy:* Grow the Education team to include at least two full-time, permanent staff members and seek longer-term seasonal hires. Participate in annual LANDWISE retreat to align priorities, share resources and strengthen collaboration across *rare's* programs.

**Photo: (Above Left):** Teens at *rare* ECO Camp visiting Crow Shield Lodge Photo by Michelle MacMillan.



Photo: (Above): Staff and event attendees at the Trail Party. Photo by Erin Clark

# Fundraising, Communications & Administration

Over the next five years, *rare's* Fundraising, Communications & Administration teams will ensure strategic growth and operational excellence across the organization. By aligning our systems, people and practices with our values, we will support sustainable fundraising, inclusive hiring, welcoming and, where possible, barrier-free infrastructure and community-rooted engagement. We will update technology, improve data management, expand volunteer and donor experiences and ensure every system—financial, technological and relational—supports our vision of a connected, thriving community where everyone can contribute to conservation to make the world a more sustainable place. By the end of this strategic period, the Fundraising, Communications & Administration teams will support a multi-faceted staff team aligned with *rare's* values and evolving needs. They will support and maintain a growing base of loyal donors, sponsors and partners inspired by *rare's* long-term vision, who believe that investing in fundraising, administration and great communication is the backbone of a resilient, inclusive and joyful *rare*.

## Stewardship & Place

- **Strengthen infrastructure and operational resilience in support of *rare's* land-based mission**

*Strategy:* Lead special fundraising efforts to support capital projects and improve operational efficiency through tech upgrades, streamlined systems and secure digital storage. Support long-term resilience with infrastructure improvements, a new program booking platform and other digital tools. Pursue Conservation Excellence Certification.

- **Expand *rare's* reach through strong, values-driven communications**

*Strategy:* Craft a bold communications strategy that elevates *rare's* public presence and interconnected work, making it a household name in conservation and local communities. Amplify storytelling across platforms and empower ambassadors to share *rare's* mission.

## Braiding & Belonging

- **Build inclusive, equity-rooted systems that reflect and support the communities we serve**

*Strategy:* Build trust with underrepresented communities that can lead to future program partnerships and

embed equity through JEDDI (Justice, Equity, Diversity, Decolonization, Inclusion) team work, inclusive recruitment and non-profit “Decent Work” practices. Align *rare's* mission with health and well-being to foster meaningful relationships with new partners and donors.

## Learning & Inquiring

- **Build organizational intelligence and strengthen governance and engagement systems**

*Strategy:* Strengthen governance and strategic adaptability through a revised Board Handbook, online access portal and rolling budget framework. Improve data-driven decision-making with donor analysis, cross-departmental surveys and increased knowledge sharing.

- **Celebrate and share the systems that make *rare* run**

*Strategy:* Launch a “What We’ve Learned” training series for internal and external audiences, sharing lessons from accounting, digital infrastructure, volunteer systems and administration and present *rare's* innovations to the community, for example at conferences.

## Abundance

- **Grow and diversify revenue streams while staying mission-aligned**

*Strategy:* Continue to evolve signature campaigns (e.g., Conversations for Conservation, Trail Party) and explore joyful new fundraising ideas like weddings-as-giving and seasonal raffles. Strengthen donor engagement and stewardship with themed outreach, digital strategies and annual impact reporting.

- **Grow team capacity and define a long-term vision for organizational growth**

*Strategy:* Engage in succession planning, create a Volunteer & Engagement Coordinator role to support department-wide volunteer programs and produce communications content. Explore the ethical, relationship-centred, sustainable use of AI tools to reduce staff overextension, track AI use and its emissions alongside other sustainability metrics and offset as appropriate.

- **Launch and grow a *rare* Alumni Program**

*Strategy:* Build and maintain a *rare* alumni network to share program updates, job and mentorship opportunities, while cultivating long-term relationships and potential donors.

## Acknowledgements

This Strategy and Plan document is the result of many conversations, collaborations and shared visions. We are deeply grateful to everyone who contributed time, insight, creativity and care to help shape *rare's* direction for the years ahead.

We thank our dedicated staff, whose passion and perseverance bring our mission to life every day and who contributed significantly by articulating their needs and barriers, as well as their healthy appetite for wanting us to do our best work, collectively. To the Board of Directors, we express gratitude for their thoughtful guidance and unwavering support through failure as well as success—we are stronger because of your mentorship. We acknowledge the many community partners, supporters, collaborators, artists, researchers, educators and volunteers who continue to challenge us, inspire us and walk alongside us in this work.

The lion's share of the writing of this document, and the creative thinking behind it, inspired by conversations and a survey with community members, was carried out by our departmental leads Laura Eckhardt, Taryn Jarvis, Mike McTavish, Stephanie Sobek-Swant, Istafa Sufi, Christine Thompson and Tom Woodcock. The graphic design and typesetting was completed by Communications Officer Erin Clark. Thank you for your long hours on top of your usual duties and passionate commitment to creating this document. For the first time, parts of this document were created with the help of an AI companion that we trained with our values so it was able to help summarize, call out inconsistencies and to keep materials structured and organized—thank you, Sol, who like the sun, quietly helped this document grow.

We offer our deepest respect and gratitude to the Indigenous Peoples of these lands—particularly the Six Nations of the Grand River and the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation—whose relationships with this territory are ongoing and enduring. We honour the knowledge, leadership and presence of First Nations, Métis and Inuit Peoples who continue to shape the future of this magnificent place.

To the youth, the dreamers, the wanderers, the helpers, the pollinators, the storytellers, the question-askers and the seed-keepers—this plan is for you! Thank you for being *rare*.



Monarch Butterfly (*Danaus plexippus*) at *rare*.  
Photo by Jessica Grealey

# Leadership

## Board of Directors

**Joy Roberts**, PhD, Chair of the Board; Musagetes Foundation Board Chair  
**David Agro**, Architect, Conservationist  
**Keith Ainsworth**, Electrical Engineer; retired CEO, COM DEV International  
**Madhur Anand**, Professor, University of Guelph  
**Karen Hacker**, LL.B., ICD.D.  
**Brian McGee**, Chartered Accountant; Partner, Zeifmans & Company LLP  
**Claire Mussar**, B.A. Customer Service and Hospitality Specialist, Social Media Manager, Environment Enthusiast

## Governance Advisor

**David R. Beatty**, C.M., OBE, MA, CFA

## International Ambassadors

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**Ljubodrag Andric**, Photographer  
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**Kehkashan Basu**, Founder, Green Hope Foundation  
**David Buckland**, Founder, Cape Farewell cape-farewell.com; Director of Art from a Changing Arctic  
**Ed Burtynsky**, OC; Photographer; Subject of award-winning documentary, Manufactured Landscapes  
**Geneviève Caron**, Award-winning Photographer  
**Severn Cullis-Suzuki**, Executive Director, David Suzuki Foundation  
**Louise MacCallum**, OC, retired Software Engineer; Philanthropist; Founder, Musagetes Foundation  
**Gerry Remers**, Former President & COO, Christie Digital Canada & former co-chair Communitech  
**Jane Urquhart**, OC; Author  
**Frances Westley**, Chair of Social Innovation Generation, University of Waterloo

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**Don Russell**, Qalipu Mi'kmaq/Acadian French Artist  
**Christopher Watts**, Department of Anthropology, University of Waterloo  
**Bill Wilson**, retired Teacher; Naturalist  
**Brett Woodman**, Terrestrial & Wetland Biologist, Natural Resource Solutions Inc.  
**Tony Zammit**, Aquatic & Terrestrial Ecologist, Grand River Conservation Authority

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**Lynda McCarthy**, Professor, Toronto Metropolitan University  
**Dan Schneider**, Outdoor Educator & Naturalist, Grand River Conservation Authority, retired  
**Matthew Suhadolc**, U-Turn Diversion Teacher, Waterloo Region District School Board

## Eastern Comma Committee

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**Elwood Jimmy**, Program Coordinator, Musagetes Foundation

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**John Straube**, Associate Professor, Civil & Environmental Engineering, University of Waterloo

## Community Cabinet

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**John K. Bell**, FCPA, FCA; Chairman, The Onbelay Group  
**Greg Buzbuzian**, Owner, Knar Jewellery  
**Rob Connell**, Partner, KPMG  
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**Valerie Hall**, retired President, Stonefields Management  
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**Keith Martin**, CPA CA, HM Advisors  
**Douglas McMullen**, FCPA, FCA; retired, Sr. V.P. CIBC  
**David Mitten**, retired; Executive Director, Siding & Window Dealers Association of Canada  
**Dean Peroff**, LLP, Partner, Peroff Professional Group  
**Joy Roberts**, (see previous)  
**Paul Ross**, retired Partner, KPMG  
**Irene Schmidt-Adeney**, Writer, Ayr News  
**Hugh Thompson**, CEO, Thompson Centre for Art & Design

## Volunteer & Consulting Advisors

**John Baljkas**, Graphic design consultant, MFA, RGD Affiliate Member, Professor, Conestoga College  
**Ken Dance**, President, Dance Environmental Inc.  
**Valerie Hall** (see previous)  
**Rita Ross**, Fundraising consultant

## rare sites Land Securement Team

**Graham Buck**, Ministry of Natural Resources & Forestry  
**Kevin Butt**, Nature Guelph  
**Chris Gosselin**, retired Manager of Environmental Planning, Region of Waterloo  
**Lauren Jones**, Six Nations of the Grand River  
**Greg C. Michalenko**, Grand River Environmental Network  
**Bill Mungall**, retired  
**Roger Suffling**, Waterloo Region Nature  
**Tony Zammit** (see previous)

## Emeritus

**Gerald Achtymichuk**, Family Physician, retired  
**Paul Koch**, Marketing & Management Consultant; Civic entrepreneur, Ottawa (retired)  
**Peter Krause**, President, Krause Corporate Solutions  
**Doug Larson**, Professor Emeritus, College of Biological Sciences, University of Guelph  
**Colleen Mercer Clarke**, Coastal Ecologist, Landscape Architect, University of Waterloo  
**Alan Morgan**, Professor Emeritus, Earth & Environmental Sciences, University of Waterloo  
**Angela Tsementzis**, Architect; B.E.S. B.Arch, OAA, LEED AP

## rare Staff

**Stephanie Sobek-Swant**, Executive Director  
**Nancy Campbell**, Bookkeeper  
**Erin Clark**, Communications & Community Engagement Officer  
**Laura Eckhardt**, Manager, Finance & Administration  
**Amanda Humphreys**, Events & Development Coordinator  
**Taryn Jarvis**, Food Security & Facilities Coordinator  
**Lauren Jones**, Every Child Outdoors Program Facilitator  
**Michael McTavish**, Conservation Scientist  
**Kim Robichaud**, Administrative Coordinator  
**Rosalind Snyder**, Conservation Technician  
**Istafa Sufi**, Senior Educator  
**Christine Thompson**, Gifts Manager  
**Tom Woodcock**, Planning Ecologist

## Contact Us

**rare Charitable Research Reserve**  
**1679 Blair Road Cambridge, ON N3H 4R8**  
**Phone: 519-650-9336**  
**Toll Free: 1-866-927-3866**

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Chipmunk (*Tamias striatus*) at rare.  
Jeff Moser and Jeanette Dillon



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