



SYDENHAM

PHOSPHORUS REDUCTION INITIATIVE

Program Guidelines

2026

Initiative by |  *St. Clair
conservation*

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Sydenham Phosphorus Reduction Initiative

Potential Projects Summary

2026

St. Clair Region Conservation Authority (SCRCA) is offering technical and financial assistance* to reduce phosphorus losses and soil erosion and protect water quality on your farm. This table provides potential grant rates and grant maximums for water quality and habitat improvement projects throughout the Sydenham River Watershed.

Potential Projects	Grant Rate	Maximum Grant
Cover Crop Incentive	\$20/ac (single) \$25/ac (min. 3)	\$10,500
Restoring Natural Cover, Windbreaks & Riparian Buffers/Filter Strips	–	100% of project subtotal
Wetland Restoration	–	100% of project subtotal
Erosion Control Structures	75% of a project	\$15,000
Livestock Restriction from Watercourses	\$18/m**	–
Alternative Watering Systems for Livestock	Up to 100%***	\$5,000
Phosphorus Application Equipment and/or Modifications	50% Cost-Share	\$20,000
Reduced Tillage Equipment and/or Modifications	50% Cost-Share	\$20,000
4R Nutrient Management Services	\$10/ac	\$2,500
Alternative Phosphorus Applications	\$10/ac	\$4,000

*Financial assistance conditional on SCRCA securing external funding, funder requirements, SCRCA project approval, and the landowner having met all conditions of the agreement. For more information see www.sydenhamriver.on.ca/stewardship/healthy-watersheds-program/spri/

**Fencing must be permanently installed

***In conjunction with a fencing project

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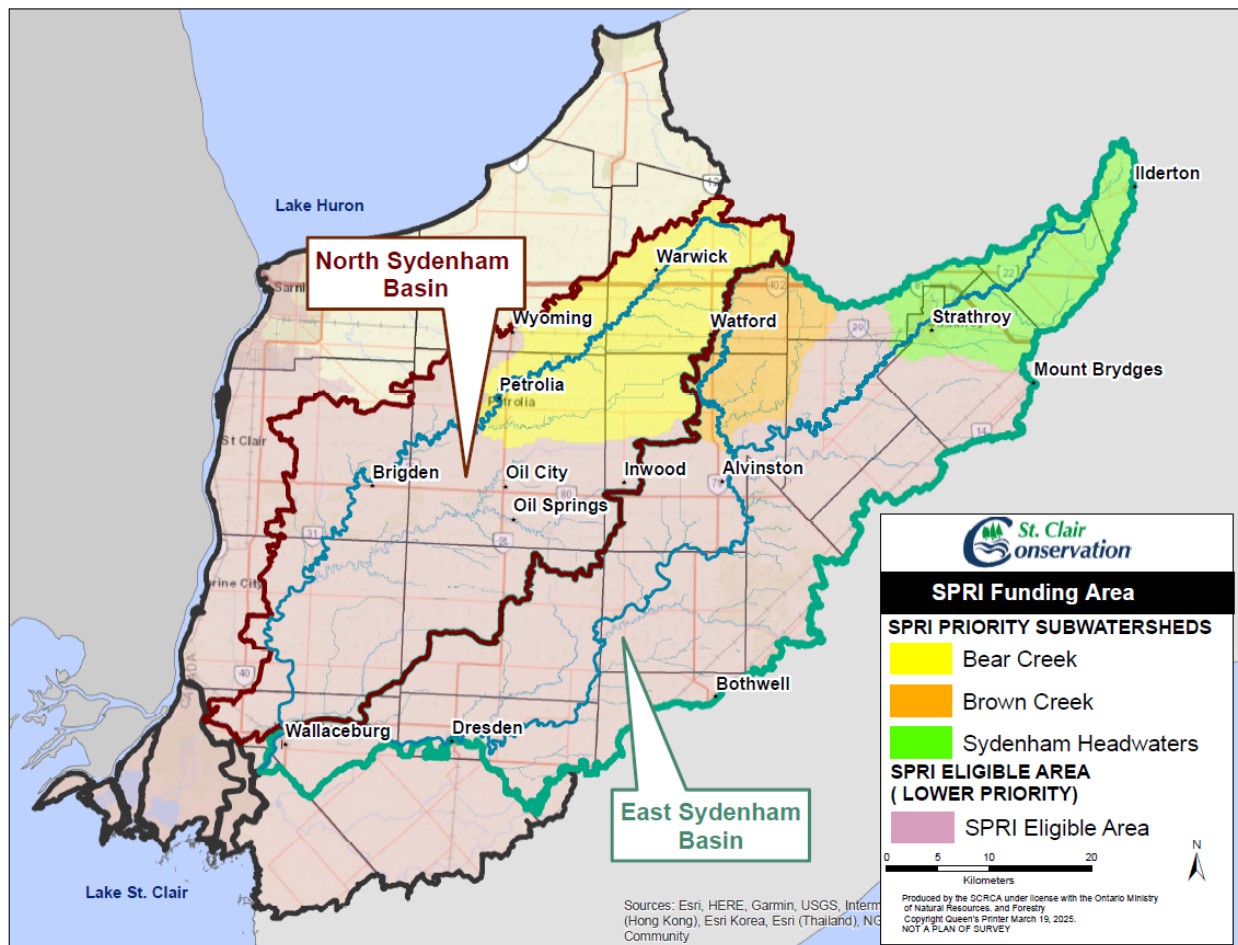
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Geographical Location Eligibility

Incentives are available to landowners within the St. Clair watershed with priority given to those in the Sydenham Phosphorus Reduction Initiative subwatersheds of **Bear Creek Headwaters, Brown Creek, and the Sydenham Headwaters** (see map below).

While priority will be given to projects in these subwatersheds, eligible projects located within the St. Clair Region Conservation Authority that are Lake Erie-draining (see SPRI eligible area in map below), show a reduction of phosphorus loss and soil erosion, and benefit fish and wildlife habitat will also be considered.



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Healthy Watersheds Program Guidelines:

To qualify for funding, the following criteria must be met:

- All projects must demonstrate a reduction in phosphorus losses and soil erosion. Projects must also contribute to an improvement to local surface water and/or groundwater quality and/or result in an increase in natural area cover
- The landowner must complete a *Sydenham Phosphorus Reduction Initiative* application form for the desired project(s).
- The landowner must demonstrate good land stewardship practices.
- The landowner must contribute financially to the project as indicated in the Landowner Agreement.
- All other sources of funding for a project must be disclosed, and total grant dollars cannot exceed the cost of the project.

How to Apply for Grants

1. Obtain specific program information from the St. Clair Region Conservation Authority (SCRCA) *Sydenham Phosphorus Reduction Initiative* website <https://www.sydenhamriver.on.ca/stewardship/healthy-watersheds-program/spri/>
2. Thoroughly read through these guidelines to determine if your proposed project qualifies for funding.
3. Complete a *Sydenham Phosphorus Reduction Initiative* application form for the desired project(s). Fillable forms can be found at the website above.
4. For land-based projects (e.g. wetland restoration, tree planting), a site visit with SCRCA staff will be necessary to determine eligibility. The project will be reviewed by the SCRCA Stewardship Committee for final approval prior to project implementation. Upon project completion, a final site visit will be conducted.
5. For equipment purchases and/or modifications, specific documentation and procedures must be followed and are outlined below. Projects will be reviewed by an external Agricultural Advisory Committee in addition to SCRCA Stewardship staff.

Important information

Written Approvals

Do not start your project until you have written approval from SCRCA. The eligible start date commences once the Landowner Agreement has been signed by the landowner. Eligible costs can only be incurred, invoiced and/or paid by the applicant once the agreement has been signed by both parties. Projects initiated prior to written approval are not eligible for the grant program with the exception of certain agricultural activities that may have already occurred or are in progress as of April 1st, 2026 (e.g. planting cover crops and crop nutrient planning).



Permits

Projects in and along waterways and ditches may need approval by municipalities, the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry, Environment and Climate Change Canada, Fisheries and Oceans Canada, or the Conservation Authority prior to implementation. Any work done in/near municipal drains also requires prior approval from the local municipality. The applicant is responsible for acquiring all necessary approvals.

Consent and sharing of information

By submitting an application, you consent to allowing St. Clair Region Conservation Authority (SCRCA) to collect, manage, and share the project cost, project coordinates, and crop management data associated with the project. The data collected by SCRCA will be shared with government partners and university researchers to assist with tracking the industry's progress towards addressing the watershed environmental challenges and program goals. Personal data including name, home address, and contact information will not be shared externally. Any data shared publicly will be in aggregate form and no business or personal identities will be shared with other organizations or agencies. SCRCA is committed to keeping the personal information of applicants confidential, secure, and private.

An example of how data maybe aggregated and shared publicly: 25 producers in the Brown Creek subwatershed planted over 3,000 acres in cover crops this fall.



Restoring Natural Cover, Windbreaks & Riparian Buffers/Filter Strips

Planting trees and shrubs on fragile land, between farm fields or as a buffer along a watercourse provides habitat as well as protection from wind and water erosion. Block planting is beneficial for wildlife corridors and connectivity. Riparian buffer zones and filter strips are integral to maintain water quality. These naturalized areas help shield agricultural activity that occurs close to watercourses.

Application Intake:	Application Deadline:
April 1, 2026	September 1, 2026
Opening Time:	Deadline Time:
10:00 AM	4:00 PM
Supporting Document(s) Deadline:	
December 31, 2026	
Note: If supporting documents are not submitted by the deadline, the application/grant funding will be forfeited.	

Grant Rate:	Grant Maximum:
Not applicable	Up to a maximum of 100% of the project subtotal

Note: Grant maximums will be at the discretion of SCRCA and are subject to change.

Projects must be pre-approved to receive funding.

Tree & Shrub Planting (Block Planting, Windbreaks, and Treed Riparian Buffers) Guidelines:

- Project must be located within the St. Clair Region Conservation Authority boundaries and Lake-Erie draining, with priority given to those in the subwatersheds of Bear Creek Headwaters, Brown Creek, and the Sydenham Headwaters.
- Projects must include a minimum of 500 trees or shrubs if planted by SCRCA
- Projects must be designed or reviewed by a Forest Professional (e.g. SCRCA staff)
- Projects must take place on currently farmed or recently fallow land (<2 crop years)
- Accepted tree planting practices apply (e.g., appropriate site preparation, spacing, diverse plantings etc.)
- Seedling trees will only be funded (not large stock or potted stock) and only native species or non-invasive, naturalized species are eligible
- A distance of not less than 1 meter will be left between the tree row and the cultivated crop.
- The landowner agrees to implement a regular maintenance program of mowing on each side of every row.
- Preference will be given to windbreaks in combination with buffers that are at least 9 metres (30 feet) in width and consist of multiple tree rows and diverse species



- Preference will be given to those applications that take place on erosion-prone land and/or take into consideration water quality improvement, wildlife habitat and the creation/joining of wildlife corridors
- **Note:** If the project is being implemented on rented farmland, the applicant may be required to provide the landowner's name, email address, and phone number.

Eligible Project Costs:

- Design/Review by a Forest Professional, plant material, and 3rd party labour costs

Ineligible Project Costs (expenses not covered by a grant):

- Commercial stock, Christmas tree, fruit tree or other species which are economically marketable in less than 10 years
- In kind land value
- In kind contributions on projects retiring less than 1 acre (0.4 hectare)

Native Grass Planting (Riparian Buffers, Tallgrass Prairie, & Meadow) Guidelines:

- Project must be located within the St. Clair Region Conservation Authority boundaries and Lake-Erie draining, with priority given to those in the subwatersheds of Bear Creek Headwaters, Brown Creek, and the Sydenham Headwaters.
- Only seed will be funded (not plugs or potted stock)
- Only native species are eligible
- Projects must take place on currently farmed or recently fallow land (<2 crop years)
- Seeds can be planted mechanically and/or by hand (pending project size, site access, and weather conditions).
- Preference will be given to projects in the priority subwatersheds that take into consideration water quality improvement, existing wildlife habitat, and the creation/joining of wildlife corridors
- Preference will be given to those projects that incorporate a suggested maintenance program (e.g. mowing, burning, etc.), as required
- **Note:** If the project is being implemented on rented farmland, the applicant may be required to provide the landowners name, email address, and phone number.

Eligible Project Costs:

- Design, plant material, and labour costs
- Nurse crop (i.e. annual oats or millet)

Ineligible Project Costs:

- Non-native and/or not locally appropriate species/seed mixes
- In-kind land value

NOTE: Projects that do not adhere to the program guidelines listed above will not be eligible for funding.



Frequently Asked Questions:

1. **Can an applicant apply for more than one category within the Sydenham Phosphorus Reduction Initiative?**
 - Yes. A single applicant/Farm Business Number may apply for multiple BMP categories. See question 3 for annual funding caps.
2. **Is funding stackable with other cost-share programs?**
 - Yes. However, cost-share programs administered by other organizations may have stipulations on stacking funding. Please refer to their respective guidelines for their stacking limitations. With exception of the cover crop incentive, grant maximums **for projects that are eligible for stacking with other sources** will be at the discretion of SCRCA and are subject to change. If you have been awarded funding for cover crops from another cost-share program, SCRCA will only provide the difference up to our respective grant rates of \$20/acre and \$25/acre. For example, if you are receiving \$15/acre from another cost-share program for a single species, SCRCA will provide you with \$5/acre to meet our grant rate of \$20/acre.
3. **Is there a cap on funding per farm business?**
 - Yes. A single farm business (as defined by a Farm Business Number) may be eligible for up to \$50,000 annually, if they are successful in multiple BMP categories.
 - There is a cap of \$40,000 per farm business number over the four-year program for BOTH the *Phosphorus Application Equipment Modifications and/or Purchases* AND the *Reduced Tillage Equipment Modifications and/or Purchases* categories combined. Any successful project under each of these categories will also contribute to the annual \$50,000 cap per farm business.
4. **Can I apply if I am outside of the priority subwatersheds of Bear Creek Headwaters, Brown Creek and the Sydenham Headwaters?**
 - Yes. However, priority will be given to landowners residing in these subwatersheds. While priority will be given to projects in these subwatersheds, eligible projects located within the St. Clair Region Conservation Authority and are Lake Erie-draining (see SPRI eligible area in map on page 3), show a reduction of phosphorus loss and soil erosion, and benefit fish and wildlife habitat will also be considered.
5. **I have questions about filling out the application form, who should I contact?**
 - Please contact the SCRCA Stewardship Team below. Please note that Jeff Sharp should only be contacted for potential tree planting projects.



Meet the SCRCA SPRI Team!

Jessica Van Zwol

Healthy Watershed Coordinator

jvanzwol@scrca.on.ca

(519) 245-3710 ext. 241

Project Lead for: General Inquiries, Wetland Restoration, Erosion Control, Reduced Tillage Equipment & Modifications, and Phosphorus Application Equipment & Modifications

Lisa McNeill

Agricultural Stewardship Technician

lmcneill@scrca.on.ca

(519) 245-3710 ext. 125

Project Lead for: Cover Crops, Reduced Tillage Equipment & Modifications, and Phosphorus Application Equipment & Modifications

Kailey Michnal

Agricultural Stewardship Technician

kmichnal@scrca.on.ca

(519) 245-3710 ext. 126

Project Lead for: Livestock Restriction from Watercourses, Alternative Watering Sources, 4R Nutrient Management Services, Alternative Phosphorus Applications, and Riparian Buffers

Jeff Sharp (trees only)

Manager of Conservation Services

jsharp@scrca.on.ca

(519) 245-3710 ext. 217

Project Lead for: Windbreaks, and Tree Planting

