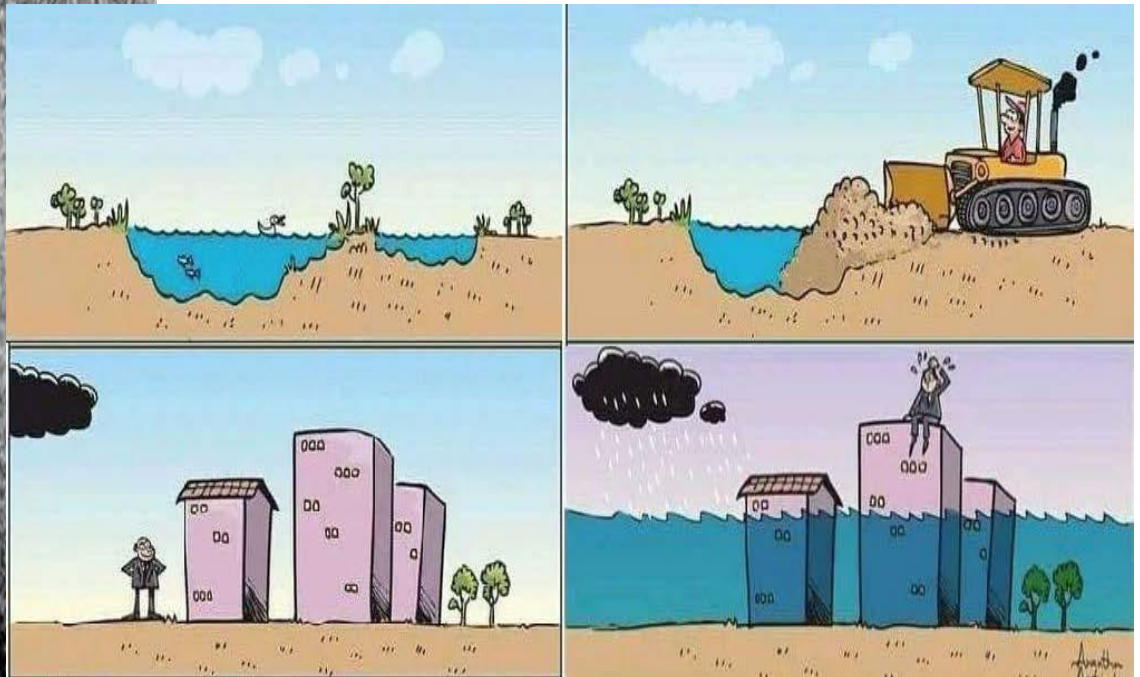




**York Region Environmental Alliance**  
*Advocating for pollinators & biodiversity protection,  
organic food in schools, watershed protection;  
raising awareness – environmental toxins,  
pesticides & GMOs, ecological responsibility*

2024

# Annual Report



*credit: Awantha Artigala*

*Why we need Conservation Authorities*

# YORK REGION ENVIRONMENTAL ALLIANCE

## WHO WE ARE

Incorporated in 2002 to campaign against the cosmetic use of pesticides, York Region Environmental Alliance (YREA), a registered charitable organization since 2008 #: 84559 0553 RR0001 has continually expanded its mandate to address ecological issues that impact our health and the health of our environment. We engage the public at community events and virtually through YREA's very popular quarterly e-news (nearly 800 subscribers) our [website](#) and [Facebook](#) page (over 500 followers).

York Region Environmental Alliance is governed and administered by a volunteer board of directors. We employ an arm's length accounting service to provide an annual financial statement.

## 2024 BOARD OF DIRECTORS & STAFF

Gloria Marsh, Executive Director

Susan Sigrist, President/Chair

Sylvia Halligan, Secretary

Donna Pearson

Liz Beesley, Joyfully Organic Farm

Wai-Ting (Elizabeth) Liu

Patty Ella, Accountant, PME Management Solutions

## INDIGENOUS LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We respectfully acknowledge that we are located on the ancestral lands, sacred gathering places and traditional territories of many First Nations including the Wendat, Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabe peoples. First Nations, because they were here first, inhabiting this land for more than 20,000 years.

There are over 30,000 place names in Canada that are of Indigenous origin. These are often descriptive of the location named because of the inseparable spiritual connection First Nations have to not only land but also to water, air, plants and animals. They view their environment as sacred and feel a responsibility for its preservation for future generations. May we follow the example of Indigenous peoples to honour and protect this Earth we call home.

## 2024 ISSUES & ACTIVITIES - SUBMISSIONS TO GOVERNMENT

Independently, as well as jointly with other NGOs, YREA made numerous appeals provincially, municipally and federally on issues of concern. A sampling of abridged submissions follow.

### NO REINTRODUCTION OF PAPER BAGS AT LCBO

To Premier Ford, MPP Wai, MPP Parsa, LCBO CEO Soleas, LCBO VP Campbell

York Region Environmental Alliance (YREA) has been an advocate of sustainable lifestyle choices for over 20 years. We therefore viewed the transition from plastic to paper bags as a huge mistake. The LCBO wisely, was able to divert 2,665 tonnes of waste from landfills and saved the equivalent of over 188,000 trees every year with their paper bag phaseout. The Ford government unwisely, wants to undo a very smart corporate sustainability effort.

Société des alcools du Québec (SAQ) in Quebec eliminated single use plastic and paper bags in **2009** in favour of handy reusable partitioned carriers and has never looked back. This initiative alone removes about **80 million** disposable bags a year from circulation not to mention the thousands of trees saved. The clever eco message on their reusable bags – I am white, I am red, **I am green**, seems to be lost with the Ontario government reversal.

YREA is very emphatic that the LCBO initiative remains in place and is strongly opposed to taking an ecologically tragic step back in the wrong direction. We therefore ask the Ford government to withdraw the foolhardy reinstatement of paper bags immediately.

Sincerely

Gloria Marsh, Executive Director  
York Region Environmental Alliance

*Partnering for a greener planet*

[www.yrea.org](http://www.yrea.org)



### ONTARIO BUDGET CONSULTATIONS

YREA was among 63 organizations that signed on requesting the following:

- Establish a new fund of \$100 million per year over four years to identify innovative and cooperative approaches to new protected and conserved areas.
- A made-in-Ontario fund could leverage matching resources from the federal government, as recently occurred through the \$1 billion tripartite framework agreement between the governments of Canada and British Columbia and the First Nations Leadership Council.

#### **Secure Near-term Opportunities for New Protected and Conserved Areas**

- Support First Nations that are interested in Indigenous Protected and Conserved Area
- Complete protection for sites identified through Ontario's Living Legacy and acquired lands by providing MECP with the staff resources required to undertake this work.
- Establish a team of staff with a suitable project budget to work with conservation partners – including Indigenous communities, the forestry and mining industries, and environmental groups to explore opportunities for additional protections for Enhanced Management Areas and Provincially Significant Wetlands that are ecologically connected to existing protected and conserved areas.

## Develop a new Made-in-Ontario Provincial Protected and Conserved Areas Strategy

- Establish a strong intra-ministerial project team of negotiators, planners, ecologists and analysts to undertake a new, modern, target-based land use planning exercise that is built on nation-to-nation dialogue and respect for Indigenous rights.
- Appoint a Provincial Protected and Conserved Areas Facilitator to support the work of the team.

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## WHY WE NEED ORGANIC FOOD IN SCHOOLS

YREA sent our presentation to the Canada wide [Coalition for Healthy School Food](#) receiving a positive response as far away as the Northwest Territories. Allotting a small amount of increased funding to ensure the health of our children will pay society back tenfold. Not only will this save untold billions in future health care costs but will see generations to come with increased wellness and mental acuity.

As our presentation below shows, public kitchens in Europe are converting to organic and some are managing this on existing budgets. Not only is this about healthier food but also another tool to mitigate climate change as an Austrian study we quote compared conventional and organic food products. This

concurrs with a Rodale study which found that organic agriculture leached no toxic chemicals into waterways (Lake Simcoe comes to mind), released 40% fewer carbon emissions and used 45% less energy.

YREA posted our youtube presentation on our website and in our summer 2024 e-news so that teachers, parents and community members can advocate for this initiative. We also sent to numerous federal MPs asking that they consider including organics in school food programs which will be supporting organic Canadian agriculture as our better breakfast alternatives shows.

<https://youtu.be/DoQKTtinLK0>

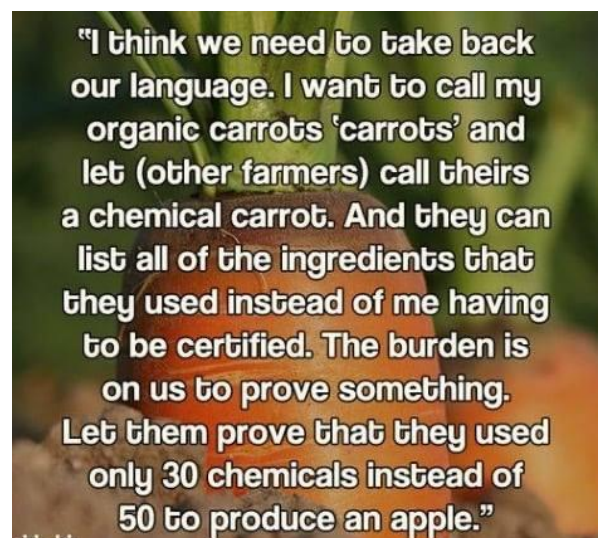


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## ADVANCING REGENERATIVE AGRICULTURE IN CANADA: Barriers, Enablers and Suggestions

YREA was asked to review this [139 page study](#) from Western University, Ivey Business School. Our detailed notes included the need to focus on transitioning to organic for healthier people and environment.

We also commented on the distinct difference between conventional and organic agriculture regarding carbon emissions, energy and pesticide use, the benefits of food forest silvopasturing and pointed out an important [McGill University study](#) – The Overlooked Impact of Rising Glyphosate Use on Phosphorus Loading in Agricultural Watersheds. YREA’s full [comments can be read here](#).



## RICHMOND HILL SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

The City's enlightened governance and vision have not only resulted in the UN University choosing Richmond Hill as its new location in Canada but also an Urban Economy Forum partnership with Richmond Hill as the first Frontrunner City in Canada championing [sustainable development goals](#). York Region Environmental Alliance (YREA) congratulates Richmond Hill for these distinctions.

YREA encourages Richmond Hill to follow through on [Goal 2](#) - promoting sustainable agriculture, supporting small-scale farmers and equal access to land, technology and markets. Although the community gardens at the Phyllis Rawlinson Park are a good first step, more can be done on this land by expanding the growing of local food and establishing an organic urban farm. Successful examples are [Montreal](#) and [Downsview](#). This would not only provide more readily accessible healthy food but would release 40% fewer GHGE, use 45% less energy than conventional agriculture & reduce the carbon footprint of distant transport by 14%. Aspects of [Goal 3](#) – good health & well-being, [Goal 8](#) - decent work and economic growth and [Goal 15](#) - life on land, food security, climate change mitigation & adaptation would also be achieved. YREA fully supports Richmond Hill's actions to convert some of the vast unused lawn areas in parks to meadows, thereby creating natural habitats and reducing biodiversity loss. A couple of pollinator patches would also be welcome at Richmond Green.

Richmond Hill must do better with sustainable urban design & development as YREA pointed out regarding a proposal for [Yonge and 16<sup>th</sup>](#). Constructing fake period structures does nothing to preserve the integrity of our heritage buildings, it in fact diminishes them. The Romanesque revival U of T building on the right

of the modern Gardiner Museum with the neoclassical building on the left shows us the chronological order of built forms in Toronto. We need good design representative of the 21<sup>st</sup> century that will stand the test of time and integrates green infrastructure in subdivision and condo development. A missed opportunity in the one story Farm Boy plaza constructed a couple years ago in Ward 1 which would



have been the perfect place for four or five stories of affordable apartment housing above. Single story strip plazas do not constitute sustainable urban development.

YREA looks forward to fruitful results with Richmond Hill's new partnerships.

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## PROVINCIAL PLANNING STATEMENT (PPS) COMMENTS

YREA was among 65 organizations and 784 individuals who asked the Ontario government to not enact the proposed changes to the PPS which would only exacerbate the housing crisis by building the wrong type of housing in the wrong places, namely on farmland and natural areas. These changes would also further eliminate important protections that have safeguarded our farmland, natural assets and water resources for future generations and eliminate public oversight of new housing development. The new PPS is a step back from sustainable growth and came into effect Oct. 2024, ignoring public input, weakening wetland evaluation and natural heritage protections, encouraging low density urban sprawl and putting farmland at risk by allowing municipalities to expand settlement areas. [Read more](#).

## [ERO 019-8016](#) REGULATORY CHANGES TO ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT 2007

YREA was among 68 organizations expressing deep concern regarding proposed amendments to regulations under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) as follows:

1. Reduced habitat protections for Redside Dace.
2. Regulatory amendments regarding barn swallows and butternut trees.
3. Additions of newly listed species to existing conditional exemptions.
4. Regulatory amendments regarding the conditional exemption for early exploration mining.

Cumulatively, these changes will only exacerbate the biodiversity crisis. Protecting species at risk is not red tape. [Read full submission here.](#)

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## [ERO 019-8320](#) NEW MINISTER'S PERMIT, REVIEW POWERS UNDER THE CA ACT

YREA was among 61 organizations strongly opposing proposed regulations regarding the Minister's new permit and review powers under the *Conservation Authorities Act*. The proposed regulation would enable the Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry to override a very broad suite of permitting decisions issued by Conservation Authorities for activities prohibited without a permit. In such cases, rather than having permitting decisions informed by the deep local knowledge, technical expertise and watershed health mandate of conservation authorities, they will be politically driven at the request of development proponents seeking to reduce their cost burden and proceed with otherwise prohibited activities regardless of risks. With their local knowledge and technical expertise Conservation Authorities must continue to manage the impacts of development from a watershed perspective. [Full submission here.](#)

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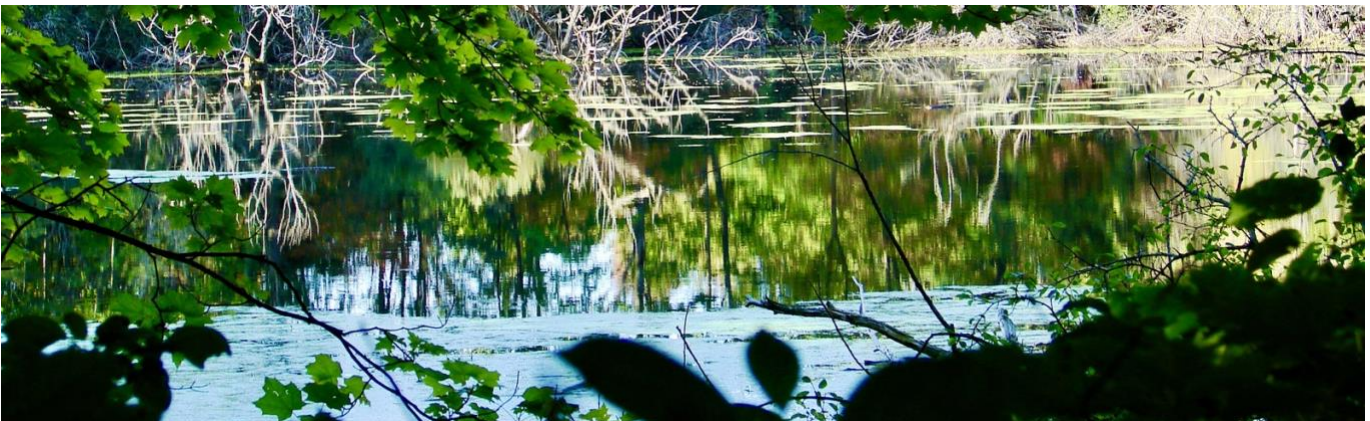
## [ERO 019-8618](#) EXPANDING PROTECTED AREAS IN ONTARIO

YREA was among 30 organizations writing in support of the expansion of protected area systems. This is a vital step in safeguarding Ontario's habitats and biodiversity urging the province to commit to additional expansion of protected areas. Protected areas offer a practical and effective approach to conserving biodiversity and ecosystems that sustain us, while enhancing our resilience to extreme weather. They also provide immeasurable economic and health benefits for Ontarians. [Read full submission here.](#)

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## RESTORING PROVINCIAL WETLAND PROTECTIONS IN ONTARIO

A joint letter was sent asking that the planning authority of Conservation Authorities be restored. That the growth plan with broader wetland protection be retained so as to limit greenfield sprawl development in the new Provincial Planning Statement. [Read full submission here.](#)



*Forester Marsh ESA, Wilcox – St. George Provincially Significant Wetland (PSW)*

## [ERO #019-9265](#) BILL 212 REDUCING GRIDLOCK, BUILDING HIGHWAYS FASTER

Joint letter summary: Bill 212 and schedule 2, *Building Highways Faster Act*, are setting a dangerous precedent for major infrastructure projects in Ontario. The Government of Ontario is prepared to move forward with designating priority highways, including Highway 413 and the Bradford Bypass, without consent from affected Indigenous communities, without public participation, without upholding due democratic processes, without disclosing information, without acknowledging true economic, social or environmental impacts and without addressing cheaper, more sustainable alternatives. Far too many critical pieces of evidence are absent from Bill 212 to proceed with construction. More highways and lanes do not alleviate congestion and simply reinforce car dependency and inefficient land use planning. We formally request the Government of Ontario abandon Bill 212, in favour of more cost-effective, environmentally sustainable and socially responsible solutions to traffic congestion. [Full submission here.](#)

## [ERO #019-9213](#) HIGHWAY 413 ACT

Joint letter summary: The *Highway 413 Act* represents an egregious attempt to move forward with the development of Highway 413 regardless of the cost, by exempting the project from being held accountable to any meaningful standard of environmental protection, consultation with Indigenous Peoples, public consultation and transparency. We oppose this proposed legislation and urge you to abandon it immediately in favour of investing in solutions to traffic congestion that will be more effective and less costly, environmentally and economically. [Full submission can be read here.](#)

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## TRANSITION TO FULL EXTENDED PRODUCER RESPONSIBILITY (EPR)

The EPR regulations in Ontario must:

1. Set and enforce high management targets that increase over time. At a minimum, targets that apply to the Blue Box today must remain in force as they are in the Blue Box regulation today: no backsliding.
  2. Continue to hold each producer liable for meeting those targets, preventing liability transfer to Producer Responsibility Organizations (PROs).
  - Expand the requirements to collect across the province from every eligible residential source to include Industrial, commercial and Institutional sources (as in Quebec and several US jurisdictions).
  3. Require producers to internalize the costs of managing their materials: no eco-fees.
  4. Ensure the Resource Productivity and Recovery Authority (RPRO) has independent regulatory, oversight and enforcement powers to ensure producers meet the requirements of EPR regulations.
- Ongoing efforts of producers and retailers to water down their environmental obligations and weaken the enforcement body overseeing it will ultimately undermine Ontario's EPR regulations. Keeping waste out of Ontario's landfills, incinerators and environment is what's best for the province and something Ontarians expect. If big companies are alarmed by the true cost of diverting their packaging from landfill, they should be motivated to design better – **and less** – packaging from the outset. [Read full submission.](#)

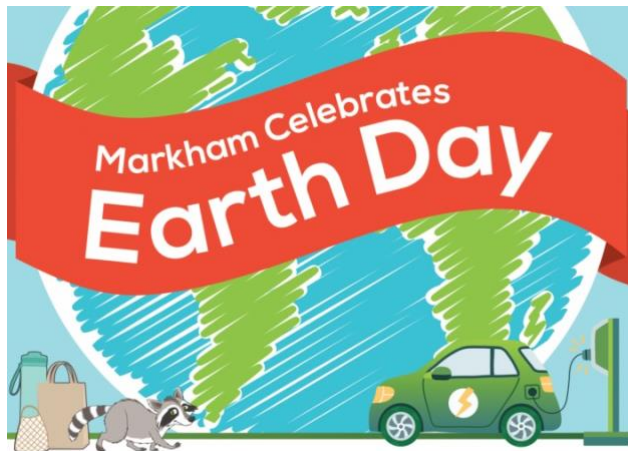


## YREA COMMUNITY EVENT PARTICIPATION

### LETTERS TO THE EARTH: BETWEEN DESPAIR AND HOPE

YREA participated in this art exhibit at the Georgina Centre for Arts & Culture. The artworks encouraged conversations about our present environmental crisis. YREA discussed the connection between climate change, the importance of making sustainable lifestyle choices and the need to preserve the well-being of our environment. We asked visitors and participants to also take personal actions as individuals for the betterment of the planet.

*Beside the Ocean of Time,*  
by Carmel Brennan  
<https://letterstoearth.ca>



### MARKHAM EARTH DAY

YREA's passport word was 'shopping' at this event.

- For every garbage can of waste put out at the curb, 70 garbage cans of waste were produced upstream to make the junk in that one garbage can.
  - Since 1980, we have consumed one-third of the planet's natural resources.
  - If everybody consumed at the rate of Canadians, we would need four planets to sustain us.
- Which is why we were happy to engage the public to [SHOP LIKE THE PLANET'S WATCHING.](#)



*Gloria, Elizabeth & Liz, who also shared info on local Joyfully Organic Farm shares*



## RICHMOND HILL FAMILY ECOFEST

YREA handed out info on why we need [pollinator gardens](#) along with a plant list as well as info on the [toxicity of fabric softeners & dryer sheets](#), what we can all do to [keep our water clean](#), our [SHOP](#) booklets and a check list on how we can [MAKE EVERY MONTH EARTH MONTH](#). We also drew attention to the importance of organic food and looking for the [Canadian milk logo](#) on dairy products.



## YREA IS A MEMBER &/OR SUPPORTER OF THESE GROUPS

Alliance for a Liveable Ontario	Food and Water First	Ontario Headwaters Institute
CBAN – Canadian Biotechnology Action Network	Friends of the Earth Canada	Ontario Nature
Canadian Organic Growers	Land Over Landings	Organic Growers of Ontario
Canadian Organic Trades Assn.	Ontario Clean Air Alliance	Safe Food Matter
	Ontario Greenbelt Alliance	Stop the Spray ON/Canada



## A SNAPSHOT OF YREA'S 2024 E-NEWS

YREA continues to connect with many hundreds of people digitally via our quarterly newsletters. This platform enables us to provide subscribers with reports on our advocacy work. We encourage an understanding of sustainability issues through education, to inform and help us think of our choices in terms of their impact on human and environmental health, our natural resources and our planet.

[Winter e-news](#) discussed the down side of online shopping, & Mexico's defiance of Monsanto/US/Canada challenge to their ban on GMO corn. We applauded Richmond Hill's promotion of winter pollinator habitat, posted links to enjoyable winter outdoor activities as well as book recommendations for those long evenings.

[Spring e-news](#) outlined the change in attitude towards wind power, with data from bird conservation organizations who are now onside. We provided lots of suggestions on how we can all shrink our carbon footprint during Earth Month and beyond as well as tips on companion planting. A link to our annual report with info on the Georgina Centre for the Arts & Culture exhibit, Letters to the Earth was included.

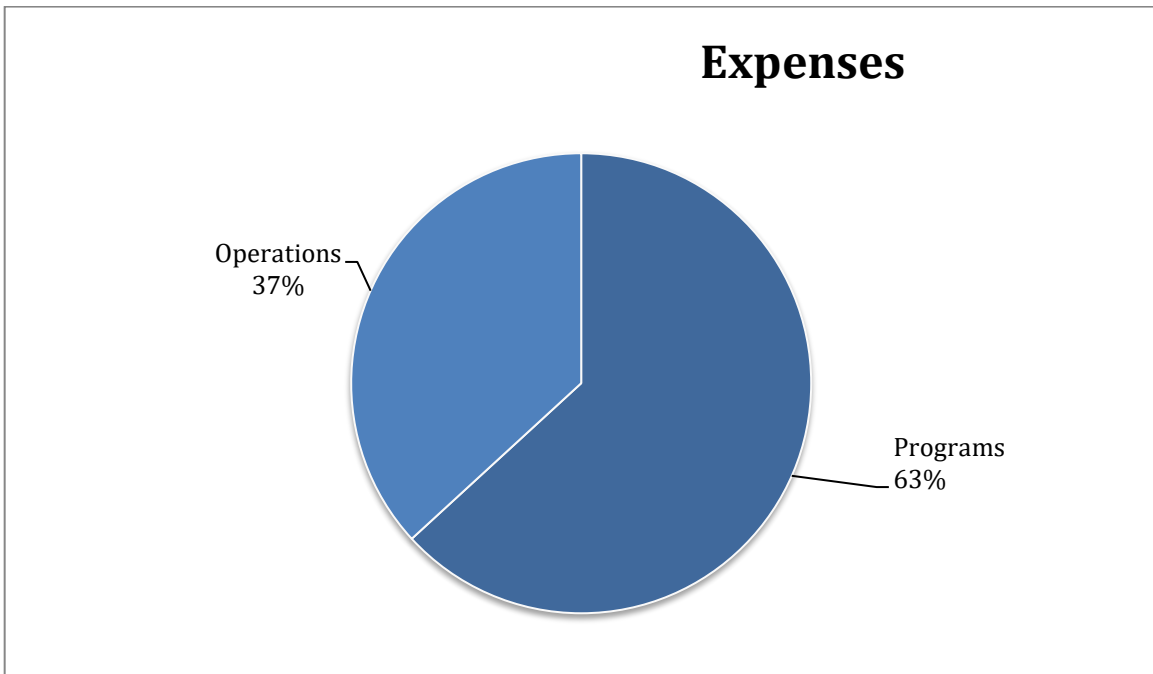
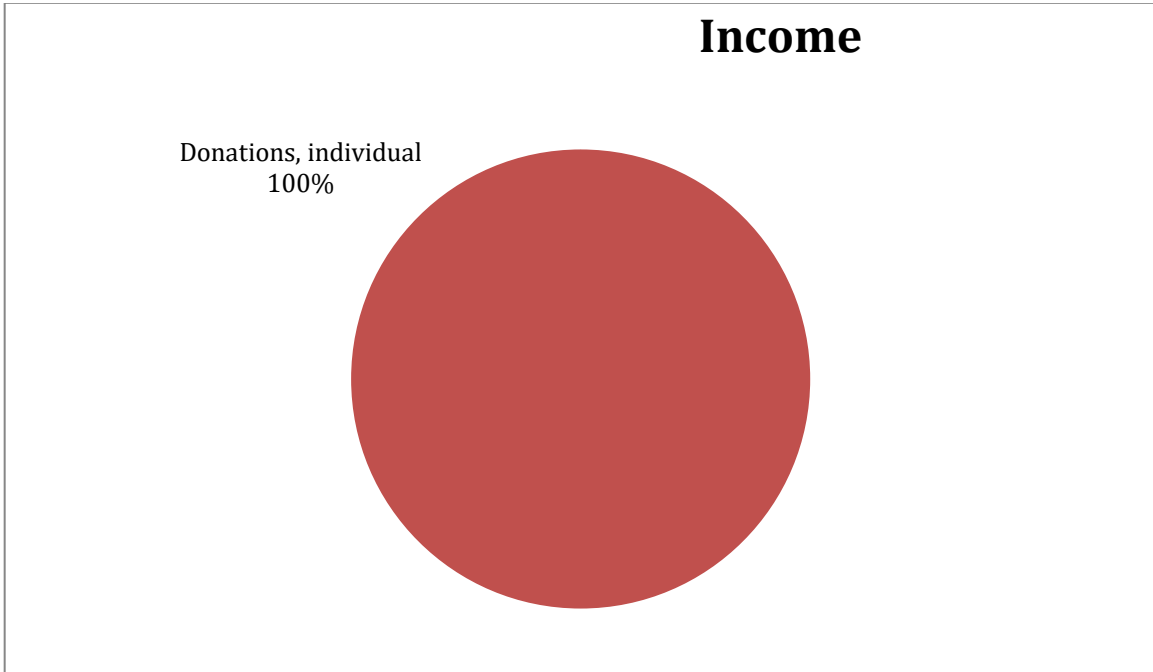
[Summer e-news](#) featured pieces on diversifying our grains by trying locally grown organic millet, the prevalence of harmful PFAS – Forever Chemicals and how to avoid them. Pesticide spraying, GMO trees and pollution prevention, with new Richmond Hill bylaws ensuring concrete and stone dust suppression were some of the bad and good news bits. A link to our organic food in schools presentation and nature guides for summer learning were highlighted.

[Autumn e-news](#) advocated for habitat gardens and why we need to choose Canadian Organic. The pros and cons of plastic and wood cutting boards were compared. We published our letter to Premier Ford strongly opposing the return of paper bags to the LCBO as well as book recommendations outlining how drastic mistakes that impact our environment are so often made.



# YORK REGION ENVIRONMENTAL ALLIANCE

2024 FINANCIAL YEAR END





**A HEARTFELT THANK YOU TO ALL DONORS AND ESPECIALLY TO THOSE  
WHO HAVE SUSTAINED YREA WITH ANNUAL DONATIONS  
WE ARE VERY GRATEFUL TO EVERYONE**

**PROTECTOR \$1000 - \$1999**

Marilyn Isaac Stewart



**GUARDIAN \$500 - \$999**

Gloria Marsh

**STEWARD \$200 - \$499**

Sylvia Halligan

Diane Keating

Donna Pearson

Spencer Lanthier & Diana Bennett

**KEEPER \$100 - \$199**

Angela Marsh & Justin Keating

Terry Knight

Peter Miasek

Debbie Schaefer

Susan Sigrist

Tom Waechter

Anonymous (1)

**FRIEND \$25 - \$99**

Marnie Beck

Sharon & Jim Bradley

Wai Ting Liu

John Sguigna

YREA does not utilize costly and unsustainable paper mailings  
or separate email solicitation requests for donations,  
which makes us doubly appreciative for the kindness of our donors

Special thanks to YREA's volunteer board members and  
to Mark Hubbard, our website wizard and fixer

## LOOKING BACK AT 2024 & AHEAD TO 2025 FOR YREA

As YREA noted in our Solstice Greetings, it is very overwhelming to see so many of us fighting to right what we perceive to be wrongs, in some instances, for decades. Be it pesticides & pesticide industry influence, poisoned drinking water, toxic air pollution, protecting nature & biodiversity, climate change, paving over farmland, an unnecessary airport or highway. Those working on these causes and many more are committed to making this world a better, healthier place for us and future generations. However, every single individual can strive for positive changes, thereby making a difference. The interconnectedness of the earth is bound by an invisible link between people, animals, plants, air, water & soil. Our simplest actions, whether positive or negative, can be incredibly significant and have an influence on the world around us. For our part, YREA will continue to advocate and raise awareness of the numerous issues that need to be addressed. We must not be disheartened & must NEVER give up.

### YREA's 2025 ADVOCACY FOCUS:

- Organic food, pesticide & GMO advocacy/education
- Ban glyphosate use in farming & forestry [STOP the SPRAY](#)
- How we can all make [EVERY MONTH EARTH MONTH](#)
- [Solar covered parking lots](#) in all municipalities
- [Planting for pollinators](#) – creating biodiversity gardens
- Greenbelt , watershed & farmland protection
- Why we need [Organic Food in Schools](#)



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MAKE EVERY DAY  
EARTH DAY