

Lake Stewards Newsletter

Summer 2020



An Unprecedented Year

Letter from the Executive Director

Life at the lake is full of connections with friends, family and neighbourly spirit, and includes community-building through volunteerism, events, and activities.

When winter subsides we all anxiously await the change of the seasons, and look ahead with great expectations to all that the warm season will bring. This year, something else arrived in advance of the much-anticipated Canadian spring: coronavirus.

The upset and tumult created to our personal health, our economy, and our day-to-day lives has been significant, and something none of us expected or was prepared for. For anyone who has been personally struck by COVID-19, if you've taken ill or if your family has been directly impacted by the pandemic, we are truly sorry, and we extend our best wishes to you.

The other less serious but troubling impacts of this situation meant challenges in the early part of the season related to travel and access to our waterfront homes. While the virus continues to circulate in the population, public health officials will continue to advise against unnecessary contact with others, and to minimize our travel. We have all had to do our part during the past months, and will have to for the foreseeable future.

This represents a serious shift from our normal experience which includes ongoing close contact with friends and neighbours, interaction with community partners, local retailers, service providers and elected officials. Our communities still need us: to be involved with our associations to keep important safety programming going; to keep the connections strong between each other and to keep longer term community priorities in focus; to shop locally and support the local economy, when it is possible to do so safely.

While this year may not bring all the usual highlights and experiences, this isolation has taught us how much we need and depend on each other. While we will continue to do this as

best we can—virtually, online, and at a distance—remember that all the things you treasure about the lake or riverside still await, will still need your care and attention, and we will get through this, together.



Sincerely,
Terry Rees
FOCA Executive Director

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Get COVID-19 Updates

FOCA continues to post updates related to COVID-19 and Ontario cottage country, here: <https://foca.on.ca/covid-19-update-from-foca/>.

Associations will find additional governance resources about banking and hosting meetings during the pandemic, here: <https://foca.on.ca/toolkit-overview/>.

For the most current news, ensure you have provided your consent to receive Elerts, FOCA's e-newsletter, delivered monthly to your inbox. Join more than 10,000 subscribers, and help us reach our goal of 50,000 subscribers, here: <https://bit.ly/FOCAelert50K>.

2019 FOCA Achievement Award Recipient

Farlain Lake Community Association

The discovery of Eurasian Watermilfoil in Farlain Lake, near Awenda Provincial Park, resulted in the association developing a Eurasian Watermilfoil Control Program. In 2019, the association received a \$200,000 grant from the Ontario Trillium Foundation for the Program.

The Farlain Lake Community Association is committed to sharing their experiences and what they learn with other communities in Ontario. Find them online, here <https://farlainlake.ca/>.

The FOCA Achievement Award was presented at the Annual General Meeting of members, on March 7, 2020. This Award is given to a FOCA member Association each year, at the discretion of the FOCA Board of Directors, to celebrate the successes of the FOCA community, and encourage peer sharing of best-practices.

Find out about past winners, and how to apply for the next Award on behalf of your great association, here: <https://foca.on.ca/member-services/foca-achievement-award/>.



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A Tale of Two Invasive Species: Eurasian Watermilfoil & Starry Stonewort in Ontario Lakes

by **Andrea Kirkwood, PhD**

Associate Professor of Environmental Biology,
Ontario Tech University, Oshawa, Ontario

Anyone who has been cottaging in the Kawartha Lakes over the last 50 years may already be familiar with the aquatic plant Eurasian Watermilfoil (**EWM**). This aquatic invader was likely introduced to the Kawartha Lakes via the Trent Severn Waterway, which acts like a conveyor belt for aquatic invasive species in the Great Lakes basin.

Although EWM has experienced population collapses from time to time, it has generally been the dominant aquatic weed in nutrient-rich lakes throughout south-central Ontario. A non-native species from Eurasia, EWM chokes out native aquatic plants, makes navigation on the water difficult, and swimming unpleasant. Controlling EWM has been a long-drawn out battle, only complicated by the emergence of an EWM hybrid with the native Northern Watermilfoil. The EWM hybrid tends to be more tolerant of cooler temperatures and resistant to biocontrol methods.

This past winter, the Ontario government sought feedback from stakeholders about the impact of 13 invasive species (including Fanwort, European Frogbit, and Tench, among others). In addition, they are reviewing the possible regulation of the movement of watercraft over land, through mandatory implementation of **“Clean+Drain+Dry”** principles.

The movement of watercraft is arguably one of the biggest vectors for the introduction of aquatic invasive species. FOCA believes regulating the movement of watercraft could strengthen the Invasive Species Act, 2015 and the Province’s response to the threat of aquatic invasive species.

Read the details in the Environmental Registry of Ontario (ERO) posting, here: <https://ero.ontario.ca/notice/019-1162>.

If you think EWM is the worst of what can happen in a lake with respect to nuisance aquatic weeds, let me introduce you to Starry Stonewort (**SSW**). In recent years, EWM has been kicked out of the top-position as the dominant aquatic plant species in productive Ontario lakes.



Starry Stonewort, courtesy A. Kirkwood



Eurasian Watermilfoil harvesting efforts, courtesy Farlain Lake Community Association

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Also originally from Eurasia, SSW is a charophyte, which is technically an alga and not a plant; however, this difference in taxonomic classification is meaningless to aquatic organisms and cottagers affected by SSW!

Nevertheless, taxonomy does matter to the provincial government, and because SSW is not a true aquatic plant, it has not been included as part of the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry's aquatic invasive species policy and management framework. Hopefully this bureaucratic hurdle is now being addressed, but unfortunately, SSW is well established across affected Ontario lakes.

My lab at Ontario Tech University in Oshawa, Ontario, is working in partnership with Ontario stewardship groups, lake associations, and conservation authorities to understand the ecological impacts of SSW. As part of his doctoral thesis research, grad student Tyler Harrow-Lyle has already documented significant effects of SSW on biological community diversity and the emergence of algal blooms. For more information on Tyler's research, please visit the lab website: <https://kirkwoodlab.weebly.com/research.html>.

Due to COVID-19, field and laboratory work has been paused across the province, but there remains an opportunity for community volunteers to step-up and document the occurrence of invasive aquatic plants in their neck of the woods.

Ontario's Invading Species Awareness Program has resources for identifying aquatic plant species and the means to report findings. Information is posted here: <http://www.invadingspecies.com/>.

SSW is a bit more challenging to identify, because it can grow well below the water surface and out of sight. The image at the side shows what a mass of SSW looks like, including the tiny star-shaped bulbil (a reproductive organ of the alga), from which it gets its name. For more information on SSW, please visit the Starry Stonewort Collaborative website: <https://starrystonewort.org/>.

All aquatic invasive species, including SSW, can be reported using the EDDMapS Ontario platform: <https://www.eddmaps.org/ontario/>.

Water Management

Within & Without a Conservation Authority

Part of FOCA's vision for thriving and sustainable waterfronts across Ontario, now and for future generations, involves understanding, appreciating and properly stewarding our watersheds.

No matter where you are in the Province, we rely on clean, abundant and properly managed water to make our communities thrive, and to keep our homes and our families safe.

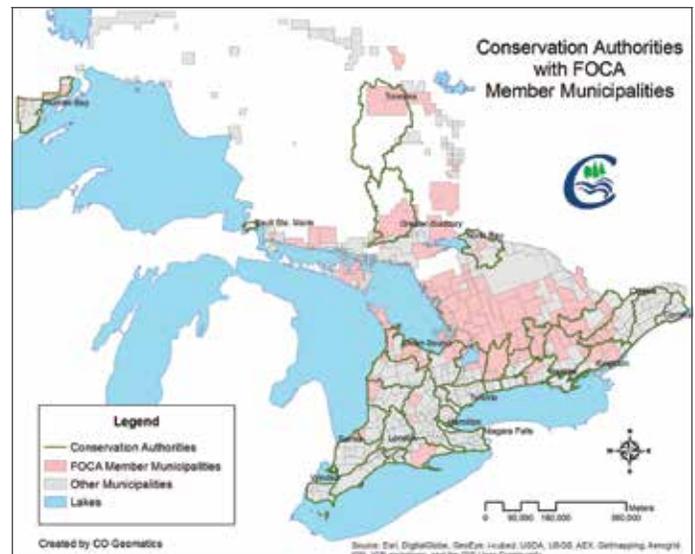
FOCA has member associations in about 60 municipalities served by a Conservation Authority (CA). This Spring, FOCA participated in stakeholder meetings, and submitted written comments to the Province of Ontario, with respect to their proposed reforms to the Conservation Authorities Act. FOCA's input was about the significant interactions between lake associations and lake residents with CAs, and the importance of planning at a watershed level in the face of looming and increasing threats from changing precipitation patterns, threatened natural heritage and biodiversity, and the ongoing need for safe drinking water for all. The CA model has been recognized as a progressive approach to ensuring that flood risks are reduced, and that important natural heritage is protected for the many benefits it provides.

FOCA believes that thoughtful and proactive water quantity management is not only an ethical but also a practical obligation of our public bodies. Having an open and ongoing dialogue about challenges related to water quantity and quality, and doing this on a watershed basis, will allow the province and rural municipalities to minimize the impact from extreme climate impacts whether that be flood, drought, or water quality issues.

Ontario has long touted the benefits of adaptive management in their resource management strategies, and this can only be achieved if there is an appetite and an avenue for using up-to-date information and state of the art planning and adaptation strategies within our communities.

The Ontario Flood Advisor's report released in November 2019 showed strong support for the CA watershed model, in protecting Ontario from the risks of climate change. This model only works if CAs retain the authority to contribute to land use planning decisions, and if they have the necessary financial resources to productively contribute to watershed resilience.

FOCA posts related information, here:
<https://foca.on.ca/conservation-authorities-act>.



Map of CAs with FOCA Member Association municipalities

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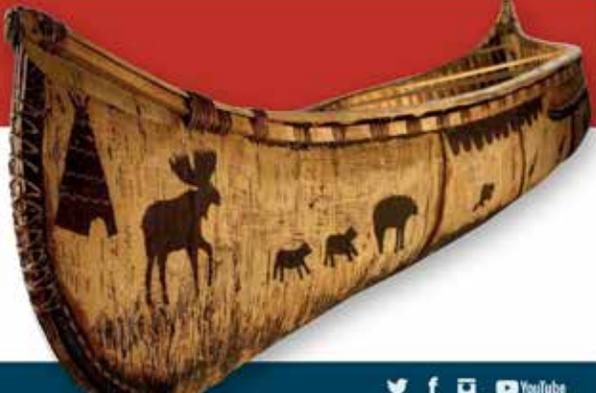
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Muskoka Watershed Advisory Group

The Muskoka Watershed Advisory Group (**MWAG**) is an example of a regional initiative in a non-Conservation Authority area, where efforts are underway to understand and address water concerns on a watershed basis.

In August 2019, the Ontario Ministry of Environment, Conservation and Parks announced the appointment of the 9-member advisory group that was charged with compiling community expert advice about managing the region's water quantity and quality. FOCA appreciated the opportunity to contribute both at the Community Listening Sessions in January 2020, and via written input through the Committee.

In our comments, FOCA noted that, when the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry (**MNRF**) posted their "*Maintaining Water Management Plans Technical Bulletin*" effective August 2016, the new Technical Guidelines affirmed that water management plans (**WMPs**) may require periodic amendments to ensure that the plans remain current, to include adaptive management or simply to provide clarity and certainty on how water levels and flows are managed.

FOCA was pleased to see that, according to the Guidelines:

- any party with an interest in the WMP can bring forward issues to the attention of plan proponents, to the MNRF, or members of the Standing Advisory Committee;
- amendment requests can be related to dam safety, public safety, dam operations, the results of monitoring programs, construction of new dams or alterations to existing dams, or in response to local issues related to the management of water levels and flows.

FOCA also noted that the water management plan proponent is responsible for assessing amendment requests and preparing the amendment proposal and that all amendments require approval by the MNRF.

A watershed approach allows for a more comprehensive consideration of many of the impinging and related aspects of water quantity and quality management. In other words, by managing the uplands, by managing wetlands and other connected features, we can both ameliorate extreme flows when they happen and help to improve water quality.

FOCA remains hopeful that, as part of the current efforts to be more thoughtful in the approach to the Muskoka River Watershed, these Technical Guidelines will allow for a more robust community discussion about the existing water regime, the drawdown and water levels and targets, and other aspects of the water management plan. Improving the dialogue on water quantity management should allow the public and stakeholders to more fully appreciate and understand the water management objectives and operations, and the practical realities of the local water regime.

The lessons learned in Muskoka through the 2019-2020 consultations, and the future actions that result, should be viewed with an eye to providing guidance in other areas of the province that are similarly facing water quantity/quality management issues. One example is investing in floodplain mapping and the related policy and implementation measures to avoid flood risk in our communities, which is money well spent when you consider the cost to families, communities, and the overall economy of continually repairing assets that are in harm's way.

Find stories from other regions, and historical context about water management plans, posted by FOCA, here: <https://foca.on.ca/water-management-plans-still-in-limbo/>.

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Proposal Process Underway to Expand Cellular Service

from our Partners at EORN

Efforts to improve cellular services across eastern Ontario are making steady progress.

The Eastern Ontario Regional Network (**EORN**) is spearheading a \$213 million project to improve cellular services across the region. It launched a competitive bidding process in April 2020.

EORN is seeking partners who offer both the expertise and best value to improve cell coverage in areas where there are homes, roads or major roadways. The process should be completed in the fall, with construction to follow.

“As the COVID-19 pandemic has shown us, connectivity is critical for quality of life, public safety and our economy,” said EORN Chair J. Murray Jones. *“We are building on the investment we’ve already made in broadband infrastructure to close the gaps in mobile services.”*

The federal and provincial governments have committed \$71 million each. All members of the Eastern Ontario Wardens’ Caucus (**EOWC**) and most municipalities within the Eastern Ontario Mayors’ Caucus are contributing to the \$10 million municipal share. Telecommunication providers are expected to provide the rest.



The EORN initiative covers a geographic area that includes 13 members of the Eastern Ontario Wardens’ Caucus (11 regional county municipalities and two single-tier municipalities), and nine separated municipalities (red dots, above).

“Improved cell service has been the EOWC’s top priority for some time,” said EOWC Chair Andy Letham. *“The demand for cell service is growing exponentially, but our region doesn’t have the infrastructure to keep up.”*

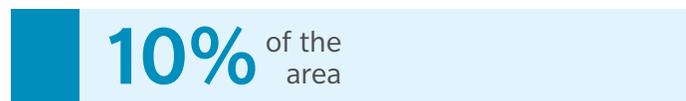
There are currently significant gaps across areas of rural Eastern Ontario where people live, work or travel:



40% of the area does not have access to high-definition services that allow streaming HD video



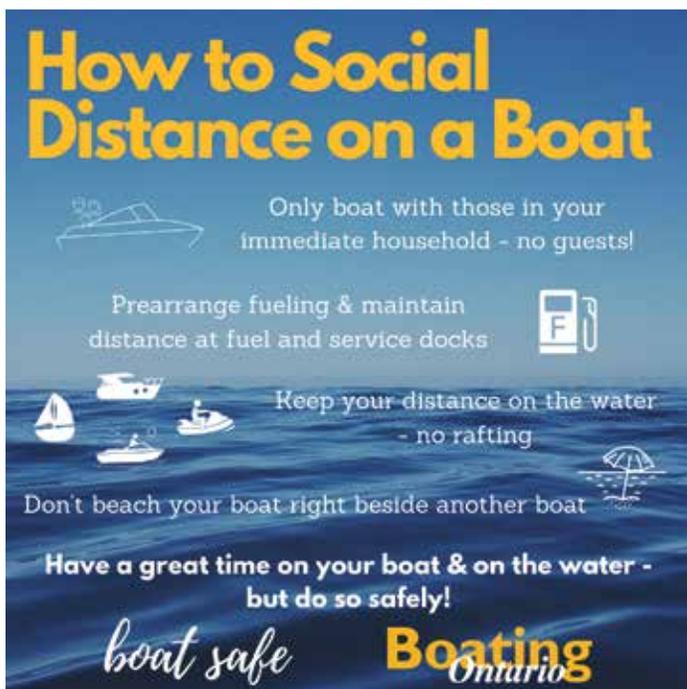
20% of the area does not have access to standard definition video, typical mobile app use and video app calling



10% of the area has no voice calling service

“Given the way people use mobile devices, we not only need minimum cell coverage, but enough capacity to meet the rapid growth in demand,” said EOWC Chair Bryan Paterson.

EORN is a non-profit created by the EOWC to help to improve connectivity across the region. Its first project improved broadband access to nearly 90% of Eastern Ontario through a \$175 million public private partnership. More information about the cellular improvement project is available at www.eorn.ca/cell.



Cottage Insurance Considerations

by Darlene Cade

Cade Associates Insurance Brokers

The cottage: our 'home away from home', our slice of paradise, our special place to escape.

Ontario provides us with the most exquisite display of freshwater lakes of all sizes, and the opportunity to find our piece of the shoreline from which we may appreciate this exceptional gift of nature.

It is this separation from the chaos of our daily lives that is part of why we love the cottage.

This same separation, however, may also distance us from any immediate professional assistance should the cottage be damaged – by weather-events, or any other cause. Now, more than ever, it is crucial to have in hand the best insurance protection available for cottage owners.



Insurance policies are typically complex and often difficult to understand. It is important that you take the time to review your own policy to ensure you are comfortable with the limits and coverages provided. A professional insurance broker/agent can provide appropriate guidance regarding this very important protection for your cottage.

In an exclusive partnership with FOCA, Cade Associates Insurance Brokers Limited offers a cottage insurance program, CottageFirst, designed specifically to respond to the needs of Ontario cottage owners. Only FOCA members may apply to this program. With CottageFirst, you benefit from a top-of-class insurance product, with a significant discount to not only the cottage premium, but also the insurance policies on your home, automobiles, watercraft and other coverages, if they are bundled together with your cottage insurance!

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We recommend you take a moment to find and review your cottage insurance policy. Keep in mind the following tips.

Cottage Rebuilding Values

The purpose of an insurance policy is to repair or rebuild your cottage in the event of a claim. The limit of insurance shown on your policy should reflect the cost to completely rebuild your cottage following a total loss. While many of us made additions and changes to our cottage using our own labour, when rebuilding after a loss your Insurer will use local contractors to complete the work. Check to see if your policy provides 'Replacement Cost' coverage, which commits the Insurer to rebuild the cottage with materials of a like kind and quality, and without deduction for depreciation.

Coverage

There is a wide range of cottage insurance products available. The most comprehensive policy provides "All Risk" coverage, which is limited only by the specific exclusions provided in the wordings. By contrast, "Named Perils" coverage specifically lists only those perils against which the policy provides protection.

In particular, cottagers should look for policies that not only cover more common perils such as fire, lightning and smoke, but also provide a minimum of coverage including loss by:

- falling trees and other objects
- vandalism & malicious acts
- theft
- building collapse
- damage caused by bears.

All policy holders should take time to read through their policy to ensure they understand the coverages provided.

Liability

Liability insurance responds to claims brought against the cottage owner for bodily injury or property damage suffered by third parties, arising from the ownership and use of your cottage property. Cottages, with their natural terrain and easy access to water, are more susceptible to a liability claim. Good maintenance at and around your cottage will help to reduce the opportunity for a 'slip & fall'. Increased liability limits should be considered on your cottage policy, and can often be purchased at a very minimal cost.

Ownership of a motorized watercraft brings a different liability exposure, and coverage may not be included in your cottage policy. Watercraft liability insurance is required to respond to injury to third parties related to the use and ownership of your boats. Whether or not you are particularly concerned about physical loss to your watercraft, it is crucial to ensure that proper liability coverage is in place.

As our litigious environment continues to expand, the Personal Umbrella Liability policy has become far more popular. This single policy is specifically designed to provide peace of mind by adding excess limits of protection over the individual limits already provided by your automobile, home, cottage, other properties, and of course, your watercraft policies.

Fire Service Protection

The distance by road from your cottage to accessible, professional and/or volunteer fire hall protection, and whether the road is seasonal or maintained year-round, are primary factors in determining the pricing for property insurance. While many lake and cottage associations do an excellent job of providing portable fire pumps for their members, and despite the close proximity of a cottage to large bodies of water, these are not considered reliable sources of protection by Insurers.

Woodstoves

Whether your cottage uses wood as its primary source of heat, auxiliary heat, or simply for ambiance during the cooler months, Insurers vary as to their approach to woodstoves. Proper risk management of your woodstove will help make it easier to arrange insurance for your cottage. Woodstoves should be professionally installed; check your own woodstove to be sure it has a metal plate with the mark of a regulatory body such as ULC or CSA. WETT (Wood Energy Technology Transfer Inc.) is a non-profit training and education group focused on the safety of wood burning stoves; see www.wettinc.ca for details. Have your chimney cleaned professionally each year, or more often if you are a frequent woodstove user. Finally, try to use only properly dried hardwoods as fuel for your fire such as maple, beech, ash, hickory, or oak.

The cottage is where we build lifelong memories with family and friends, where we experience peaceful mornings and the call of the loon at night.

Be sure you have the appropriate insurance protection to protect your precious cottage memories. For more about this important FOCA member benefit, visit: <https://foca.on.ca/cottage-first/>.

Update about the Lake Partner Program

As of June 2020, lab services at the Ontario Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks (MECP) Dorset Environmental Science Centre (DESC) are still on hold due to the pandemic. The Ministry is currently assessing the safest way to continue the Lake Partner Program (LPP), while keeping volunteers and ministry staff safe.

During this time, we have been instructed to ask that volunteers do not gather or submit any samples to the Ministry lab in Dorset.

What's the LPP?

The LPP is Ontario's volunteer-based, water-quality monitoring program, and is the largest and longest-standing program of its kind in North America. MECP coordinates this program from DESC in partnership with FOCA. Generally, lakes on the Canadian Shield are sampled once in the spring, and lakes off the Shield are sampled monthly from May to October.

Over 20 years of data have been collected in the LPP. Long-term data is incredibly valuable as it allows a baseline condition of a waterbody to be recorded. This baseline allows policy makers and researchers to watch for trends and changes, and the program can create or cement community connections as citizen scientists and lake associations connect with the health of their watershed.

We are hopeful that one missing year in the data will not diminish the overall value of the information as a tool for research and trending.

Why Sample Water?

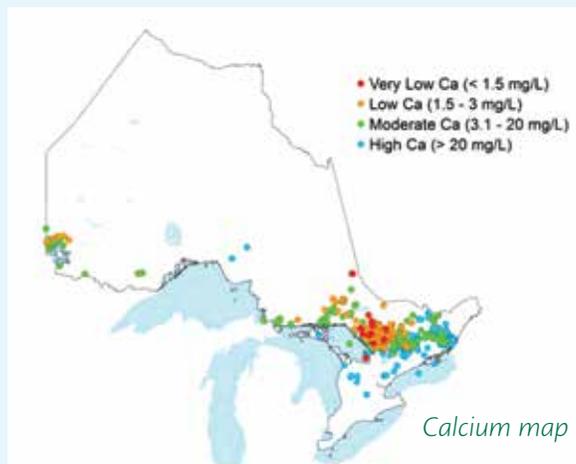
Inland lakes are affected by a variety of nutrients that can impact water quality, fish diversity, and algal blooms. In every lake there is a healthy background level; having too much or too little of a nutrient can have negative effects on the ecosystem, human health, and the economy. The Lake Partner Program monitors and analyzes four parameters: phosphorus, calcium, water clarity, and chloride.

LPP volunteers in their own words:

"My great great grandfather started fishing the lake in 1872. I feel a responsibility to help ensure the lake is available for future generations and by monitoring the lake can see if there are any negative trends occurring."

LPP Quick Facts

- Over **600 volunteers** in over **500 lake associations**
- Sampling on over **550 inland lakes** at over **800 sample sites**
- Over **2,600 volunteer hours** annually to gather over **4,400 phosphorus samples**
- Contributing over **half a million in in-kind field research** every year with **over 20 years** of data collected



Who uses the LPP data?

- Individuals who are curious about the health of their lake, and may be seeking to make informed property decisions, such as naturalizing their shoreline.
- Lake associations who seek to best manage their lake and be lake stewards; many monitor for trends, and use the LPP data to engage their lake community.
- Private organizations or companies that focus on environmental work and use LPP data as a baseline on potential projects or proposals.
- Researchers studying topics such as lake health, aquatic species, waterfront property economics, cumulative effects on lake ecosystems, and human impacts on lakes.
- Government staff and scientists who incorporate LPP data into research such as studying the effects of road salt on inland lakes (see page 23), and government policies and tools, such as the *Lakeshore Capacity Assessment Guidebook*.

For data by waterbody (2019 and prior), and more case studies of uses of the LPP data, consult FOCA's LPP Report and links, posted here: <https://foca.on.ca/lake-partner-program-sampling-assistance/>.

Case Study:

KLSA's use of LPP data

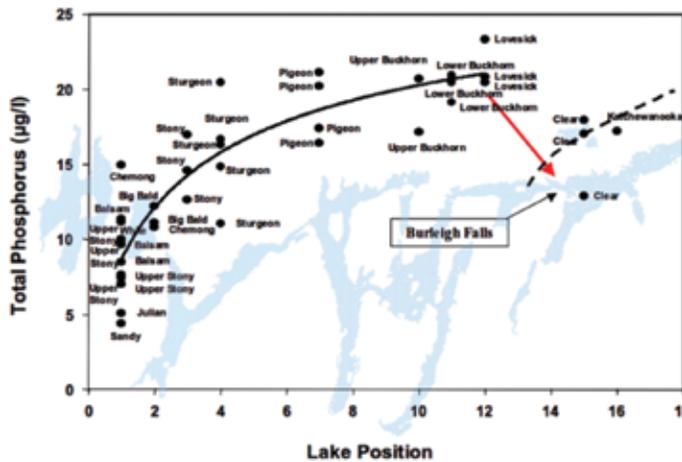
The Kawartha Lake Stewards Association (**KLSA**) is a FOCA Supporting Group that has used LPP data, amongst other scientific research, over many years. KLSA is a volunteer, non-profit, community-based organization of cottagers, year-round residents and local businesses formed to monitor the water quality of the Kawartha Lakes, to educate the public, and to conduct research in areas of concern.

KLSA publishes an annual report on a variety of water parameters for a series of connected lakes along the Trent Severn Waterway, from Balsam Lake to Katchewanooka Lake. The data on total phosphorus, calcium and water clarity for this report are derived from the samples collected and analyzed annually through the LPP.

In early 2019, KLSA was among many FOCA partners that wrote to the Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks, encouraging the Ministry to continue funding the LPP. KLSA posted the following in their March 2019 blog post at the time:

KLSA strongly supports the decades old, low cost programs that the LPP runs with volunteers and volunteer organizations throughout the Province of Ontario. KLSA was started after the Walkerton tragedy, in 2000/2001, by the volunteer Lake Stewards throughout the Kawartha Lakes that were already doing lake water sampling and testing through the LPP program in our area.

KLSA supports the continuation of the LPP and the long-term data collection on lake water clarity, temperature and nutrient loading (phosphorus concentration) in Ontario Lakes. This ongoing water quality information is critical in our area for monitoring changes that could impact local businesses, tourism, property values, municipal market value taxes and tax assessments, lake capacity, and development projects throughout the area.



Data can really help to tell a story: the **above graph—from the 2019 KLSA Annual Report**—tracks total phosphorus (TP) concentrations along the Kawartha lake chain. Superimposing the data over a map of the lakes makes clear how TP concentrations rise steadily from west to east through the lakes chain, until a surge of freshwater from the Eels and Jacks Creek watersheds enters Upper Stoney Lake at Burleigh Falls, where TP levels dip down again.

The LPP monitoring results have also been used in crafting local lake management plans and public outreach programs in the Kawarthas. KLSA pointed out to FOCA that Lake Management Plans are now being implemented on the lakes managed by Kawartha Conservation, and lake associations to the east have undertaken the initiative to create their own plans.

“As a citizen science organization, the KLSA is guided by scientific advisors from universities and colleges who provide a reality check on our enthusiasm,” notes KLSA Chair, William Napier. *“All of our projects include the participation of lake associations and government bodies. We find a cross-section of knowledge, experience and familiarity with the lake systems lends itself to a better project.”*

Now with the looming prospect of climate change and other environmental effects, KLSA has published a climate change report earlier this year, which includes projections for the area, up to the end of this century. KLSA is also planning with partners for a multi-year continuous water temperature and multi-season dissolved oxygen monitoring project across the Kawartha Lakes.

“We hope that other like-minded organizations are created and thrive,” said Napier, *“as a greater focus is placed on an inter-lake ecosystem approach to lake(s) management.”*

All of the KLSA material described above, including the annual reports and more, are posted to the KLSA website: <https://klsa.wordpress.com/>.



Lake Associations Working with Municipal Partners

In recent years FOCA has noted a few, and more emerging, committees of council related to lake associations.

We are encouraged by the efforts of our municipal partners to engage with the lake associations in their area.

For example: the Municipality of Trent Lakes Council has held an annual Cottage/Ratepayers Association meeting for several years now; the Township of Rideau Lakes created a Lake Association Committee in the summer of 2019, and the Township of South Frontenac has recently established a Lake Ecosystem Advisory Committee.

In the case of South Frontenac, the new Lake Ecosystem Advisory Committee has been directed to meet quarterly or more often, as necessary, and to report to Council regularly. The goal of the Committee is *“to support the health and welfare of the Township’s lake ecosystems and the enjoyment and use of those lakes by lake residents, visitors and future generations,”* through specific duties and functions that include:

- hosting an annual Lake Associations Forum for networking, sharing best practices, voicing common concerns, discussing emerging trends and providing feedback to the Committee regarding Township policy, strategic plans and budgets
- advising on the development of a Lake Study Grant program, in collaboration with Township staff
- coordinating the collection of feedback from Lake Associations and other lakeshore owners and residents, as necessary
- fostering meaningful, respectful and productive working relationships between local Lake Associations, their members, other lakeshore residents, and municipal elected officials and staff.

FOCA recommends that you bring this example to the attention of your own municipal Council!

Rural Ontario: we’re in this, together.

Find more about municipal engagement – how to approach it, and why it matters – here: <https://foca.on.ca/municipal-engagement-guide/>.



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FOCA & OWA

Data Sharing Partnership

There are over 220 waterpower facilities across Ontario. Together these facilities provide approximately 25% of the province's annual generation and 75% of the renewable energy supply. Waterpower is a major resource management undertaking in rural Ontario, providing many benefits to communities.

Waterpower is happening proximate to many FOCA communities, over 500 lake associations across Ontario, representing the interests of Ontario's 250,000 waterfront properties. FOCA members are interested in water level management, whether water seems too low or too high at a particular time.

Since 2019, FOCA and the Ontario Waterpower Association (**OWA**) have been working collaboratively with the objective of sharing and aligning data to support and provide value to our members. This partnership focuses on communications and identifying shared areas of interest.

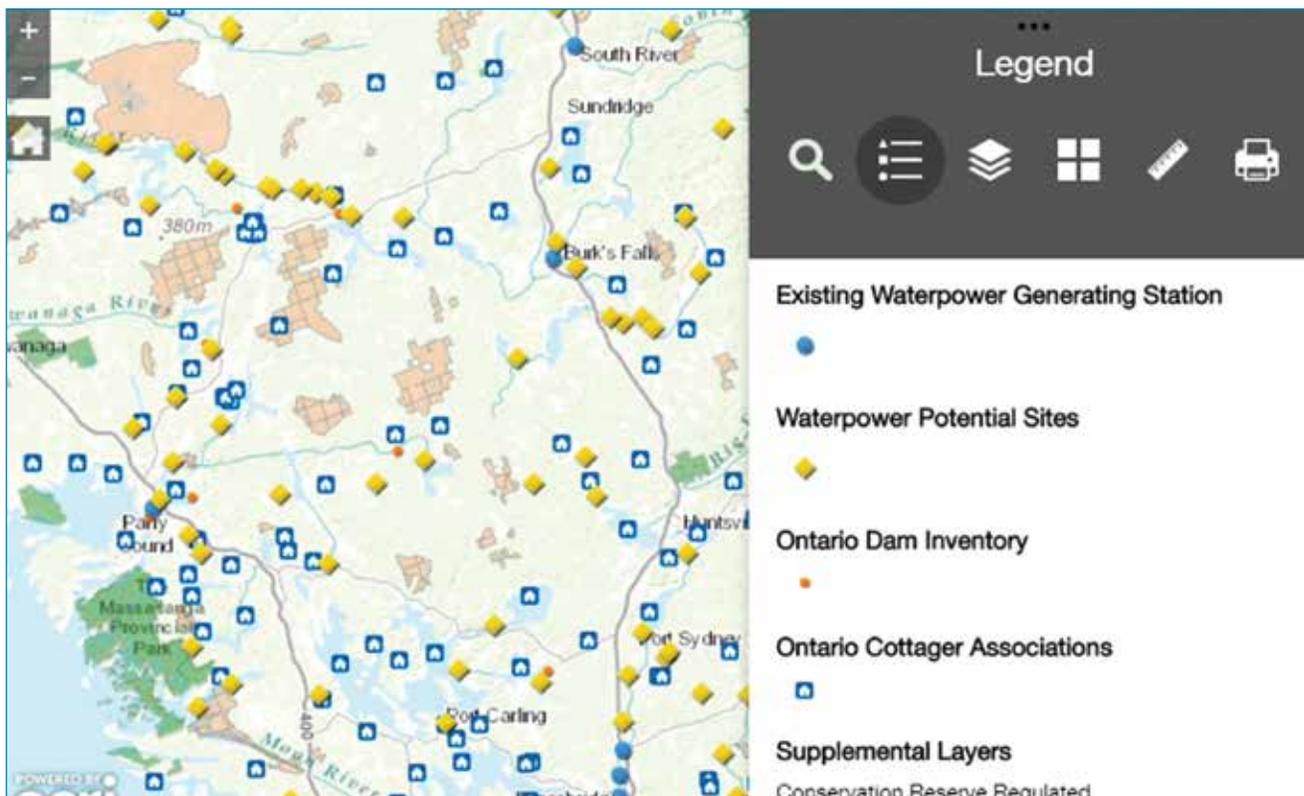
The collaboration has resulted in the creation of the Waterpower Reference Centre (**WRC**), a digital map which utilizes GIS technology to provide specific and current data layers pertaining to waterfront property owners and the waterpower industry.

We all want to have better relations and a common understanding of the challenges on both sides, especially as we face changing climatic conditions, and an evolving energy market. This project is a joint effort to understand the interactions between waterpower facilities and lake associations, so we can build better communications and appreciate each other's interests and concerns.

The map provides a provincial snapshot of where and how waterpower facilities overlap with cottagers' associations, identifying the spatial relationship between the two on the landscape.

The WRC contains multiple data layers including cottage associations, existing waterpower sites, potential waterpower sites, Ontario's dam inventory, provincial/federal protected areas and more!

The map was made available to FOCA members for viewing at FOCA's annual Spring Seminar in March 2020. It is not posted publicly; for more information, please contact FOCA directly at info@foca.on.ca.



Forestry: What Associations Need to Know

by Michelle Lewin

FOCA Communications Coordinator

Forest covers almost two-thirds of the province of Ontario, and close to 90% of those forests are publicly owned, known as “Crown lands.”

According to the Province, 44% of these Crown lands are managed forests, which are subject to the Crown Forest Sustainability Act of 1994. The Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry (**MNRF**) manages Crown forests, in the Province’s words, “to ensure forest health now and into the future.”

In many parts of Ontario, however, these Crown forests border private waterfront properties. This is where issues arise that FOCA hears about from our member associations, concerned about the specifics of forestry management—particularly when, where, and how.

Too often, property owners seem unaware of the forestry plan, until the moment when logging crews arrive in their “backyard” and begin taking down trees. **FOCA would like your association to become informed about the forestry process, so you know how and when to become involved.**

The Province explicitly encourages public involvement in the planning process, if your interest in the forest includes, among other things, “hiking, canoeing, camping or other recreational activities; cottaging; ... Crown land use; cultural heritage; the environment.” Your lake association has local knowledge and perspective that can improve the Forest Management Plan (**FMP**), and can ensure that considerations important to local residents get reflected in the plan.

How the system functions

Ontario’s managed forests are divided into geographic planning areas, known as management units, and each area has a FMP, which includes public reporting requirements, a compliance program and independent forest audits to monitor the progress of management companies.

FMPs are set before any forestry activities can take place, and are reviewed on a 10-year cycle. The local FMP determines how much forest harvesting can occur, and where, and where forest access roads will run, and how much forest will be renewed after harvesting.

FOCA encourages you to visit the MNRF’s “Find a Forest Management Plan” webpage, and look up your own local FMP: <https://www.efmp.lrc.gov.on.ca/eFMP/home.do>.

The FMP process includes mandatory stakeholder notification—but be aware that you should self-identify to your local MNRF office ahead of time (i.e., “now”) to ask to be included on a mailing list for all future FMP updates. If you need help identifying your local office, contact FOCA for assistance.

The public review period of a preliminary FMP is the primary time for your lake association to engage in the process of deciding what forest gets harvested, how and when for the next decade. Your association can provide representation to the Local Citizens Committee (**LCC**); see an example from Nipissing Forest, posted to FOCA’s forestry webpage, outlining LCC procedures, roles and responsibilities: <https://foca.on.ca/using-our-forest-resources-sustainably/>.



The advertisement banner features the EORN logo on the left, which consists of three stylized human figures in green, orange, and blue. To the right of the logo, the text reads "EORN EASTERN ONTARIO REGIONAL NETWORK". The main headline states "EORN is improving cellular services for homes, businesses and major roads." Below the headline are three circular images: a woman talking on a mobile phone, two people in a car, and a car on a road. In the background, there is a rural landscape with a field and a silo. At the bottom right, a dark green bar contains the text "Learn more: www.eorn.ca/cell".



Courtesy of Catchacoma Forest Stewardship Committee

Lake Associations in action

At Kawagama Lake in Haliburton, Jim Kaufman is a past President of the Lake Association, and the current Chair of the LCC. A mixed hardwood Crown forest surrounds his lake. *“If you’ve got Crown land around you,”* Kaufman said, *“assume it’s going to be logged at some point.”* He reminds fellow FOCA members that logging doesn’t start until a lot of planning and notification has taken place.

Kaufman’s advice:

- Start asking questions and get involved if you receive notification of Forest Management Planning, planning open houses or Operation notifications for your area.
- Speak to the Forester at your District MNRF office, or the Forester at your SFL (Sustainable Forest License holder). They will write the next 10-year forest plan, and implement Annual Operation plans.
- Once logging has started, the logging crew on the ground may be able to address some of your concerns, but do contact the MNRF if you still have unresolved issues.

Where an FMP is active, an Annual Work Schedule (AWS) is released each year. The AWS is created by a registered professional forester for each management unit and identifies specifics of the impending harvest, access road or bridge construction, replanting, etc.

However, the opportunity for public comment or input is extremely limited at the AWS level. As the Province states, you can *“view the Annual Work Schedule on the MNRF website and at the office of the sustainable forest licensee to see where operations are scheduled to occur.”* Unfortunately, this is sometimes the moment when FOCA hears from a member group trying to stop or alter a forestry plan.

Jumping into the process

At Catchacoma Lake in the Kawarthas, a new group has recently been formed in response to activity in the Catchacoma forest. Ted Spence, Lake Steward for the Catchacoma Cottagers’ Association (CCA), recalls there was a plan posted at the local marina about a decade ago, but it is still a shock to local residents to see logging actually underway. Tree marking in the forest was noted last Fall—a pre-cursor to cutting this year, in the ninth year of the 10-year plan. *“It’s called ‘Selection’ cutting, which sounds good,”* said Spence. *“Then you discover that could mean losing 30 to 40% of the mature trees, and suddenly it doesn’t sound that ‘selective’ anymore.”*

Although they are arriving to the table at a late hour, the Catchacoma Forest Stewardship Committee (CFSC) is pursuing multiple angles of enquiry, in an effort to protect what they have had described to them by the Ancient Forests Exploration and Research (AFER) organization as one of the largest old growth hemlock forests on record in the region. The CFSC is led by Katie Krelve of the Wilderness Committee, and includes Spence representing the CCA, other local residents, and representatives of the AFER.

On the map, the area to be logged appears as a “butterfly-shaped” parcel at the north end of Catchacoma Lake. Spence notes that area of the lake already lost many trees during wind storms in 2013. The CFSC and others have engaged with their municipality, local First Nations groups, the MNRF, MECP and the forestry company. Krelve explained that the Committee has requested more information on existing Ministry documents about species-at-risk, Areas of Concern, previous logging, and more. The group has organized public hikes (pre-pandemic), press releases, videos and news articles to raise awareness about the significance of the forest.

Spence, who was also FOCA’s long-time representative on the Province’s (now disbanded) Minister’s Mining Act Advisory Committee, points out it is not just logging that threatens Crown land near cottage communities, but *“mining, forestry, aggregates – anything can happen,”* while processes and regulations continue to be weighted in favour of industry. A current example: in May 2020 the Province proposed extending an exemption to the Endangered Species Act for forestry, intended to *“avoid additional regulatory burden and economic strain on the forestry sector.”* In late 2019, in response to Bill 132 the “Better for People, Smarter for Business Act,” FOCA had written the Province to iterate multiple concerns about proposed changes to the Aggregate Resources Act and the Crown Forest Sustainability Act, including the amount of ministerial authority with respect to extending forest management plans.

So what cards do property owners hold, if the deck is indeed stacked against us?

(continued on next page)

More Forestry Tips from Association Peers

The Jack's Lake Association (JLA), a FOCA member group located near Apsley, has contributed significantly to their local forestry plan, over many years of concerted effort. In 2009, there was notice of the FMP process—inviting comment and participation—sent to the JLA by the District MNRF office and the local forestry company; however, outdated contact information was on file for the association, and JLA did not feel properly notified. From this shaky start, a relationship with improved communications eventually developed.

This does not mean the JLA and the forestry company agree on all the details of the plan as it exists today! The JLA initiated an Issues Resolution Process to advocate for increased setbacks of logging from the lake and wetlands. Issues that have been addressed were the harvesting distance from the lake's edge, amount of overall harvesting, "viewscape protection" (which was eventually added as a specified Area of Concern to the FMP), access across private property for forestry equipment, road safety and maintenance concerns.

At Jack's Lake, Neill Lanz, past JLA President and current Vice President, has been advocating for the protection of the lake environment for many years. Some of the "wins" include an increased setback from the lake (from 3 metres, as originally proposed by the logging company, to 30 metres) and a 90 metre setback from wetlands (but only after an appeal to the Ministry of the Environment). There have also been successes on aesthetic considerations (such as restricting forestry operations to a time period after Thanksgiving through the end of April to reduce the impact of noise and traffic during the busy cottage season) and on road safety considerations (such as widening areas of a road that doubled as a forestry turning-point, and posting of proper signage warning of haulage in progress). "We're in it to protect the environment," says Lanz. "We are the last defence."

Lanz's advice to others? Get involved early and be prepared to hang in.

Gather scientific evidence to support your cause; find out about species-at-risk in your area, wetlands, and other unique features that warrant special protection. Don't just rely on the information provided by the forestry company or MNRF. JLA has also investigated the impact of methyl mercury migration into lakes as a result of logging.

Lanz recommends establishing an association environment committee, to stay the course and monitor forestry operations and compliance. Raise awareness and engage locals by circulating petitions for sign-on, and having flora/fauna inventory events. Inform local politicians and municipal partners of the community's concerns. Build a relationship with the forestry company. Be watchful, and commit to many years of effort, he adds.

According to the province's online information, it takes approximately three years to prepare a Forest Management Plan.

Watchful eyes like Spence's at Catchacoma are already concerned that their next FMP is coming up this year, to be implemented in 2021, but the public consultation process has not yet emerged.

Long-term, over at Jack's lake, Lanz still hopes for more protection afforded for species through the "Stand and Site Guide" that directs Crown forest managers in developing plans. This guide, in the province's description, "gives direction on modifying forest operations to retain special features such as decaying trees and fallen logs, protect sensitive habitats such as bird nests and woodland pools, and ensure the conservation of water and soil resources." Find more, here: <https://www.ontario.ca/page/forest-management-guides>. FOCA notes that, in 2018, we were advised that our role on the Stakeholder Advisory Team for the revision of the Forest Management Guide for Conserving Biodiversity at the Stand and Site Scales was on hold. We had been there in the hopes of seeing revisions to water setbacks, and considerations about mercury release.

Finally, Kaufman notes, although the aftermath of forest management operations can look "messy" for a while, there is science behind it. Treetops left after logging will return nutrients to the soil, provide forest habitat, and decompose in a number of years. Forest operations are highly regulated and audited.

"Years ago," said Kaufman, "I was invited to take a walk with my MNRF District Forester. I saw forest stands looking healthy, where logging had occurred 20 and 40 years ago. I've come from being a sceptic, to being an advocate of our Forest Management process."



A NEW START



As a cottage owner, you know the amazing feeling of opening weekend and the promise it holds for another remarkable season. The same feeling can fade quickly as you realize the cottage you once loved is now tarnished, dated and in need of many costly repairs. Perhaps the cottage is too small for your growing family, or inadequate for your picture-perfect retirement.

Either way, you will need to make a decision. Do you renovate and add on? Sell and buy new? Tear down and build from scratch? These are not easy choices, especially if you have a longstanding relationship and many treasured memories at your cottage.

At Home Hardware Building Centre, we want to be part of the conversation and help you discover what is best for you and your family.

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Vegetation Maintenance

from our Partners at Hydro One

Did you know that Hydro One owns and operates over 120,000 km of distribution lines in the province?

These vital power lines could wrap around the world three times, and they supply power to homes and businesses, including providing power to your cottage.

To keep the power on, Hydro One crews need to make sure a safe distance exists between power lines, trees and other vegetation. This important work keeps the right-of-way or corridor safe for public use and gives Hydro One crews access to the power lines for regular maintenance and emergency repairs.

We all know that power outages disrupt everyday life. To help reduce the number of tree related outages, Hydro One has implemented a new vegetation maintenance approach for distribution. Hydro One's distribution lines are now patrolled and maintained every 3 years.

As part of this work, Forestry crews identify any trees or other vegetation that can grow into the power lines and poles in the short term for removal, while any trees that can fall into the power lines and poles will only be removed if they are dead or diseased.

To safely complete this important work, Hydro One crews utilize a number of tools to maintain rights-of-ways:

- Vegetation removal and trimming with hand-held tools, such as chainsaws and pruners
- Sections of dense vegetation may be addressed with heavy mechanical equipment, to ensure the safety of crews completing the work
- Herbicides may be applied to certain cut stems to prevent re-growth – only applied if permission from property owner is given.

The application of herbicides to select vegetation plays a critical role in Hydro One's approach to maintaining vegetation on rights-of-way. Hydro One cares deeply about community safety, which includes environmental stewardship, and follows strict regulations governing the application of herbicides.

Only highly-trained staff apply herbicides directly to cut stems and do not use in proximity to open water courses, including potable water wells, Municipal well head or water intake, and/or surface water.

Before applying herbicides on private property, Hydro One will always ask permission! If herbicides are applied, signs will be placed in public areas or access points to ensure the broader community is well aware.

Hydro One's new approach has reduced outages, and balanced the removal of trees and other vegetation by maintaining some of the existing greenspace, while also ensuring the safety and reliability of the electrical system.

If you have any questions about this important work, please contact Hydro One Community Relations at 1-877-345-6799 or Community.Relations@HydroOne.com.



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Getting Involved in Land Use Planning

from our Partners at EcoVue Consulting

When it comes to public consultation in land use planning, inevitably, we hear from the municipal planners: “*we tried to engage the public, but they didn’t participate*” and from the public: “*why didn’t I know about this until it was too late to influence the process?*”. The traditional public consultation process hasn’t always worked well for everyone.

The COVID-19 pandemic has forced us to change the way we approach many parts of our everyday lives – planning and public consultation included. People seem willing to try new ways of doing things right now, out of necessity but also with an interest in changing the status quo. There are lots of webinars, podcasts and online “meetups” focusing on how municipalities can continue to engage people in planning decisions, using digital tools that were previously unavailable, or just unused.

From legislated requirements to just good planning, planners want to ensure that people are involved in public decision-making processes, even during the pandemic. As planners, a broader set of tools is becoming available to enhance the public consultation process and some of these are proving to be successful for both sides.

As participants in the planning process, it is important to engage with new digital tools being used by municipalities, and to provide feedback on the experience, to better the public engagement process in the long-term. If people from around the corner, across the country, or in the middle of a winter storm can use a digital tool to attend a Council meeting, then the opportunities for participation are greatly improved, going forward.

The hope is that new tools will lead to a broader interest in the planning process, and will provide participants with enhanced accessibility and convenience. More involvement should ultimately lead to more inclusive conversations about community building, and the planning decisions that impact all of us.

This is a time for flexibility, nimbleness and learning. We urge you to find out what your municipality is trying, to engage with some of these new tools during the pandemic and, most importantly, to provide feedback to the decision-makers.

Let’s come together in new ways and share what we are learning, to better our collective future.



FOCA adds: Practical Tips for Lake Association Representatives

There are legislative requirements that outline the process for making planning decisions; however, the timing of decision-making and the means of soliciting public feedback will vary by municipality. Here are some general tips:

- Find out when your municipality is making decisions, and which tools they are using to gather your feedback. The easiest way to get this information is to connect with the planning staff at your local municipality. Start by finding their contact information on the municipal website. Ask about any significant planning decisions that are coming up, and make sure they know you are interested in receiving notification of related meetings. Then, attend! (Or, designate an association attendee.)
- Some municipalities have begun using digital meeting tools; if they are, most will post meeting times on an online calendar on their website. This is the time to test the technology and find out if issues like lack of internet coverage in your area make this a viable option, or not.
- Ask if you will be able to provide digital input to a meeting in “real-time” or whether you can only listen to the proceedings; these are two very different levels of public engagement.
- After the meeting, provide feedback to the municipality about how the process worked for you. Let municipal staff know, if you want to continue to be able to participate digitally even after the pandemic.
- If you see or participate in an engagement tool that you like, even if it isn’t to do with planning, let your municipal planning staff know that the tool worked well, and why you liked it. This is a time when many municipalities are looking for ways to do things differently.

Above all, this is an opportunity to open (or expand upon) solid lines of communication with your municipal partners. For more about why and how to get involved, see: <https://foca.on.ca/municipal-engagement-guide/>.

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- Ways of presenting your cottage effectively
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Our Responsible Rental Owner Programme helps cottage owners create sustainable, environmentally friendly and neighbor- considerate rental practices.

Contact us for a comprehensive Owner Information Pack at info@clrm.ca



Over-salting Our Lakes

Road salt (sodium chloride) overuse, and its connection to chloride levels in our lakes, is an important issue for lakefront cottagers to understand.

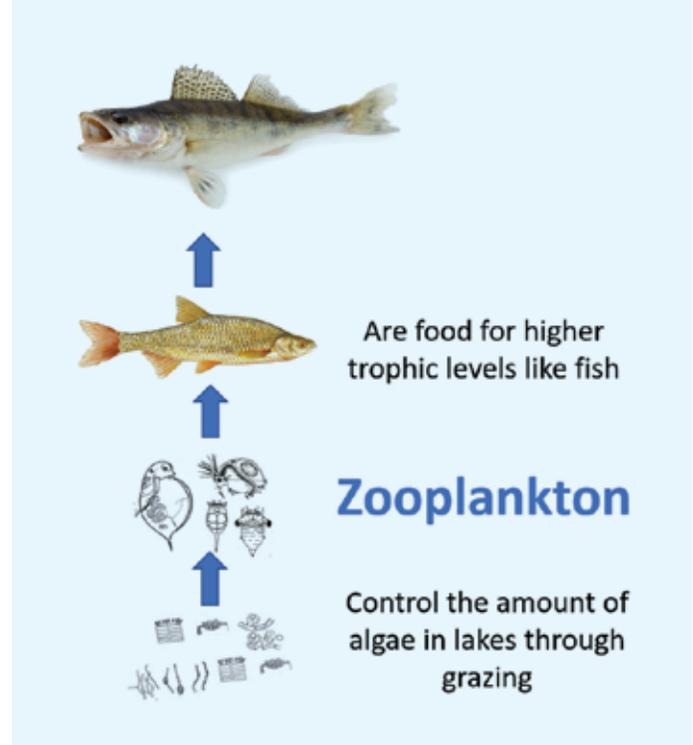
Currently, 7 million tonnes of road salt are applied to roads and parking lots in Canada, each winter. The resulting chloride moves through watersheds, potentially affecting drinking water, irrigation and fish populations, and can even damage boats and corrode in-water structures. These impacts create added cottage maintenance expenses and can alter the ways you and your family enjoy lake life.

Chloride has been tracked in Ontario's inland lakes in recent years through the Broadscale Monitoring Program of the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry, and through water samples collected by citizen science volunteers in the Lake Partner Program (see page 12), and analyzed by scientists at the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks.

Dr. Shelley Arnott is a Professor of Biology at Queen's University. Studies conducted by Dr. Arnott and colleagues have found that chloride concentrations are increasing in Ontario's freshwater lakes and streams. Furthermore, Dr. Arnott provided examples of lab studies that suggest Ontario's current water quality guidelines for chloride (chronic exposure at 120 mg Cl⁻/L, or acute exposure at 640 mg Cl⁻/L) may not be adequate to protect foundational life such as zooplankton in our waterbodies.

Zooplankton are small invertebrates near the bottom of the "food chain" of healthy lake ecosystems; they support fish populations (as food) and provide a form of protection against negative events such as algal blooms (because they graze on algae). Dr. Arnott explained that current chloride levels as recorded in Ontario lakes were found, in lab studies, to reduce zooplankton reproduction rates and reduce the survival rate of these organisms. This could contribute to the collapse of lake ecosystems (see the image above), and even create an environment where invasive species fill the gap and thrive.

On the basis of the lab work findings, field experiments were undertaken by Dr. Arnott, her graduate students, and colleagues on Long Lake and Paint Lake in Ontario. Alongside similar international studies, this work concludes that zooplankton are vulnerable to chloride levels considerably lower than current water quality guidelines.



The role of zooplankton in healthy ecosystems, courtesy Dr. Shelley Arnott

While scientists continue to produce data in support of changing our provincial water quality guidelines, Dr. Arnott provided several tips for those of us who can reduce our own salt impact, in support of lake ecosystems.

Here are just a few of her suggestions:

- only use road salt when the temperature is above -10°C as the salt will not work effectively at lower temperatures
- remove as much snow as possible before applying salt to roads or sidewalks, for more effective de-icing, with less salt use
- prevent ice (and reduce related salt use) by ensuring proper water drainage in areas such as parking areas and walkways
- use the right amount: don't overapply salt! Consult the product packaging and use the minimum required to do the job.

Together, we can all reduce our use of road salt, and help to lower chloride levels in our lakes.

—

This is a summary of the presentation by **Dr. Shelly Arnott** about the impacts of over-salting on our lakes and their ecosystems, delivered at the FOCA Annual General Meeting and Spring Seminar on March 7, 2020. Members can download a link to all the day's presentation slides, in the Event Summary posted here: <https://foca.on.ca/2020-agm-spring-seminar/>

Grass Carp

Water Quality Impacts

FOCA is very concerned about the potential impacts of introduced species, including the effect they can have on our quality of life in Ontario. These invaders have proven to alter the environment, damage our economy, and negatively impact our communities. The threat of Grass Carp is especially real for our members on the Great Lakes.

Grass Carp feed primarily on aquatic plants and can consume up to 40 percent of their body weight per day. By eating such large quantities of aquatic plants they can significantly alter the composition of nearshore habitat. Continue reading to learn about just a few of the ways Grass Carp could negatively impact the water quality of the Great Lakes.

Algae

Grass Carp can increase the abundance of harmful algae in the Great Lakes. Grass Carp eat a large quantity of the aquatic plants that are responsible for filtering nutrients and providing shade. Increased nutrients and sunlight in the water column create ideal conditions for algae to multiply.



Eutrophication

Coastal wetlands are valuable nutrient sinks that provide protection against eutrophication in lakes. Eutrophication can occur when an excess of nutrients enters a lake, which causes a dense growth of plant life and death of animal life from lack of oxygen. If Grass Carp were to become established in the Great Lakes, they could degrade vegetated wetlands resulting in the loss of ecosystem services including nutrient cycle control.

Increased Contaminants

Vegetated nearshore areas would be the most vulnerable habitats if Grass Carp established in the Great Lakes. Loss of nearshore vegetation would negatively impact water quality, because plants along the shoreline slow surface runoff and filter contaminants before they reach the lake.

Increased Nuisance Aquatic Plants

Grass Carp could change the composition of your shoreline plants. Grass Carp feed voraciously on native shoreline plants and once these plants disappear they are often replaced by nuisance aquatic plants. To learn more about the impacts of Grass Carp please visit FOCA's webpage for more information: <https://foca.on.ca/asian-carp/>.

How to Identify Grass Carp

Large scales that appear crosshatched

Eyes sit even with the mouth

Weigh up to 45 kilograms

Grow to 1.5 metres in length

What can you do?

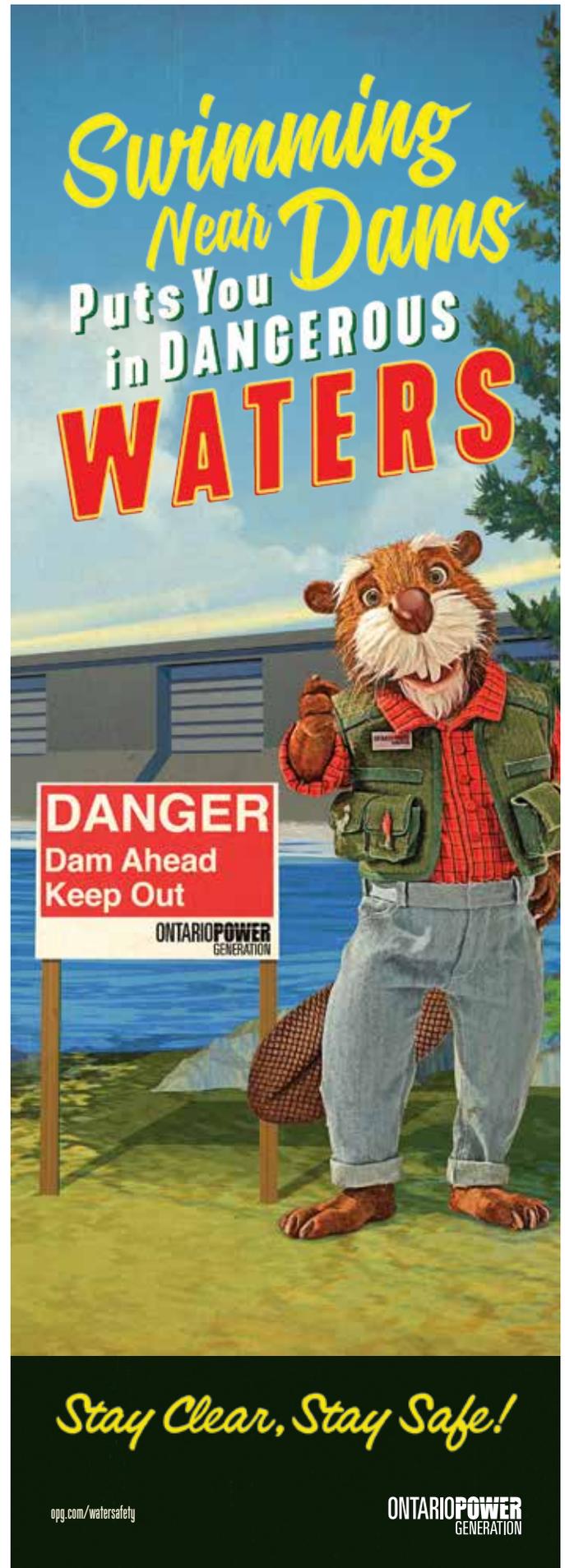
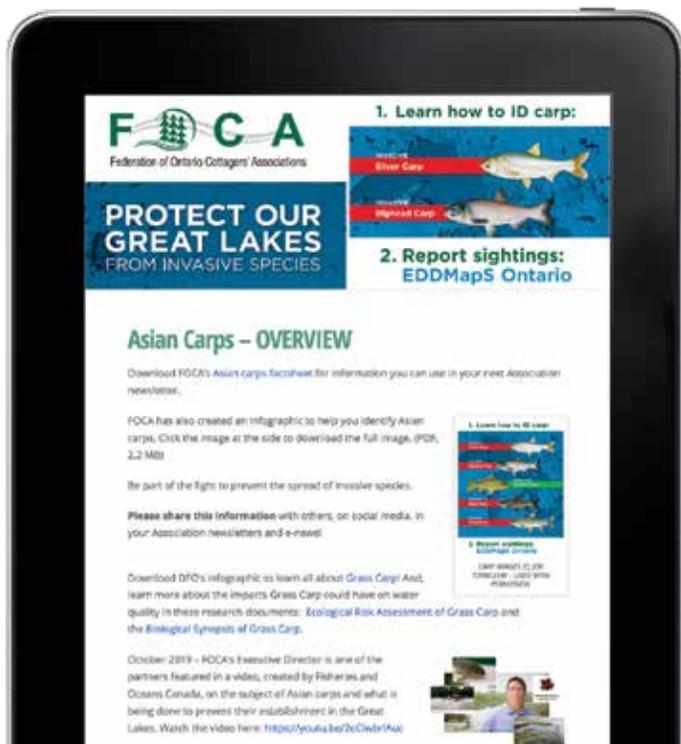
- Never buy or keep live Asian carps. It is against the law to keep an Asian carp as a pet, to use one as bait, or have any live Asian carp in your possession.
- Don't introduce any live fish into Ontario lakes or rivers.
- If you are fishing and incidentally catch an Asian carp, double bag it, put it on ice, and call the Invading Species Hotline (see below). Do not return it to the water.
- If you have any information about the illegal importing, distribution, or sale of live Asian carp, report it immediately to the MNR TIPS line (1-877-847-7667), or call Crime Stoppers anonymously.
- If you've seen an Asian carp or other invasive species in the wild, call the Invading Species Hotline (1-800-563-7711) or visit Ontario's Early Detection & Distribution Mapping System (www.eddmaps.org/ontario) on your computer or smartphone to report a sighting.

For more information

Learn more about Asian carps from these partner sources:

- FOCA: <https://foca.on.ca/asian-carp/>
- Fisheries and Oceans Canada: <http://www.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/species-especes/profiles-profil/asiancarp-carpeasiatique-eng.html>
- Ontario's Invading Species Awareness Program: <http://www.invadingspecies.com/asian-carps/>
- Asian Carp Canada (Invasive Species Centre): <https://asiancarp.ca/>

Learn more on FOCA's website



LakeSmart 2020: The Virtual Edition

Summer 2020 marks the tenth birthday of the LakeSmart program of the Lake of the Woods District Stewardship Association (LOWDSA).

"We've been planning to celebrate this milestone for almost a year," notes LOWDSA Executive Director, Diane Schwartz-Williams. *"Celebrate it we will, although not quite the way we had anticipated."*

The impact of COVID-19 has been considerable. Concern for the safety of the LakeSmart team and LOWDSA members required a thorough look at all the traditional LakeSmart program activities. Not knowing if/when physical distancing protocols would be reduced, LOWDSA realized that having LakeSmart team members together in one boat was not an option, for at least part of the summer. The summer calendar of events was being stripped with cancellation after cancellation.

No boat, no events, no farmers' market... what did that leave? *"We decided... LOTS!"* says Schwartz-Williams. *"It could be a whole new playing field if we got creative and adapted our program and activities to a very different kind of summer."*



Tried, true and new

LakeSmart 2020 will indeed be unlike previous years, but it will still be familiar, and in some ways, even bigger and better, with an extended program season (June 1 to August 28), individual or group 'dock' visits by Zoom meeting, and new research projects and resource developments.

LakeSmart remains an environmental outreach program unique to the Lake of the Woods area. It is delivered by a team of three university students, each with an environmental education focus, who spend the summer sharing information on ways to live and play green at the lake.

The LakeSmart boat is generously supplied by their lead sponsor, Woodlake Marine, but the overall program is only possible with the additional support of LOWDSA member donations to the Environmental Initiative and Special Projects fund, and other sponsors. FOCA has been a proud financial supporter of the LakeSmart program for a number of years.

The team is looking forward to a busy summer connecting with LOWDSA members and friends in new ways. As always, the team will share practical knowledge about what each person can do to contribute to a healthier lake ecosystem, and spread the word about being more sustainable in the stewardship of land and water. The team is equipped with knowledge and resources on a broad range of topics including creating and maintaining shoreline buffer zones, reducing run-off, septic systems, using eco-friendly cleaning products, preventing the spread of invasive species, safe boating, and more.

LakeSmart helps LOWDSA to deliver on its mission: providing leadership, education and communication on issues affecting the Lake of the Woods region. *"Our outreach potential has increased exponentially,"* says Schwartz-Williams of the 2020 digital developments, *"to engage with members and non-members alike who love the lakes and want to see them preserved to be enjoyed for generations to come."* For more, visit: <https://www.lowdsa.com/cpages/lakesmart>

How is your association adapting activities and events this year, in light of physical distancing requirements? FOCA wants to hear your success stories! Send us an update and some pictures to info@foca.on.ca.

4 SIMPLE TIPS FOR SEPTIC SYSTEMS

If you take good care of your system, you will save yourself the time, money and worries involved in replacing a failed system. Here are a few tips.



1 SCRAPE YOUR DISHES

Scraping your dishes into the garbage will make sure solids don't go into your septic system.

2 KEEP THE PLANTS AWAY

Don't plant trees or shrubs too close to the system or leaching bed.



3 PUMP IT OUT

Pump your tank out when solids reach 1/3 of your tank's capacity. Keep records of system maintenance or service calls.

Keep an 'as built' system diagram for reference. Know the location of your tank and tile bed.

4 CONSERVE WATER

Reduce the amount of wastewater your system must treat. Replace old toilets with low-flush models.



A poor system can degrade water supplies and reduce property values

oowa.org

Great Lakes Water Levels Planning

In early June 2020, the International Joint Commission (IJC) reported that an ongoing review of Plan 2014 and the regulation of Lake Ontario outflows will be informed by a diverse Public Advisory Group of people from Canada and the United States. The 16-member group includes leaders from shoreline interests from both sides of Lake Ontario and the St. Lawrence River along with representatives from boating and tourism groups, environmental organizations, local governments, commercial navigation, First Nations and hydropower in New York, Ontario and Quebec.

Plan 2014 is the regulation plan used by the IJC's International Lake Ontario-St. Lawrence River Board to set Lake Ontario outflows. The IJC notes that residents and the board have dealt with record-high water levels and river flows in two of the last three years; however, the extremely wet conditions are beyond those that can be managed by any regulation plan. Nevertheless, the IJC reports that it remains committed to finding the best solutions possible for managing levels and flows, especially during periods of extreme climatic shifts. To that end, the IJC allowed the Lake Ontario-St. Lawrence River Board to deviate from Plan 2014 during the winter and into spring 2020, to reduce Lake Ontario's rise while minimizing damage to other stakeholders throughout the system.

When the IJC approved Plan 2014, it required a review of the plan's performance within 15 years. IJC Commissioners, all of whom were appointed in May 2017, called for an "expedited review" after the record floods in 2017 and 2019. The IJC has received about \$3 million from Canada and the United States to investigate possible improvements to the regulation of Lake Ontario outflows. The review will focus on gathering and analyzing scientific data to review the performance of the regulation plan and identify potential changes to best manage water levels under extreme conditions.



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The effort will be managed by the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River Adaptive Management (GLAM) Committee, a sub-committee to the IJC's Lake Ontario-St. Lawrence River Board, Niagara Board of Control and Lake Superior Board of Control. The Public Advisory Group will assist review efforts by contributing knowledge about water level impacts along with input on the assessment methods used in the review. The GLAM Committee further plans to seek input on the expedited review from the public at a future stage in the review process.

The first phase of the review began in February and is expected to take about 18 months. Information is being provided to the Lake Ontario-St. Lawrence River Board on how best to deal with existing near-record high inflows to Lake Ontario from Lake Erie and address high water conditions. A second phase will examine how Plan 2014 addresses extreme high and low water levels over the long term.

Any resulting changes to Plan 2014 would need to be approved by the IJC, and agreed to by the governments of Canada and the United States. Follow this, and related Great Lakes news, here: <https://foca.on.ca/great-lakes-strategy-and-action/>.

Nature Fun at the Lake

by Drew Monkman

If there's any bright side to the COVID-19 crisis, it's the gift of time that we've been given. Why not use it to reconnect with nature?

There's an amazing natural world to explore on and around Ontario's lakes. Encourage your kids to be inquisitive, to ask questions, and to "plug in" to nature through their senses. Here's some activities in which the whole family can participate.



Images courtesy Drew Monkman



Engage your senses

- 1. Rainbow Colors:** Cut up a variety of paint color samples – especially greys, browns, yellows, oranges and greens – into smaller pieces. Hand out 5-10 pieces to each child. Ask them to try to find natural objects (e.g., grasses, rocks, buds, lichens, bark) that exactly match the colour of each paint sample.
- 2. Smell Cocktail:** You will need some small cups and twigs. Selectively harvest tiny "bits" of nature and place them in the cup: a bud, some conifer needles, a flake of bark, some pine gum, etc. When you have four or five items, stir them with a twig. This is your smell cocktail! Give your creation a name – perhaps "summertopia" – and let everyone smell each other's concoction.
- 3. Touch Bag:** Give everyone a small bag. Find five or so familiar objects from nature (e.g., different conifer needles, bark, moss, etc.) and place them in the bag. Taking turns and using only the sense of touch, challenge the kids to identify the objects in each other's bags.

Salamander sleuthing

Hunting for salamanders is great fun. They are most commonly found in wooded areas under fallen logs, old boards, and large rocks.

Carefully lift up the rock or piece of wood and peak underneath. The most common species are the Spotted, Blue-spotted and Red-backed.

If you find a salamander, observe their colouring and how stream-lined they are – slim and flat – for fitting into tight spaces. Red-backed salamanders can resemble earthworms, so be sure to look carefully.

After you've examined them and maybe taken a picture or two, carefully put them back where you found them.

A summer scavenger hunt

Kids love scavenger hunts. Challenge them to find the following items – with help where needed – and to maybe even keep a few for a cottage nature table! Adapt as necessary.

1. 3 different kinds of wildflowers
2. A mushroom growing from a tree trunk
3. A tree with holes excavated by a woodpecker
4. Berries on a tree or shrub
5. Cones on a pine or other conifer
6. Lichen on a tree or rock
7. Moss
8. 5 leaves of different shapes and shades of green
9. A leaf partly eaten by insects
10. The smell of decaying leaves
11. The smell of two different kinds of conifers
12. Something soft
13. Something rough

14. 4 different creatures under a rock or log
 15. A turtle on a log
 16. 2 different kinds of frogs
 17. 2 different kinds of butterflies
 18. 2 different kinds of dragonflies
 19. 5 different kinds of birds
 20. 3 different bird songs or calls
 21. A water strider
 22. A whirligig beetle
 23. A fish
 24. 2 different constellations
 25. A shooting star
-

FOCA adds: Drew Monkman is an award-winning environmental advocate, and naturalist. A retired elementary school teacher, Monkman is the author of several nature guides including *The Big Book of Nature Activities*. Find out more at www.drewmonkman.com.

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You Asked, FOCA Answers

Flooding & Property Assessments

The Municipal Property Assessment Corporation (**MPAC**) continuously reviews properties as new homes are built, owners renovate, structures are demolished and properties change use.

But what happens if changes to your property are a result of damage from natural disasters like flooding?

“When this unfortunate situation happens, municipalities rely on MPAC to provide the breakdown of the property’s assessment so that they can make an informed decision about a tax application and process the application quickly,” said Rebecca Webb, MPAC Regional Manager, Municipal and Stakeholder Relations.

In situations where a building is damaged rendering it substantially unusable or requiring significant repairs, a property owner may file an application with their municipality to cancel, reduce, or refund property taxes based on specific criteria in accordance with Section 357 of the Municipal Act.

“Your local municipality is available to help and answer any questions and to support during these difficult times,” said Mishele Joanis, Program Manager, Customer Accounts Branch, City of Ottawa, earlier this year. *“An application can be submitted to your local municipality until February 28, 2021, and we encourage property owners to submit photos and substantiating details of property damage along with the application.”*

MPAC’s role in processing municipal tax applications is to provide the municipality with the information it needs to enable municipal council to determine if a tax adjustment is warranted.

As well as filing an application with their municipality for property tax relief, property owners also have the option to file a Request for Reconsideration (**RfR**) with MPAC for free, if they do not agree with their assessment. If they are not satisfied with the outcome of that review, they have the option to file an appeal with the Assessment Review Board, an independent adjudicative tribunal. FOCA posts information about the RfR process, here: <https://foca.on.ca/how-to-challenge-your-property-assessment/>.

When assessing any property, MPAC relies on the market—and specifically sales—to indicate if a factor such as flooding may have an impact on a property’s value. MPAC does this through the ongoing study and analysis of the market, including the investigation of sales transactions.

The deadline to file an RfR for the 2020 tax year was March 31, but given the province’s emergency declaration due to COVID-19, the deadline will now be 16 days after the declaration has been lifted.

It’s important to keep in mind that RfR applications are applicable for an entire taxation year, so in most cases where flooding has affected properties for only a portion of the taxation year, a municipal tax application is likely the best option for the 2020 taxation year. MPAC would then update the property’s state and condition, as applicable, for the next full taxation year. If repairs are ongoing, the property owner may be required to submit an RfR for subsequent taxation years.

Your individual questions can be directed to MPAC: <https://www.mpac.ca/en/contact>.

MPAC Assessment Update

As part of the Ontario Government’s March 2020 Economic and Fiscal Update responding to COVID-19, the Hon. Rod Phillips, Minister of Finance, announced the Province’s decision to postpone the 2020 property assessment update from the Municipal Property Assessment Corporation (**MPAC**).

The Ontario Government has indicated that property assessments for the 2021 property tax year will continue to be based on the fully phased-in January 1, 2016 current values.

This means your property assessment for the 2021 property tax year will be the same as the 2020 tax year, unless there have been changes to your property. Get information and related links from this FOCA webpage: <https://foca.on.ca/focas-property-tax-position-overview/>.

Walkerton 20 Years Later

Lessons Worth Remembering

by Terry Rees

Executive Director of FOCA

As a “water person”, when I first heard in May 2000 that thousands of people had become ill and seven people had died from water-borne contaminants in Ontario, like others I was shocked and confused. How could this happen here?

For decades, FOCA and others have advocated for healthy waters. The Walkerton tragedy provided still more impetus and placed a higher priority on the important work involved to keep our precious waters safe.

The subsequent public inquiry led by Justice Dennis O’Connor, resulted in a list of 121 recommendations providing the guidance needed to build the multi-barrier framework for drinking water protection in Ontario. The Clean Water Act (2006), the Safe Drinking Water Act (2002), and other measures have helped make our municipal drinking water among the safest in the world. The province’s 22 approved Source Protection Plans cover much of southern Ontario and are based on complex science, policy development and public consultation and involved Source Protection Committee members from municipalities, businesses, industries, First Nations, landowners and others.

Source water protection includes underground aquifers as well as lakes and rivers, but from a legal perspective, it is narrowly defined, and only protects sources where they are located very close to municipal water sources.

“Rural water” such as virtually all the lakes and rivers where FOCA members are located, do not yet benefit from the planning or the policies within the Clean Water Act.

Since I presented to Justice O’Connor at a town hall in Peterborough about the need to protect the health of ALL of our lakes and rivers, and though over 100 subsequent Committee meetings in the Trent Source Protection region, it has remained clear to me that all our water deserves protection.

To date, the Province of Ontario has not committed to expand the scope of this protection to clusters of wells, or other non-municipal water sources. FOCA, along with our partners and colleagues, will continue to press for increased oversight for all our waters.

Water treatment facilities, where they exist, are intended to provide only a second defence against contamination of drinking water. Protecting source water is safer and more cost-effective than detecting and treating contaminated water.

We need to never forget the lessons of Walkerton, and to remain vigilant to build on the framework, the policies, the technical expertise, and the investment we make in maintaining our municipal drinking water sources. But we should also remain focussed on those waters—not formally protected under the existing drinking water policies—that form the nucleus of our rural communities, and afford so many of us with water for our household use, our recreation, our peace of mind and well-being.

See more at:

<https://foca.on.ca/source-water-protection/>



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