2022 YEAR IN REVIEW



across Ontario



Coming Out of Our Shells

From the Executive Director & President of the Board of Directors

We are approaching the 3-year mark since we last gathered in person for the FOCA Annual General Meeting on March 7th, 2020.

For many, that was the last large in-person event we attended before the pandemic took hold and pixelated our social interactions and fractured our community connections.



So much has changed in the world since then, and no one is entirely 'back to normal' yet.

Nevertheless, waterfront Ontario has remained a touchstone throughout these years for hundreds of thousands of families: a place where we come together; a place where we create memories; a place that we dream about returning to, when we are away.

Now we tentatively contemplate 'coming out of our shells' as we anticipate upcoming in-person gatherings and hope for a more 'normal' cottage country season ahead. For FOCA, the next event will be our AGM & Spring Seminar (https://foca.on.ca/2023_agm_spring_seminar/), planned as a hybrid in-person and virtual gathering on Saturday, March 4, 2023 at the Bayview Golf & Country Club in Thornhill, and by Zoom webinar.

We look forward to seeing you there.

On behalf of our member Associations and supporting families, we wish everyone the best for the coming year, as we take a moment to reflect on the busy year just past, and celebrate our organization's **60th anniversary** this year. Learn more about FOCA's 2022 programs, advocacy, communications and education efforts on the following pages.

Our province-wide organization represents waterfront Ontario and supports our member associations: more than 525 lake, river, road and residents' associations with 50,000 families who love the water and life alongside it.

Your annual support makes us strong. Thank you!



Terry Rees FOCA Executive Director



lan Crawford
FOCA Board President

FOCA's Strategic Priorities

FOCA works year-round on behalf of thriving and sustainable waterfronts through education, communication and advocacy efforts. FOCA has been the voice of the waterfront since 1963.

Our core work revolves around the following priority areas:



Promoting Healthy Lands, Lakes and Rivers



Serving Lake & Road Associations



Advocating for Responsive Government



Championing Affordable & Safe Rural Living



Building Organizational Capacity & Strategic Partnerships



Fostering Community in Rural Ontario

Read more on the following pages about how we continued to address these priorities in 2022.

Your annual support is an investment in FOCA, and makes it possible for us to deliver our programs, member services, advocacy, and educational outreach to new cottagers.

Thank you to our Member Associations, Supporting Groups, Annual Supporters and Donors!



FOCA effectively serves and represents Ontario's lake associations, waterfront property owners (WPO) and waterfront communities through education, communication and government advocacy.

FOCA's environmental programs engaged over 1,000 volunteers across the province throughout 2022, and resulted in an additional \$13,000 distributed to member Associations in funding for on-the-ground invasive species prevention, identification, and eradication.

FOCA Environmental Program Highlights

Green Shovels Collaborative

For the past two years, FOCA has worked with conservation partners on the Green Shovels Collaborative—a group of organizations with a shared interest in protecting nature and the economy. Through this collaborative, FOCA has so far funded almost \$40,000 in on-the-ground invasive Phragmites prevention, identification, education, control, management and eradication projects with member Associations. Thank you to everyone who participated in these program efforts! FOCA is working to secure more funding to continue this work in future years. Learn more: https://foca.on.ca/phragmites/.

Lake Partner Program

The Lake Partner Program (LPP) is our long-standing citizen science initiative between FOCA's Lake Stewards and the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks which analyzes water samples and Secchi depth recordings taken annually by over 600 volunteers across Ontario, tracking long-term trends in our waters for over a quarter of a century! The results from this long-term dataset can be accessed here: https://foca.on.ca/lake-partner-program/.

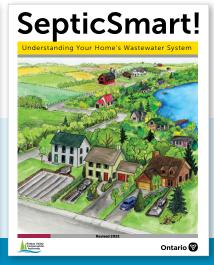
IsampleON program

The IsampleON program (Invasive Species Awareness Monitoring Program & Lake Education in Ontario) which FOCA launched in 2021 with colleagues at the Invasive Species Centre (ISC), continued in 2022 with targeted outreach, education, and sampling for invasive mussels and spiny water flea in lakes on the Canadian Shield. Thank you to the 58 volunteers who collected water samples and eDNA samples for lab analysis at ISC, and who shared educational information about local invasive species prevention throughout 2022. We know early detection is essential to protect our lakes and rivers from the negative impacts of aquatic invaders on these key ecosystems. Learn more: https://foca.on.ca/isampleon/.









FOCA Communicating Science

Asian Carps Threat

FOCA continued our work throughout 2022 with the Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) Canada to educate Great Lakes watershed residents about the threat posed by Asian Carps. DFO spoke at FOCA's 2022 Fall Seminar about *Preventing a Grass Carp Invasion: how you can help.* FOCA's members are part of the early-warning system to protect Ontario waterways from these invaders. If you live or cottage along the Great Lakes, please watch the video: *Cottager perspectives on Asian Carp prevention* and a webinar we hosted with DFO about early detection, posted here: https://foca.on.ca/asian-carp/.

'Lake by Lake' Reports

In the Spring of 2022, FOCA released 'Lake by Lake' reports to the Lake Stewards and Presidents of our member lakes being sampled through the LPP as of 2019. The reports were intended to provide them with a snapshot of conditions in their area, including an overview of recent LPP information (to 2019) plus related open-source data such as fish species, monitoring bodies, and lake morphology.

Wondering if your lake has a report? Contact programs@foca.on.ca. No report might mean we need volunteer samplers on your waterbody! Learn more about the LPP and find out how to get involved: https://foca.on.ca/lake-partner-program/.

Being 'FireSmart'

In 2022, FOCA worked with the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry to educate waterfront property owners about wildfire prevention and how to be 'FireSmart'. Owning a woodland property in rural Ontario means that you are more likely to be affected by natural disturbances such as forest fire. It is important to take steps on your property and in your community to reduce the risks from wildfire. If you encounter a waterbomber gathering water from a lake, stay well clear of this critical emergency service. Also, do not fly drones within 9 km of a wildland fire area as firefighting aircraft cannot share airspace with drones. Thank you for sharing these messages in your local communities. Learn more: https://foca.on.ca/fire-safety/.

Septic System Infrastructure

Septic systems are an important piece of infrastructure on many waterfront properties, and FOCA worked with our partners to update and release the amended <code>SepticSmart!</code> homeowner guide this year. FOCA encourages you to learn more about your own onsite waterwater system. The Canadian Standards Association has recently implemented mandatory safety screens for new-builds of septic systems, but whether existing systems will require retro-fits is yet unclear. For related information and updates, visit https://foca.on.ca/septic-systems/ or stay tuned to the FOCA Elert (https://foca.on.ca/news/elerts/).

✓ In the words of our volunteers:

"The reason we are protecting our lake is HOPE. We HOPE that future generations will be able to enjoy the beauty of nature as we seniors have. We HOPE that our grandchildren will be able to explore the shore and see frogs, turtles, snakes and crayfish as we have. We HOPE that future generations will be able to

catch fish that are clean and healthy. We HOPE that our grandchildren will be able to swim in clean water. We HOPE that future generations will be able to canoe in a lake that is brimming with native plants, wildflowers and insects. HOPE is why we are so determined to protect our lake."

~ Randy V, Mississagagon Lake

As social-distancing considerations continued throughout 2022, FOCA hosted more member AGMs on our Zoom webinar platform, assisting member groups representing 2,500 member families to meet virtually and conduct essential association business.

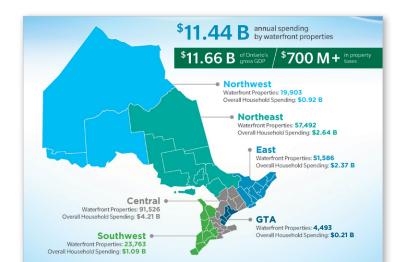
Helping our Member Associations

Association Memberships

From our 2022 extensive member survey we learned that 91% of respondents said their Association's membership was "steady" or "up" over the previous year. We are gratified to know that so many of our member groups are in a period of growth or stability! Member Associations can contact FOCA (info@foca.on.ca) for further survey results, including benchmark Association statistics about annual dues, number of volunteers, and various ways they accept membership payments.

Economic Impact Study

FOCA released a first-of-its-kind study of the *Economic Impact of Waterfront Property Households across Ontario*. FOCA invested in this project on your behalf, to quantify the significant contributions of waterfront property owners (WPO) to the rural and northern economy. This report concludes that an estimated \$11.44B was spent in 2021 by a quarter-of-a-million waterfront property households across Ontario. For every 10 waterfront properties in Ontario, 6.3 jobs are created, and 5.4 of those jobs are in the local community! Download the report and infographic: https://foca.on.ca/economic-wpo.



Responsible Use of Our Waterfronts

The FOCA Board Working Group on Short-Term Rental (STR) released a summary report *STR in Waterfront Ontario*, an overview for Member Associations and our municipal partners created in response to members' reported concerns with overloaded rental properties, noise, trespass, parking and other problems. FOCA feels strongly about the responsible use of our waterfronts and—in support of our member associations and municipal partners—encourages local stakeholder engagement and municipal consideration of ways to minimize STR concerns. Download the 16-page digital STR report here: https://foca.on.ca/rental/.

Managing Private Roads

FOCA has many member Associations that are engaged in—or entirely devoted to—the management of private rural roads. In April 2022, FOCA undertook a survey of municipal partners to compile information about varying responses to municipal participation in road issues. We also addressed a packed room of municipal delegates at the Ontario-wide *Good Roads Conference* to speak about the 'last mile' of the cottage commute. We continue to build bridges (metaphorically, only) with municipal partners on behalf of our members and their road issues. Access our member resources related to roads: https://foca.on.ca/cottage-roads/.

In the Fall of 2022, FOCA's Board Working Group on Road Issues released a new toolkit document targeted to our road groups, titled *Starting & Building an Effective Road Association*, which expands upon the original version of our guide for Waterfront (Lake) Associations. Both documents are available for member download from our Association "Toolkit" webpage: https://foca.on.ca/toolkit-overview/.





2022 FOCA Event Highlights

How many of these FOCA member events did you attend in last year?

AGM & Seminars

The FOCA AGM & Spring Seminar (February 26, 2022 by webinar) included presentations by the Municipal Property Assessment Corporation about property assessments and voter enumeration; an LDD moth outbreak overview by the Ontario Forest Health Program; an introduction to digital water quality data in the new Great Lakes DataStream; and a presentation about concerns with Floating Container Residences. Members can read the event summary, including links to download all the presentation slides, posted here: https://foca.on.ca/2022_agm_spring_seminar/.

In November, FOCA held our Fall Seminar for Associations with the theme "Gathering Momentum" including the release of our 2022 survey results including benchmark association statistics. We highlighted the release of our report about the Economic Impact of Waterfront Households, and how your Lake Association can accelerate important municipal partnerships, including new shorelands resources for homeowners and municipal partners created through FOCA's partnership in the "Planning for our Shorelands" project. Members can download the detailed event summary and links to the slides, posted here: https://foca.on.ca/2022-fall-seminar/.

Is your Association ready for the Ontario Non-profit Corporations Act (ONCA)?

In April, FOCA hosted a webinar with legal partners to help Ontario Associations to comply with governance changes by October 2024. Updates may be needed for your Association's by-laws or Articles of Incorporation; review these details now, as they may entail regular or special resolution membership votes in 2023 or 2024.

Webinars

In February, FOCA and Make-Way Environmental Technologies held a "Lunch and Learn" webinar about Septic Systems in Ontario. Review the event recording, which includes an overview of the types of systems permitted in Ontario, and creative solutions for difficult sites: https://foca.on.ca/septic-systems/.

In March, FOCA hosted a webinar about the *New Invasive Species & Watercraft Regulations* on the movement of watercraft between waterbodies that came into effect on January 1, 2022. We followed that with a June webinar about *Zebra Mussels in Ontario* outlining where and how they area spreading, and their impact on our waterways. Access the recordings from our webpage: https://foca.on.ca/invasive-species/.



Access the webinar and additional resources: https://foca.on.ca/onca-overview/.

Throughout the year, FOCA met with provincial and federal partners to discuss important subjects like invasive species prevention and management funding, land use planning regulations, oversight and operation of the Trent Severn Waterway and Rideau Canal, climate resilience, and much more. FOCA is the voice of the waterfront to government, where our combined numbers carry strength on the issues that matter.

Participating in Elections

FOCA encouraged waterfront property owners to vote in the 2022 Provincial and Municipal Elections by providing engagement tools to help associations 'get out the vote' in rural Ontario. In July, FOCA offered a webinar about *Municipal Election Engagement* '101' for Associations. Municipal councils are now in place for the coming 4 years, and FOCA encourages our Member Associations to reach out and establish lines of communication with their new local councils. Access the resources: https://foca.on.ca/vote-for-your-future-municipal-elections/.

Floating Container Homes

Floating container homes are an emerging cottage country issue which FOCA featured at last year's AGM & Spring Seminar. In Spring 2022, FOCA brokered a meeting with our Ministry contacts to enable members to provide input about their concerns surrounding the use of floating accommodations on waterways over Ontario public lands. A consultation period followed on the Environmental Registry of Ontario, although no official development had been announced by year-end. Consultations with affected members continues in 2023. Learn more: https://foca.on.ca/floating-accommodations/.

Boating Advocacy Updates

FOCA supported new 'Clean, Drain, Dry' boater regulations that went into effect in January 2022 to help prevent the spread of invasive species between Ontario waterways. Throughout the year, and with signage for members to post at boat launches, FOCA has informed lake users of these new regulations and how they will help us prevent and slow the spread of invasive species. Learn more: https://foca.on.ca/invasive-species/.

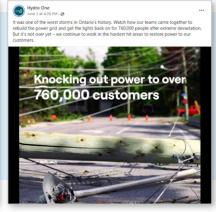
FOCA continues to sit on the **Ontario Recreational Boating Advisory Council** where, in April 2022, Transport Canada (TC) announced they are considering new regulations related to mandatory PFD use by boaters; FOCA will keep members updated about opportunities for public comment in 2023. TC is also continuing to modernize the *Vessel Operation Restriction Regulations (VORR)* which will include a 2021 proposal to introduce a new schedule for wake surfing restrictions. In May 2022, TC launched a public comment period on the subject of boat noise limits. Finally, this year TC confirmed changes to the Pleasure Craft Operator Card (PCOC) for personal watercraft renters under the age of 21. Get updates on these and related topics, from FOCA's webpage: https://foca.on.ca/boating-overview/.











Underused Housing Tax

In 2022, FOCA pressed the government for clarity about a new Underused Housing Tax that was implemented by the federal Finance Department effective January 1st, 2022. We asked that seasonal owners be excluded from this tax (1% of current property value, annually), and the government did eventually bring forward an exemption for vacation or recreational properties, with certain conditions. Nevertheless, cottage owners who are neither Canadian citizens nor permanent residents may still be affected. Learn more: https://foca.on.ca/ property-taxation-assessment/. This federal tax is separate from the provincial Foreign Homebuyer Tax (introduced in 2017) that increased starting in late March 2022 to 20% of the sales price, and now applies across the province rather than just in the Greater Golden Horseshoe region.

Source Water Protection

FOCA has been working on source water protection since our organization was founded in 1963. Twenty years after the legacy of the Walkerton Inquiry, throughout 2022 FOCA spoke and wrote about crucial gaps that still remain after all these years, in the current state of implementation of the Clean Water Act. Although the Province of Ontario released a guide in 2022 detailing best practices for source (drinking) water protection, most waterfront landowners in Ontario are not included in a Source Water Protection Area. FOCA remains dissatisfied with the Province's proposed voluntary approach without technical resources, implementation, or enforcement provisions. We will continue to press for clear, effective and enforceable rules that protect all Ontarians' water: https://foca.on.ca/source-water-protection/.

Cottage Country Extreme Weather

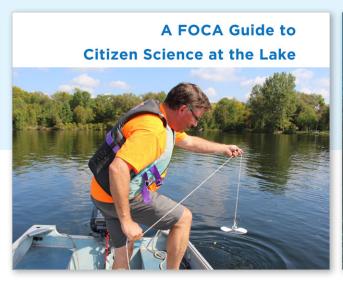
On the May long weekend in 2022, an extreme weather/wind event known as a derecho sliced across south central Ontario and Quebec, leaving fallen trees and downed power lines in its wake. Some properties were without power for days, and others for weeks. Our changing climate brings increasing uncertainty to rural and remote properties, and reminds us all to be prepared for emergencies, including possible extended periods without regular services. Learn more here: https://foca.on.ca/emergency-preparedness/.

Cottage Succession

FOCA continued helping families plan for generational transfer of the cottage in our popular *Cottage Succession Seminars* which were held again in 2022 with estate lawyer Peter Lillico. Altogether there were 6 webinars and one in-person event, with co-hosting provided by our Member Associations, reaching more than 500 attendees in 2022 to help them start the family conversation on this important topic. Our seminar series will continue in 2023. If your Association would like to co-host an event for your members, learn more here: https://foca.on.ca/cottage-succession/.

Be #WakeAware

The **Be #WakeAware** campaign (created by FOCA and our partners at the Muskoka Lakes Association and Safe Quiet Lakes) entered its second year, garnering exposure to tens of thousands of visitors at the Spring Cottage Life show on the Main Stage video loops. A new "Marine Ambassadors" campaign saw Ontario marinas across the province pledge to help spread the word, including resources like the YouTube video about wake impacts. Get links here: https://foca.on.ca/watch-your-wake/.





FOCA Staffing Changes

The FOCA office continued to function in a digital and distanced manner through 2022, but our staff was busier than ever. In early 2022, FOCA committed to full-time positions for the roles of Membership Coordinator and Programs Coordinator, to better serve our membership. We also expanded the part-time role of General Manager into a full-time Director of Operations. We enter 2023 with a vibrant and enthusiastic office team, supported by our spectacular volunteer Board of Directors! Learn more about our team: https://foca.on.ca/about/team/.

Protecting Biodiversity

FOCA has been a member of the **Ontario Biodiversity Council** for over 15 years, and was part of the Steering Committee that recruited a new Chairperson for the Council. Also in 2022, the new *State of Ontario Biodiversity Report* was released. In December, Canada welcomed the world to *COP15*, the United Nations Biodiversity Conference—a once-in-a-decade opportunity to meet and agree on targets to ensure the survival of species and halt destruction of the natural world. Watch for more from FOCA on the importance of protecting biodiversity, coming up at the 2023 AGM & Spring Seminar and on our webpage: https://foca.on.ca/biodiversity/.

Planning for Our Shorelands (PFOS)

FOCA is a partner on the **PFOS Steering Committee**, which released significant new resources about shorelands in 2022: *Environmental Net Gain; Shoreline Naturalization Planting Plan template;* and *The Science Behind Vegetated Shoreland Buffers*. Get links to these and additional healthy shorelines resources from our webpage: https://foca.on.ca/shorelines-stewardship/.

Citizen Scientists

Citizen scientists are stewards of community trust! This is the theme of an article co-written by FOCA and academic partners that was published in August 2022 in the journal, *Environmental Sociology*. The article sprang from a qualitative case study of FOCA's Lake Partner Program volunteers. Get a link to the article, and more about citizen science, here: https://foca.on.ca/citizen-science/.

- Can citizen scientists counter anti-science attitudes and help to build public trust in science?
- Or, is the recent popularity of citizen science indicative of growing public hostility towards professional expertise in favour of 'alternative facts' in a 'post truth' era?
- Does the democratization of science (by involving unpaid citizens) marginalize the authority of science 'experts' on subjects of environmental policy, or make it more relatable and 'real'?

Cottage country bulged at the seams throughout the year, as travel restrictions and global health concerns continued to dominate the news. Cottage prices, which skyrocketed through 2021, continued to climb in 2022.



Current Issues & Concerns

From our extensive 2022 surveys of members and others, we learned that the top issues facing waterfront Ontario haven't changed dramatically over the past 60 years, such as water quality, land use and development, rural services, and boating issues. Some newer concerns joining the "top 10" in the most recent round of answers, include climate impacts, invasive species, short-term rentals, noise, water levels, and naturalizing shorelines.

Trends in Property Usage

A quarter of our 2022 survey respondents were either permanent waterfront residents, or use their properties year-round. Two-thirds were seasonal users who have another Ontario property, and the remainder live out-of-province for part of the year. When we compare these results to other FOCA surveys from the past decade, it becomes clear that there is a trend toward increased year-round usage over time.

Less than 10% of survey respondents reported they have rented their waterfront property. However, those who have owned their property for less than 5 years are more than twice as likely to have rented. And, they are renting for more days overall each year. We also know that over 10% of waterfront properties are island or water-access-only. More than half of respondents reported being on a private road, while nearly three-quarters reported their road has four-season access.

We also asked seasonal survey respondents how many days of the year, on average, they spent at their waterfront property in 2020, 2021 and 2022. The average was 117 days (nearly 17 weeks). 86% said this usage was either steady, up by a little, or up by a lot compared to pre-pandemic usage. 90% of respondents said they plan to use their waterfront property next year as much, if not more!

Cottage Country: Looking Forward

The pandemic highlighted an increase in the demand for all services in waterfront Ontario, with digital connectivity (cell and internet) foremost among them. As service options expand, so do possibilities for remote work and extended stays in cottage country.

FOCA continues to participate in discussions around rural economic recovery, as we work to help "new-to-rural" waterfront property owners to become stewards of these lands for the generations yet to come. Remember that FOCA posts information for new cottagers and permanent waterfront residents on our webpage: https://foca.on.ca/cottage/. We encourage you to keep sharing the video resources and links on this page with new owners in your own waterfront community. We encourage our Member Associations to create their own "Welcome" sheet or binder from templates available from FOCA, to help get new folks connected with their local lake associations.

Throughout 2022, FOCA actively engaged new and established waterfront visitors through targeted ads and expanded social media campaigns, as well as events and presentations. FOCA's Executive Director spoke on the **Fall Cottage Life Main Stage** with Michelle Kelly, Cottage Life Magazine Editor, about short-term rental in cottage country: trends, pinch-points and the importance of educating "new to rural" visitors.

FOCA's 2022 Facebook reach was up a whopping 82% over last year, thanks to lots of posting and our loyal followers and new friends. Please continue to help us: follow FOCA's Facebook page (https://www.facebook.com/foca.on.ca) and share our posts with others!

FOCA's Elert... and Your Role

The Elert is FOCA's monthly e-newsletter, filled with cottage country news, policy and environmental updates, and event notices.

Central Ontario Fisheries Management
The Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry
has developed a Draft Fisheries Management Plan for
Fisheries Management Zone (FMZ).15. This plan outlines
the status of fisheries, sets fish population objectives, and
provides direction for the management of recreational
fisheries and aquatic resources. Public comments are
welcomed via the Environmental Registry posting until
November 28, 2022.

Green Shovels: Phragmites control
Phragmites australis is one of Canada's worst
invasive species. It is a serious threat to
biodiversity and causes extensive negative socioeconomic impacts. This summer, FOCA sought

We are proud to have surpassed our initial goal of 15,000 subscribers, reaching 17,767 by the end of 2022! Altogether, over 188,000 messages were sent last year, garnering an astonishing 65% open rate (compare this to the industry average of 21%, according to our e-provider, Constant Contact software).

Our new goal is to reach 25,000 Elert subscribers by the end of 2023, our 60th anniversary year.

This means we are searching for 7,233 new sign-ups—or around 600 per month in 2023.

You can help us!

Circulate this Elert sign-up link to friends, neighbours, and fellow waterfront enthusiasts: https://lp.constant contactpages.com/su/wEll9od/FOCA25000

Or, ask FOCA (communications@foca.on.ca) about how to poll your fellow association members for permission to get them on the Elert list as well. This will help to build our collective network, and to demonstrate the scale and significance of this engaged waterfront community, all across Ontario. Thank you!









