

**MEDIA RELEASE:**  
**FOCA Advances Rural Water Protection in the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Year of the Walkerton Drinking Water Tragedy**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
May 9, 2025 –Ontario

Next Monday, May 12, 2025 will be the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Walkerton drinking water tragedy.

To mark this, the Federation of Ontario Cottagers' Associations (FOCA) has announced the completion of 'Phase One' of a rural waterfront source water protection pilot project, marking a critical step forward in protecting drinking water in small communities.

**While municipal water systems are subject to many protocols, testing and safeguards, private water sources are an essential – yet often overlooked – aspect of Ontario's water safety framework.**

A special report by Ontario's Auditor General that was released in late March 2025, "[Safety of Non-Municipal Drinking Water](#)," identified ongoing gaps affecting drinking water safety for the nearly **three million Ontario residents** who rely for their drinking water on private wells or small systems, many of which remain untested and unregulated.

**About 'Phase One' of the FOCA Source Water Protection Pilot Project:**

With support from Ontario's Ministry of Environment, Conservation and Parks (MECP), over the past year FOCA partnered with the Kinmount Park Estates Association to develop a source water protection plan for the waterfront community on Crego Lake in the City of Kawartha Lakes.

Working with consulting engineers and local volunteers on Crego Lake, the pilot project assessed threats to the community's drinking water including risks posed by septic systems, fuel storage, and the area's vulnerable fractured bedrock geology. The project provided practical recommendations to help the local community mitigate risks and safeguard private water sources, in keeping with FOCA's longstanding commitment to healthy freshwater systems.

**In the wrap-up to 'Phase One', 90% of Crego Lake survey respondents reported they now know more about their drinking water sources and potential threats than they did before the project.** They also strongly agreed they would take at least one recommended action over the next 12 months in support of protecting drinking water sources, such as:

- maintaining a naturalized shoreline buffer at the water's edge
- avoiding pesticide use
- using biodegradable cleaning products
- testing well water
- having their septic system inspected.

"I think the presentation and report were excellent," wrote a Crego Lake resident in the project exit survey. "With increased run off and global warming, the state of lake and well water become increasingly significant and concerning. Education going forward makes a lot of sense to me."

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**About 'Phase Two' in 2025:**

FOCA is now entering 'Phase Two' of the initiative, with plans to expand to three more lake-based communities this summer, and ultimately to develop a volunteer-led protocol to make source water protection planning more accessible across rural Ontario.

Twenty-five years after the Walkerton tragedy, FOCA is working to close the rural water safety gaps flagged by Ontario's Auditor General.

"The need to protect our drinking water at the source remains clear," said Lesley Lavender, FOCA's CEO. "This project brings the principles of the Walkerton Inquiry to life for rural Ontario—helping to empower rural residents to understand the risks, their role, and to take action to protect what matters most: safe, clean water for the health of our families, our communities, and future generations." FOCA is putting the Walkerton Inquiry's "multi-barrier approach" into practice where it is needed most, by adapting source water protection tools for small communities not serviced by municipal systems.

"FOCA is proud to lead the way in closing the rural water safety gap," said Lavender. "By piloting practical tools and education in communities that rely on private water systems, we're making source water protection more accessible, more achievable, and more essential than ever."

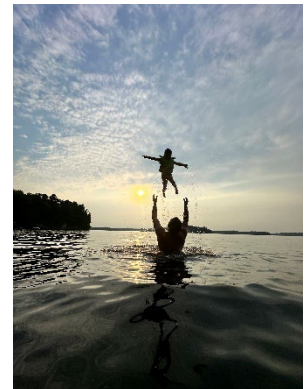
For more information about FOCA's work on source water protection, visit: <https://foca.on.ca/source-water-protection/>.

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**About FOCA:**

FOCA is the Federation of Ontario Cottagers' Associations, the only go-to provincial advocacy organization committed to sustaining and enhancing the Ontario cottage experience. We work collaboratively to identify and address key issues by providing credible expertise, environmental stewardship, targeted programs and services, and a robust network of strategic partners.

Since 1963, FOCA has united Ontario's waterfront community. We are a non-profit membership organization representing over 525 lake, road, cottage, camp, and rural waterfront associations—together, 250,000 families and voters who steward 15,000 km of shoreline and 50 hectares of privately owned waterfront land from Kenora to Kingston, Lake Erie to north of Temagami. Our 2022 Economic Impact Study confirmed that every 100 waterfront properties generate 63 jobs in Ontario, with most of those in the local community.



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