

For almost 125 years, the Muskoka Lakes Association has been a principal protector of the unique environment we all cherish. As the oldest cottage association in Canada, the MLA is a respected leader committed to taking action on five key initiatives:

Protect the Environment

The MLA advocates for strong environmental standards and smart, forward-thinking land use and development planning that respects the unique character of Muskoka’s communities.

Promote the Safe, Responsible and Active Enjoyment of Muskoka

The MLA is committed to promoting the safe, responsible and active enjoyment of Muskoka, while encouraging mutual respect, living in harmony with the environment, actively engaging the local community and protecting our valuable assets.

Advocate for Responsible Government and Fair Taxation

The MLA believes fair waterfront taxation depends on responsible, efficient spending by district, municipal and provincial governments.



Lead on Important Muskoka Issues

The MLA attends meetings of Muskoka’s district and municipal governments to monitor and act on issues that affect waterfront property owners and informs our members so they too can take action.

Protect and Promote Water Quality

The MLA operates one of the most comprehensive water monitoring programs of any lake association in Canada. Known as the Water Quality Initiative, this program monitors lake water quality to provide data to protect vulnerable areas, and shares the data with district and municipal governments. When issues are identified, we work with a variety of stakeholders to find solutions.

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The MLA is here, **TAKING ACTION** on your behalf when you're away!

TAKING ACTION to protect the Muskoka environment!



MLA WATER QUALITY INITIATIVE

The MLA Water Quality Initiative (WQI) is one of the most comprehensive, citizen-science based water quality monitoring programs of any lake association in Canada, designed to measure key biological, chemical and physical indicators of water quality in lakes and rivers throughout Muskoka. The program is implemented by a dedicated group of more than 100 volunteers who collect and analyze water samples on four separate occasions, from 180 sites in the big three lakes (Muskoka, Rosseau and Joseph) and other lakes and rivers.

The water quality parameters sampled during the 2015 program consisted of temperature, secchi depth (clarity), total phosphorus (nutrients), escherichia coli (*E.coli*), total coliform (bacterial counts) and dissolved organic carbon (DOC). Beacon Environmental, of Bracebridge, is our contracted scientific provider. Together we review and establish sampling protocols, guide volunteers to test sites and document the

results. Beacon then analyses the data and prepares an annual Water Quality Initiative Report which can be found on our website at www.mla.on.ca under the Water Quality tab.

WATER QUALITY STUDIES

Over the years, the MLA has identified and taken steps with those responsible to remedy specific issues that have threatened the overall health of our water. This year it was determined that the sampled lakes continue to be healthy with only a small number of isolated locations identified as requiring further investigation. Typically, this involves increased monitoring to determine trends. However, following are examples of when the MLA has engaged stakeholders in further study.

• 2011

Members of the Water Quality committee met with local stakeholders within the Cox Bay area near Port Sandfield, to develop and implement solutions that could reduce elevated phosphorus levels entering Cox Bay.



• 2012

Having identified relatively high phosphorus levels in Hamer Bay, the MLA, in partnership with the Lake Joseph North Association, contracted RiverStone Environmental Solutions, of Bracebridge, to conduct a yearlong study of a stream entering Hamer Bay near the north end of Lake Joseph in Seguin Township. This study was to determine whether elevated phosphorous concentrations observed in Hamer Bay were contributed to by the stream inputs. The report from that study determined that the stream did not have a disproportionate impact on water quality in the bay. As Hamer Bay continues to be an area of concern, efforts are on-going to determine what might be contributing to elevated phosphorous levels.

• 2014/2015

The MLA determined that elevated levels of *E.coli* discovered in Wallace Bay on Lake Rosseau discovered in 2014 warranted a Second Stage Monitoring program, which was conducted in the summer of 2015. Beacon Environmental performed this assessment. Beacon increased the frequency of water sampling to 15 separate occasions at four different sites, and intentionally collected samples under various weather conditions, including during rainstorms. Samples were sent to an independent laboratory for bacterial analysis, the results of which are available as an appendix to the 2015 Water Quality Report.

Data compiled by the MLA is also made available to other organizations such as the provincial Lake Partner Program, to augment their information or compare results when anomalies are noted. Occasionally, independent scientists will rely on our data for inclusion in larger studies. Currently, the District of Muskoka is considering our results data and recommendations for an update to their Water Quality Model. You can view their model at <http://www.muskoka.on.ca/content/lake-system-health>.

See all MLA Water Quality Reports on our website at www.mla.on.ca under the Water Quality tab.

MLA INFLUENCE – Septic Setbacks

District of Muskoka’s municipal plans emphasize the protection of its lakes and acknowledge the recreational and economic importance of Muskoka’s clean waters. The MLA is constantly looking at ways to maintain and improve Muskoka’s water quality and natural environment.

One of the factors affecting our clean waters is the ability of individual septic systems to function efficiently without impacting the lakes. For that reason the MLA lobbied for a zoning by-law in the Township of Muskoka Lakes (TML) to establish that septic systems are to be set back from the waterfront thereby increasing their ability to filter pollutants before they enter the lakes. The MLA is pleased that due to our pressure TML followed the example of the Town of Gravenhurst and most other municipalities in Ontario by including a zoning regulation for the location of individual private septic systems. The MLA knows that there is a need to continue to politicize water quality protection initiatives to protect property values in Muskoka, otherwise economic issues and municipal inattention will overtake environmental protection and scrutiny.

SEEDLING DAY

The MLA is also committed to a sustainable environment in Muskoka, and toward that end, continues the mid-May traditional Seedling Day sale of young trees and bushes suitable to the Muskoka environment to remediate shorelines and wooded areas. In 2015 over 6,600 seedlings were distributed.

6,600
SEEDLINGS
PURCHASED
AT 2015
SEEDLING
DAY

267
HOURS OF
MEETINGS
FOR THE
PRESIDENT

196 MLA
VOLUNTEERS

50
YEARS OF
WATER QUALITY
MONITORING



Since 1894 the mission of the MLA has been to preserve the unique Muskoka landscape and protect the value of its waterfront properties. In the past ten years, the focus on the preservation of Muskoka's landscape has included not only concern for its waters, but also its shorelines. Accordingly, we have supported municipal initiatives to control development to minimize impact on the visual appeal of our shorelines.

- **MULTIPLE STRUCTURES** – We supported municipal initiatives to minimize the proliferation of buildings on the waterfront by establishing controls suitable to the unique context of each municipality.

- **BUILDING SETBACKS** - We advocated for the establishment of municipal wide standard setbacks on waterfront properties for new builds whether in town or in rural areas. However, recognizing that not all existing cottages meet this standard, we worked with Gravenhurst and TML to establish municipal compromises that will allow modest expansions of cottages that do not comply with today's requirements.

- **DOCK LENGTHS** - We fought for standardized dock lengths in narrow water bodies allowing all cottagers to build docks without interfering with each other, while ensuring boating safety.

- **TREE-CUTTING** - We lobbied for a by-law to control large scale tree cutting and for shoreline protection/naturalization initiatives as a planning requirement for large scale developments.

One of the most disastrous events in the past few years was the flooding in the spring of 2013. Many cottagers and residents were affected and hundreds of thousands of dollars were spent restoring docks and boathouses. We provided up-to-date reporting to our members throughout that period, and immediately thereafter, launched our own investigation through a private engineering firm of the circumstances leading up to and during the flood. Our actions resulted in an improved communications process between the Ministry of Natural Resources & Forestry (MNRF) and

municipal governments, and we have since formally requested to participate in the upcoming review of the Muskoka River Watershed Management Plan (MRWMP). In the meantime, water levels are posted on our website at <http://mla.on.ca/Page.asp?PageID=122&ContentID=5333> daily during the late fall and early spring when water levels fluctuate the most.

We also work diligently to protect the Muskoka experience. In 2014 the MLA supported a local association in appealing and winning the continued extension of a regulation that limits the hours of outdoor entertainment on commercial patios. We are aware of concerns about the disruption occasionally caused by vacationers and cottage renters and



in response, we pushed for a by-law requiring on-site management at local resorts and we continue to petition for better by-law enforcement, particularly on weekends. We were also instrumental in the enactment of dark sky by-laws enacted in TML and Gravenhurst, to reduce light pollution from commercial and residential properties interfering with our enjoyment of the night sky.

TAKING ACTION to identify political issues of concern!

The MLA reviews the agendas for all District of Muskoka and municipal meetings in Bracebridge, Gravenhurst, Township of Muskoka Lakes (TML) and Seguin Township and attends those meetings that address issues of real or potential concern to waterfront property owners, often providing input by offering suggestions, asking questions, or simply making our views known on behalf of our members. We attend budget discussions and participate in the detailed review of district and municipal annual proposed budgets. At all times we urge the municipal governments to be more efficient in service delivery and more prudent in spending dollars raised by us, the local taxpayers, and we weigh in on issues that increase our taxes, such as:

- Construction of new or improved roads, highways and sewage treatment plants;

- Emergency Services and Operational Costs - At the district level we encouraged municipalities to curb expenses by reducing duplicate services. In 2012, the District established a Citizen's Service Review Committee which led to a reorganization that resulted in shared agreements for procurement practices, i.e., the provision of IT support services by the District including the property maps in the new zoning by-laws of TML and Gravenhurst.

- Waste collection - The MLA continues to be engaged in the ongoing debate over equitable costs of waste collection services for seasonal and permanent residents, whether located in urban or rural areas; and

- Health Care - The MLA supported the introduction of a new health care facility in Port Carling, and is closely following the Muskoka Algonquin Hospital Committee's (MAHC) recommendation for a one-site hospital. Our letter in support of the resolutions passed by the towns of Bracebridge and Huntsville to retain two full care hospital sites in Bracebridge and Huntsville respectively can be found on our website at www.mla.on.ca under the News tab. We encourage our members to become informed, participate in the debate and/or petition the various levels of government.

Upon the recommendation of the MLA, TML and Gravenhurst both created Citizen Advisory committees to provide input to their respective budgeting processes. Board members of the MLA sat on the TML zoning by-law review committee and we are taking an active part in Gravenhurst's new official plan review procedures. Recently, we conferred with local associations on Seguin Township's official plan and participated in Bracebridge's official plan update, especially as it pertained to waterfront properties and the future of the former Bangor Lodge property.

We also focus on efforts that will impact the local economy. In 2012 we went on record as supporting the Mayor of Bracebridge's efforts to have the District of Muskoka included in the Eastern Ontario Economic Development Fund. Today we are studying the potential economic implications of the proposed widening of Highway #11 at Gravenhurst, and the planned Bracebridge northern transportation corridor.

In 2015 the MLA interviewed candidates running in the Gravenhurst, Bracebridge, TML, Seguin Township and District elections, ranking each in accordance with their alignment to the MLA values and mission. We posted campaign material and links to candidate websites on the MLA website to ensure that our members were given access to as much information as possible. On an ongoing basis, the MLA provided voting

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92%

OF MEMBERS
NORMALLY
READ

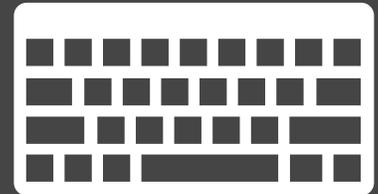
ShoreLines



2,887
FOLLOWERS

64,121

WEBSITE VISITORS
IN 2015 TO
WWW.MLA.ON.CA



13,200

COTTAGERS
REPRESENTED
BY MLA

TAKING ACTION and taking care!

The MLA is active in community programs to promote safe, responsible and active enjoyment of Muskoka, while encouraging mutual respect and protecting our valuable assets.

We have partnered with agencies such as Safe & Quiet Lakes, BoatSMART! and other cottage associations to educate boaters on wakes and boat noise, and promote safe and responsible boating. We keep our members apprised of special events where increased or specialized boat traffic may be disruptive, such as the poker runs and Wakestock. In 2015, the MLA piloted a boat speed sign initiative to provide boaters with instant feedback on their speed in slow speed zone areas.

MEMBERSHIP INSURANCE PROGRAM

Based on inquiries from members we learned that many cottagers were not fully aware of the unique requirements of insuring their cottage properties. In 2013, we partnered with a qualified insurance broker to provide complimentary cottage insurance audits to members. To date over 200 members have taken advantage of this free audit and many have found significant flaws in their coverage. We are now working on enhancing this program and working with the insurance industry to better serve the unique needs of the cottager in Muskoka.

Fostering responsible citizenship has included education and community support.

EDUCATION

We are supporting local graduating high school students with our \$5,000 bursary to be applied to their continued education, for one student each year, who is committed to pursuing the preservation and enjoyment of Muskoka. This bursary also comes with a summer intern program opportunity within the MLA.

COMMUNITY SUPPORT

You may remember back in 2011 when downtown Gravenhurst suffered a devastating fire (if you don't remember the fire you can find the details in this report: <http://www.muskokaregion.com/news-story/3648802-downtown-reeling-from-tragic-fire/>). Many in the Muskoka community were saddened by the huge impact this had on many local businesses and were looking for ways to help. Helping the local businesses in Gravenhurst was the inspiration behind the *MLA Advantage Card*, a partnership between the MLA and business and service providers to provide incentives to MLA members to shop locally. Introduced in 2011, the program has expanded to include over 100 participants in Gravenhurst, Bracebridge, Bala, Port Carling, Minett and Huntsville who have signed up to give MLA members discounts or special offers! We are proud our members choose to 'Stock up in Muskoka' and support the local economy. In fact, each year we receive stories from members who have discovered great local shops that they otherwise wouldn't have visited. One member even kept track of their purchases using the card and said they saved over \$500 in one summer!

We also look for opportunities to support our local charities. In 2015 our fall Food Drive was expanded and captured the generosity of cottagers and residents, donating over 1,000 pounds of food and very appreciated cash donations as well for a local food bank.





TAKING ACTION and having fun!

We are proud of our water sport legacy events which continue to reach a broader audience and enhance the MLA's long and rich history. The MLA Aquatic Regatta is the oldest continuously run regatta in Canada. This regatta includes dozens of races in the long-time traditional events of canoeing, rowing and swimming, as well as the newer sports of stand up paddle boarding and kayaking. The highlight of the day is the tilting event in which two paddlers and two jousters battle to tip or knock each other out of their respective canoes. The regatta is a wonderful event for the whole family with competitions for every age group and ability.

Every other year we offer a free (thanks to our valued sponsors) Antique Boat Show in Port Carling, which showcases the remarkable wooden crafts which have plied the Muskoka Lakes for generations of cottagers.

The MLA Sailing Network has now been running successfully for several years and continues to expand its scope. Nine of the sailing clubs in the Muskoka area benefit from the coordination of youth sailing regattas as well as the sharing of best practices at sailing school operations. In addition, the MLA Sailing Network's annual open sailing regattas continue to grow in significance. In 2015, we hosted many world class sailors in the Ontario Master Laser Championship.

In the winter, we host the MLA Curling Bonspiel at the South Muskoka Curling & Golf Club.

Through thoughtful planning we operate this group of programs with virtually no cost to members, partnering with organizations that have goals aligned with ours, and relying on the commitment of passionate volunteers to create, organize and operate these great programs.

TAKING ACTION to keep you informed!

Have you seen a recent email from the MLA? Was there something in there that piqued your interest? Keeping members abreast of important Muskoka issues is a key responsibility of the MLA. For members, we have two main ways of sharing important Muskoka information.

First introduced in 2012, our ShoreLines newsletter is produced four times each year and covers key issues • recent topics have included the new OPP costing model, Hydro One rate increases, and recent threats to the Muskoka region by invasive species such as Phragmites and Beech Bark Disease. But you can scroll through older editions and learn more about the use of bubblers, feeding winter wildlife, or follow the progress of the Miss Canada IV restoration, just to name a few. You can find past issues of ShoreLines on our website homepage at www.mla.on.ca.

Two years ago, we launched a monthly e-blast update called NewsBites, a summary of political activity in Muskoka. It is a must-read for anyone

looking to stay up to date on what the four municipalities and the district are thinking about, talking about, and working on. It's the quickest and easiest way out there to stay on top of important Muskoka issues. Recent reports have covered updates on the proposed hydro plant in Bala, the effect of siltation in the Muskoka River, conflict of interest accusations in TML and discussions regarding the proposed one-site hospital, to name a few. They also include links to websites and attachments that provide greater detail. Visit our website homepage if you missed one.

Look for our updated website in 2016, read our weekly articles in the Muskokan and follow us:

- on Twitter (@MuskokaLakes)
- on Facebook (Muskoka Lakes Association)
- on Instagram (@servingmuskoka)

TAKING ACTION on your needs!

Our goals and objectives, actions and positions are driven by our membership. Responses to the MLA Member Survey allow us to establish our priorities based on member feedback. Letters and calls from both the membership, and the public, keep us up to date on the ever-changing concerns and allow us to adapt accordingly. We welcome all input.

We are always looking for more help, so GET INVOLVED! Call us at 705-765-5723 or email us at info@mla.on.ca.

On behalf of the Board of Directors of the Muskoka Lakes Association, we are proud to be of service.

TAKING ACTION to identify political issues of concern!

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material to our members as the information became available from the municipal elections clerks informing our members of the procedures and extended hours of operation to vote or obtain information. On election night, as the votes became known, we provided updated information to all members through our website and followed up with an eblast confirming the final new members of council. Dates of the inaugural meetings of council were provided to our members with the invitation to join other MLA members and directors of the board in congratulating the new councils in each municipality. We will continue to monitor council's performance over the next two years so we can provide you with even more insight for the next election in 2018.



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