



MLA MEMBER CONCERNS HEARD IN FLOOD REDUCTION PLANNING



With above-normal water levels and the lakes just beginning to freeze over in mid-January, it's clear that Muskoka's environment is changing, with no greater recent example than the 2019 floods. Shortly after the floods, the Province announced \$5 million to identify regional environmental issues through the Muskoka Watershed Conservation and Management Initiative, and MLA members have been well engaged in this work.

The Muskoka Watershed Advisory Group — which included MLA director and environment committee chair Chris Cragg — was formed to advise the Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks regarding priority geographic areas and issues in the Muskoka River Watershed following the floods. They recommended projects promoting integrated watershed management, flood mitigation and, watershed enhancement. The group's 2020 report identified serious concerns for the watershed, in addition to flooding, and highlighted the need for integrated watershed management.

Based on this report, the Province and District of Muskoka settled on 12 projects to be funded from the \$5 million pledge, while the Town of Bracebridge lead another.

These projects laid the foundation for a comprehensive approach to watershed management, encompassing land-use decisions, the environment, infrastructure and broader public policy options, and some projects support early action on flood reduction. The District has summarized the 12 projects and provided reports here. The table on page 3 provides a snapshot of each of the projects. https://www.muskoka.on.ca/en/environment/Making_Waves_Integrated_Watershed_Management_Projects.aspx#Project-overviews-and-findings.

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President's MESSAGE



As you read this year's first issue of *Shorelines*, I hope you are looking back on wonderful holidays and celebrations with family and friends.

Some call the MLA "the best insurance you can buy," and "a protective layer" for your investment in Muskoka. We owe this resilience to our 2,250 families-strong membership (some fourth generation), representing more than 11,500 people. With this broad base, our association has a powerful, respected voice and a deep source of volunteers who bring diverse skills and passion to protecting Muskoka's natural environment and engaging the whole Muskoka community.

This work is increasingly important, as Muskoka faces significant new challenges for both the environment and community. As a rallying cry against reckless development, we showed the devastation of Sugarloaf Island on our 2022 yearbook, calling that outrage 'Time to Take Action.' Other environmental challenges include more frequent flooding and threatening algae blooms. All of us throughout the broader Muskoka community face looming significant tax increases, and our permanent-resident neighbours urgently need more affordable housing.

Municipal governments decide many of these issues, so MLA volunteers got out voters and educated them about candidates in the October 2022 municipal election. We celebrated democracy in action, as many candidates we endorsed won seats in Muskoka Lakes, Gravenhurst, Bracebridge and Seguin.

But after the election, and before the new councils were sworn in, the provincial government tabled and adopted the development-

friendly Bill 23 — the More Homes Built Faster Act 2022 — timing that seemed to deliberately prevent serious debate.

To be fair, Bill 23 purports to speed construction of affordable homes, a goal the MLA supports. But it also threatens the Muskoka we cherish three ways. It removes site plan control from municipal authority, and thereby exposes Muskoka's shorelines, forests, and water to the excessive blasting and tree cutting the MLA has been fighting. Bill 23 also severely curtails protections for heritage buildings and it drastically reduces development charges, further straining municipal budgets. With Bill 23, Muskoka's municipal councils face huge challenges in identifying alternative strategies to protect the natural environment and heritage sites under development, and avoiding big property tax increases.

The MLA voiced its objections and concerns, as did many members, lake associations, and environmental organizations across Ontario, but our concerns were ignored and Bill 23 was rushed into law.

This Bill underscores how vital it was to mobilize members to vote for municipal politicians who are strongly aligned with the MLA's values and motivated to protect Muskoka from reckless building practices.

It's membership renewal time, and I hope you will keep in mind the tremendous importance of your membership fees and donations to the MLA's ability to be effective on your behalf, not just through the familiar water quality and advocacy efforts but, equally, through the programs that engage the whole Muskoka community: our regattas, family seedling day, the student bursary, bonspiel sponsorship, the food drive; and, our members' direct charitable support of vital community resources.

Be that "insurance" and "protective layer" for your investment in this magnificent place in 2023 and beyond. With your membership and donations, we will continue our work to protect and enhance Muskoka for all generations to value and enjoy.

Susan Eplett

Renew your MLA Membership for 2023

In 2023, the MLA's member-focused advocacy and events promise a very active and exciting year, and your support through membership dues is vital in maintaining momentum towards our objectives. Thank you if you have already renewed.



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1	HYDROLOGICAL MODEL	Model how water flows through the Muskoka River watershed to characterize existing flooding and test scenarios (climate change, land use and enhanced flood storage infrastructure e.g., expanding wetlands and forest cover) on flooding.
2	OPERATIONAL ADJUSTMENT STUDY	Identify operational adjustments to the Muskoka River Watershed Management Plan (MRWMP) to inform water management that could reduce spring flooding.
3	STRUCTURAL FLOOD MITIGATION OPTIONS	Defined 10 flood mitigation projects for identified flood-prone areas of the Muskoka River Watershed
4	FLOOD PLAIN MAPPING	Continued mapping unmapped shoreline areas to determine flood elevations.
5	NATURAL CAPITAL INVENTORY	Mapped critical natural features such as woodlands, wetlands, watercourses, and wildlife habitat
6	WATER MANAGEMENT PLAN SCOPING STUDY	Assessed root causes of flooding in the Muskoka River and potential options for short-term flood mitigation.
7	WATERSHED-SCALE FLOOD MITIGATION OPTIONS	Advanced the 10 options identified in Project 3 to conceptual design and determined the potential benefit and costs associated with implementation of these options.
8	LAND USE POLICY	Reviewed all applicable Official Plans in the watershed to identify policy approaches across the municipalities
9	WATERSHED HEALTH INDICATORS	Identified environmental and ecological indicators for the watershed.
10	WATER QUALITY INDICATORS	Summarized the current water quality monitoring programs, reviewed water quality issues and identified gaps in the current monitoring programs, to recommend a comprehensive long-term monitoring strategy
11	EROSION STUDY	Identified locations throughout the watershed where shoreline erosion has or could occur and developed the E-rod app for residents to report erosion areas
12	PUBLIC ACCESS INVENTORY	Inventoried and mapped existing and potential public access points.
13	MUSKOKA RIVER SILTATION PROJECT	Determined the amount of sediment deposition at the outlet of the Muskoka River to Lake Muskoka since 2017, investigate options to address the buildup and provide cost estimates for the various potential management options

We will mention briefly key findings of a couple of the Projects intended to reduce spring flooding. The simplest project to reduce spring flooding — and one advocated by the MLA for 10 years — is to adjust the operating rules in the Muskoka River water management plan. Recommendations have been made to review the lake drawdown decision thresholds using more recent data, as well as to consider fully utilizing the lower range of the normal operating zone in winter. While this project offers flood reduction potential, its benefits must still be weighed against water level impacts for recreation, fisheries and water intakes.

Six of the 10 structural projects, evaluated in Projects 3 and 7 are predicted to have moderate to high effectiveness at reducing flooding impacts in the watershed. Concurrent implementation of six combinations of flood mitigation options reduced flooding in select regions, while implementing all 10 flood mitigation options

reduced flooding in all regions of the watershed. There is still more work to do but initial work looks promising.

What's next? A community round table, which includes Chris Cragg and MLA past president Deborah Martin-Downs, will advise the District and continue pushing for a full watershed plan and continued progress on these projects. The good news is that there appear to be some options worth pursuing, but the District will need to prioritize projects and find funding for the additional work over coming years. The Province needs to continue supporting these projects and time will tell whether our MPP, Graydon Smith (who is also Minister of Natural Resources and Forestry), will deliver for Muskoka. In the meantime, winters come and go and every year we hold our collective breath until the threat of flooding has passed.

Deborah Martin-Downs & Chris Cragg

WEST MUSKOKA FOOD BANK



Congratulations and a heartfelt thank you to Larry Johns, Cathie Mostowyk, MLA Director Stephen Sims, Chelsea Callard, and Penny Middleton for assisting with the MLA's 2022 Food Bank. They are MLA members and volunteers who give a few hours of their time each fall to a worthy cause: picking up and distributing food donations from you, MLA members.

We are very grateful to the following businesses, which accommodated our food collection bins: Oliver's Coffee locations, Gordon Bay Marina, Hamer Bay Marina, The Cove Marina, Spirit Bay Marina, Campbell's Landing, Walker's Point Marina, SWS Marina, Rosseau General Store and Glen Orchard General Store.

MLA member donations were directed to the West Muskoka Food Bank, which was extremely grateful for the abundance of canned and dry goods. These food donations are especially valuable this year, as requests are higher than usual. The MLA also supports the Salvation Army in Gravenhurst and MANNA Food Bank in Bracebridge, in alternate years, but please feel free to donate to any of these organizations at any time.

This is one of the many ways MLA members engage with the community to give back in away that makes a difference in peoples' lives. Thanks again, MLA members!



Family Seedling Day will take place at the Port Carling Community Centre

3 Bailey St Port Carling
Saturday May 20, 2023
from 9am - 12 noon

We have a great selection this
year including our best selling Ferns!

Yearbooks will be available for pickup.

Please stay tuned for more information on special guests
and a chance to win a prize with your Seedling Order!

NOW HIRING – Administrative Coordinator – 20 month contract

MLA is looking for an Administrative Coordinator who is passionate about community, who believes in environmental preservation and who wants the unique place that is Muskoka to be enjoyed for generations to come. If you know someone looking for employment and would be a great fit, please let them know we are hiring.

If you or anyone you know is interested in applying or learning more, please direct your inquiries to admin@mla.on.ca.



DARK SKIES ARE ESSENTIAL TO HEALTHY HABITATS — FOR HUMANS AND ANIMALS AND PLANTS



Dark skies are often overlooked as an important element of habitats, but they are essential to healthy ecosystems. Not only do dark skies aid sound sleep for humans and wildlife, some species use the moon and stars — against the dark sky — for navigation. Unfortunately, human-generated light pollution reduces the darkness of our night skies and disrupts natural systems.

Light from different parts of the spectrum has different impacts on living things. Red light is closer to the dark end of the spectrum, and because the iris can adjust easily between red and dark, allows the eye to see longer distances at night. At the other end of the spectrum, blue-white light (like that from LEDs), is very difficult for our eyes to adjust between blue-white and dark, making it jarring and problematic. Blue-white light tricks us into thinking it is still daytime because this is when our eyes are most accustomed to this type of light. Blue-white light is disruptive to our sleep and our circadian rhythm, which play crucial roles in hormone secretion and cardiovascular health. Human-generated blue-white light has the same impacts on animals, and further results in a loss of habitat because it reduces areas where they can sleep. It creates additional problems for birds and bats, who use the stars and moon to navigate and who can become confused by LED lights they mistake for these astronomical bodies. Blue-white light is also a problem for plants, as it triggers growth. When blue-white light is placed near bodies of water, it can create or worsen algal blooms that choke aquatic systems of oxygen, kill fish and other aquatic wildlife, and pose a risk to human health.

The good news is that there are lighting alternatives that reduce ecosystem negative impacts. Many of these offer benefits, including making seeing in the dark easier. This is unlike LED lights, which temporarily blind us and attract mosquitos and unwanted predators. Warm coloured, or red-orange bulbs are an option, as are specialized filters that block LEDs' blue-white light. Capping lights or focusing them to funnel light only to areas that need to be lit, using motion sensors or timers, reducing wattage, or removing lights altogether from areas that don't need to be lit are additional options.

There is also another benefit to reducing light on our properties and promoting darker skies — stargazing, a pastime that has inspired and uplifted humans since the dawn of time. When light pollution is reduced, we are better able to see our

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night skies. For avid stargazers, check out Torrance Barrens Dark-Sky Preserve, located in Gravenhurst, on Southwood Road. Torrance Barrens is Canada's first dark sky preserve — a place where human-generated light is almost completely eliminated, and the last place where you can see the Milky Way from Southern Ontario. It now permits camping, with six tent sites. If visiting, be sure to check the sky visibility forecast and respect the rules.

Kate Dickson-from The Land Between



The Land Between is a bioregion spanning Parry Sound and Orillia in the west all the way to the Ottawa Valley in the east. It is home to our beloved Cottage Country here in Ontario, including Muskoka and the Kawarthas, with the bioregion as a whole being a community-nominated Priority Place in Canada, which are areas where a final opportunity exists to protect and recover species at risk and their habitat through conservation action. Our eponymously named charity, The Land Between, works to protect this globally rare and nationally unique place. To learn more about our organization visit our website thelandbetween.ca. Together, we can protect and conserve Cottage Country for generations to come.



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Winter in Muskoka can be a magical time to escape the city and rediscover the beauty of a Muskoka winter. But it is also a time to reach out to friends and neighbours and help us bring new members to the MLA. Just one new member each from our existing membership will help us achieve our membership goal of doubling the membership in the next five years. Just call the office with a name and contact info. We'll do the rest.



HELP US ACHIEVE OUR MEMBERSHIP GOAL!
REFER A FRIEND AND BECOME AN MLA AMBASSADOR

DETAILS, TOOLS & SIGN UP

Contact us at newmembers@mla.on.ca
or by phone 705.765.5723

New Members

Please welcome the following as new members of the MLA!
From September 30, 2022 to February 7, 2023

Gary BROWN
Donna DI LELLO
Alison FLEMING

Ken GLOVER
Gregory GOLDS
Kate HARDILL

Thomas HUNTER
Thomas D. HUNTER
Lauren HUNTER

Joseph HUNTER
Elizabeth KINGSTONE

Mel VAUGHAN
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Local's Corner

Clear Lake Brewing Company



We dropped in for a visit and lunch on one of those clear, sunny Muskoka fall days. What started as a brewing company in 2017 has morphed into something much more. Yes, they still brew an amazing variety of craft beers, but they also have 13 small cabins, the Cottage by Cottage Springs restaurant, and in spring of '22 opened the water amenities at BeerSpa.

The cabins all have in-room beer taps, complimentary snacks, queen beds and tv. There are four season 3-bedroom cabins, as well as seasonal 1 & 2 bedroom cabins. Overnight rates come with access to the spa and amenities, and they deliver morning pastries!

And the spa! Hot tubs, pool, saunas, cabanas, loungers and more invite you to simply relax and slow down. Day visitors

are welcome from early May until the end of October and a day pass of \$49 gives you access to all the amenities, towel service and lockers. Seasonal passes are also available.

During the winter months, they put an ice rink in the beer garden space outside the brewery, open to the public every day.

The Tap Room Restaurant is open year round, and the Cottage restaurant from May to October. Since they brew right there, the beer is plentiful and fresh. Try a flight of beer and have a small taste of each one!

4651 Southwood Road
Torrance, ON
705.762.0234

Cathie Mostowyk



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