



As spring unfolds across the Kawartha watershed, nature is awakening in both beautiful and challenging ways. The trees are budding, rivers are flowing strong, and wildlife is returning – but the season has also brought with it powerful reminders of nature’s force and resilience.

In this edition of Watershed Watch, we explore the many faces of spring. We begin with a look at the devastating impact of the April ice storm, which caused significant damage across our conservation areas. Our team has been hard at work clearing trails and restoring access, but the road to recovery will take time and community support.

We also take you to the Bobcaygeon Dam for a closer look at the Walleye Watch, a special project that highlights the economic and ecological importance of Walleye in our region. This hands-on initiative shows how monitoring fish populations helps sustain local economies and maintain a healthy watershed.

Finally, we invite you to learn more about what defines our work at Kawartha Conservation – the watershed itself. In our feature article, we explain what a watershed is, why it matters, and how everything we do, from land-use planning to conservation, is tied to understanding this interconnected system.

As the seasons shift, so too does our focus, blending restoration, science, and stewardship to protect the natural spaces we all depend on. Thank you for being part of this journey.

With gratitude for your continued support,

The Kawartha Conservation Team



Our Spring Native Plant Sale is officially underway! Bring a splash of local beauty to your yard while supporting pollinators and a healthy watershed. Kits are available in limited quantities — be sure to place your order soon before they’re gone!

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ICE STORM CAUSES WIDESPREAD DAMAGE ACROSS CONSERVATION AREAS

The powerful ice storm that swept through the region in early April left a trail of destruction across Kawartha Conservation's natural spaces, felling thousands of trees and blocking trails, roads, and access points. The aftermath has been severe, with staff dedicating countless hours and resources to clear debris, assess hazards, and gradually reopen some of the hardest-hit conservation areas.

Ken Reid Conservation Area remains a major focus of recovery efforts. While the Escarpment Loop, Pond Loop, and the Off-Leash Dog Park have reopened to the public, other trails remain closed as crews continue to cut downed trees and remove dangerous overhanging branches. Windy Ridge Conservation Area and Durham East Cross Forest have reopened, though visitors are urged to use caution and respect all posted signs. Pigeon River Headwaters Conservation Area is scheduled to reopen in June. There is currently no timeline for the reopening of Fleetwood Creek Natural Area.



Interim Director of Planning and Development Services, Kristie Virgoe, assessing damage at Ken Reid Conservation Area.

Kristie Virgoe, Interim Director of Planning and Development Services, has witnessed the damage firsthand.

“As someone who works in and values these natural spaces, the devastation has been overwhelming,” Virgoe said. “We’ve lost an incredible number of trees, and the work required to make these areas safe again is enormous. It’s not just the physical effort - it takes a toll emotionally, too.”

Virgoe, a Certified Forest Therapy Guide, noted the deep connection many people have with forests and green spaces, making the damage more difficult for staff and the community alike.

“This storm didn’t just affect trees,” she added. “It’s impacted the people who find peace, connection, and well-being in these places. We are working hard to restore that.”

The storm’s impact has been far-reaching, affecting not just Kawartha Conservation’s properties but communities and private landowners across the region. Thousands of trees have been lost or damaged, altering the landscape and ecosystems that rely on them. For Kawartha Conservation staff, the focus remains on public safety, environmental restoration, and long-term resilience planning.

Each conservation area presents its own challenges. At Ken Reid, the dense network of trails and mature forest areas have been particularly hard hit. In some areas, entire sections of trail are still impassable, and cleanup is expected to take several more months. At Fleetwood Creek Natural Area, the extent of the damage is still being assessed, with staff working cautiously through remote areas where access remains difficult.

“Our staff have gone above and beyond, shifting their focus entirely to deal with the aftermath of this storm,” Virgoe said. “They are out every day, sometimes in tough conditions, doing the work that needs to be done so our visitors can return safely.”

The ice storm has stretched Kawartha Conservation’s resources, and recovery efforts are expected to continue for months. While public access is being restored in stages, the cost in time, labour, and equipment is significant.

Those who want to support the ongoing restoration work can make a donation to help repair and improve trails, restore natural areas, and ensure public access to these vital green spaces.

To donate, visit www.kawarthaconservation.com/donate.

For updates on trail conditions and conservation area access, please visit our website or contact our office directly.



Conservation Areas Specialist, Melissa Creasy Alexander and Interim Director of Planning and Development Services, Kristie Virgoe, assessing risk factors before removing downed trees.



One of many willows toppled by the storm, this tree by the pond at Ken Reid Conservation Area is part of the major cleanup effort that continues.

AN EVENING ON THE WATER: WATCHING WALLEYE IN BOBCAYGEON

The air was mild for late April, carrying the soft scent of rain with it as we gathered near the Bobcaygeon Dam. On Friday night, April 25, 2025, the temperature hovered around 10°C - warmer than usual for this time of year - while a gentle breeze from the southeast stirred the water's surface. The sky threatened rain, but only scattered showers touched down as we prepared for a night that promised something special: the Bobcaygeon Dam Walleye Watch initiative.

I joined Kawartha Conservation Water Quality Specialist Tanner Liang and Matthew Wilson, Assistant Watershed Resources Technician, to take part in the Walleye count, a collaboration between Kawartha Conservation and Parks Canada. For the past couple of weeks, teams have been working near the Bobcaygeon Dam during the Walleye spawning season, counting fish as they make their journey upstream.



Assistant Watershed Resource Technician, Matthew Wilson, working with Parks Canada staff to monitor Walleye populations at Bobcaygeon Dam.



Parks Canada staff assisting with the Walleye count.

Walleye, or Pickerel as many locals call them, are more than just a prized catch - they are a vital economic driver for our region. Supporting a thriving recreational fishing industry, Walleye attract anglers from near and far, contributing to local tourism, businesses, and the broader economy. Monitoring their numbers helps ensure healthy fish populations, sustaining the economic benefits they bring to communities throughout the watershed.

That night, the sound of rushing water filled the air as we waited for the last light to fade. Walleye prefer the cover of darkness to begin their spawning rituals, and once the sky darkened fully, we set out with our headlamps, scanning the river for the telltale flashes of silver and gold beneath the surface.

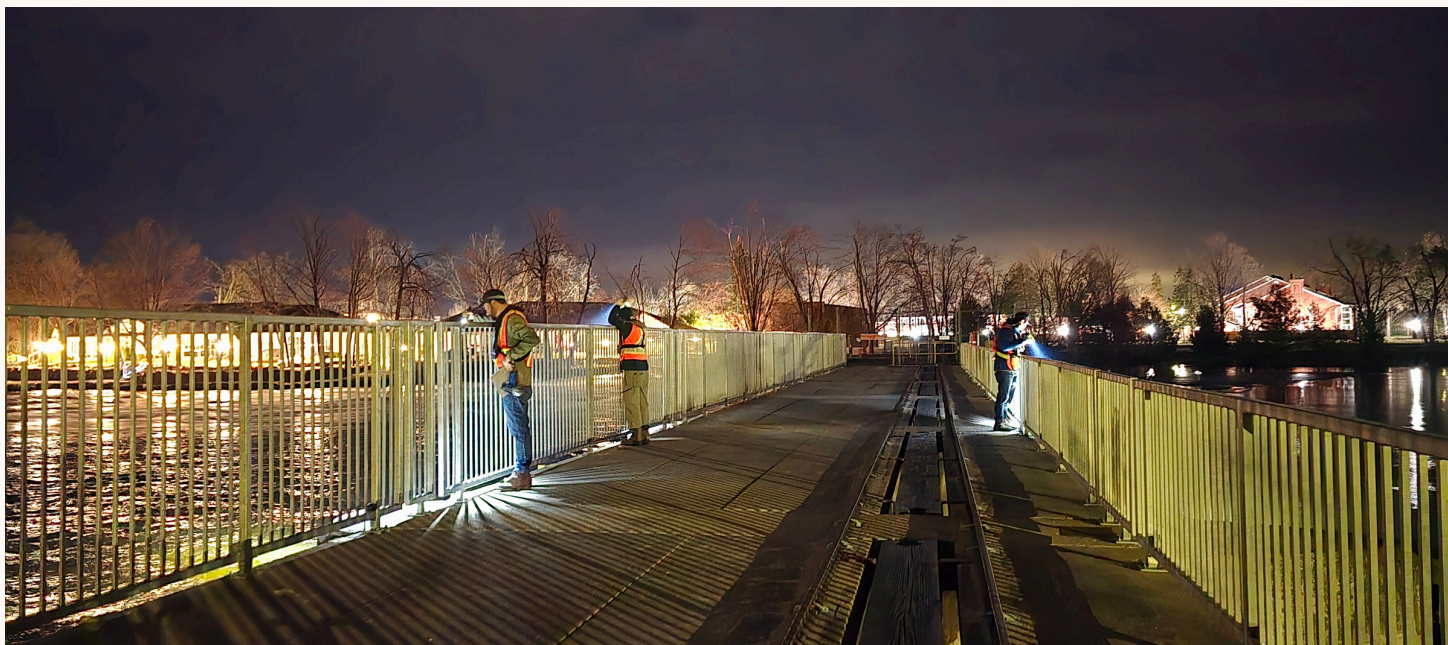
There's something awe-inspiring about watching these fish return, year after year, driven by instinct and the rhythm of the natural world. Each one we counted was not just a number, but a sign of life, of resilience, and of the importance of the work we do. The data collected here informs everything from habitat restoration to water quality programs, ensuring that these vital species - and the ecosystems they depend on - remain strong.

On this particular night, our walleye count was noticeably lower than in previous evenings, a sign that the spawning season is beginning to wind down. The fish had done their part, and soon the river would settle back into its usual rhythm.

Being part of this project reminded me why I love this work. It's not just about numbers or reports; it's about standing by the water, feeling connected to something bigger. The Walleye Watch brings together science, community, and conservation in a way that's tangible and real.

As the night wore on, and the chance of rain stayed just that - a chance - I felt a deep sense of gratitude. For Tanner, for Matthew, for the dedicated teams at Kawartha Conservation and Parks Canada, and for the opportunity to witness this natural spectacle first-hand. Protecting our lakes and rivers starts with understanding them, and nights like this make it all worth it.

-John Chambers, Marketing and Communications Specialist



Kawartha Conservation staff working alongside Parks Canada staff to monitor Walleye spawning populations at the Bobcaygeon Dam.

WHAT IS THE KAWARTHA CONSERVATION WATERSHED?

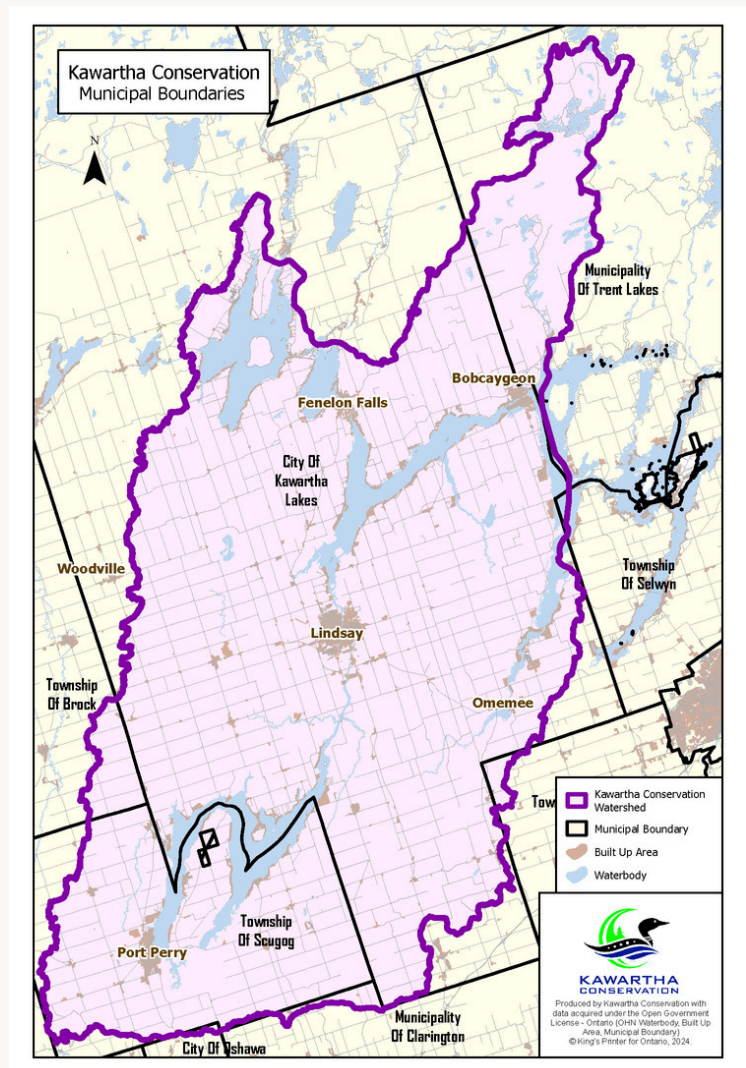
When people hear the term ‘Kawartha Conservation,’ they often associate our work with the boundaries of the City of Kawartha Lakes. And while we’re proud to serve this vibrant municipality, the area we steward, our watershed, is determined by nature, not political lines.

A watershed is an area of land where all the water that falls on it, whether from rain, snow, or runoff, drains into a common water body, such as a river, lake, or wetland. Watersheds are defined by topography. That means water flows downhill, across forests, fields, roads, and communities, eventually collecting in streams and lakes - no matter what political boundary it crosses along the way.

“A watershed is nature’s way of organizing the landscape,” explains Nancy Aspden, Director of Integrated Watershed Management at Kawartha Conservation. “It’s how water moves, across municipal lines, through forests, wetlands, and neighborhoods, ultimately connecting us all.”

Kawartha Conservation’s watershed includes not only the majority of the City of Kawartha Lakes, but also portions of the Municipality of Trent Lakes, Township of Scugog, the Municipality of Clarington, and the Townships of Brock and Cavan Monaghan. This area spans nearly 2,600 square kilometres and includes more than 250 lakes, rivers, and wetlands, draining primarily into the Scugog River, Pigeon River, and Lakes Scugog, Pigeon, Cameron, Balsam and Sturgeon.

Most of the water in this region originates as precipitation - rain and snow falling across the diverse landscape of upland forests, farmlands, and wetlands. It also enters the system from groundwater sources, feeding springs and streams from below the surface. Key headwaters, for the majority of lakes in the Kawartha watershed, start in the north, through the Burnt and Gull River systems. Headwaters near the Oak Ridges Moraine, travels across the land through tributaries, wetlands, and lakes before converging into major rivers.



Kawartha Watershed

Water flows east through Pigeon Lake, and then ultimately, that water flows east and south, joining the Otonabee and Trent Rivers before emptying into the Bay of Quinte, and then Lake Ontario. The Kawartha watershed is part of the larger Great Lakes Basin, meaning water that starts here influences the health of aquatic ecosystems far beyond our borders.

“It’s a massive connected system,” says Brett Tregunno, Aquatic Biologist with Kawartha Conservation. “A raindrop falling in a farmer’s field near Bethany could eventually make its way to Lake Ontario. That’s why every action we take across the watershed matters.”

“People are often surprised that our work stretches beyond Kawartha Lakes,” adds Tregunno. “But water doesn’t stop at a township line. What happens upstream, whether it’s development, land use, or pollution, can have a big impact downstream. That’s why managing from a watershed perspective is so critical.”

Watershed-based management means looking at the entire connected system, rather than just a small piece of it. This is especially important when it comes to things like water quality, stormwater, erosion, habitat protection, and land-use planning.

“If you manage land and water based only on municipal lines, you risk missing the big picture,” adds Aspden. “For example, a subdivision in one township could lead to increased flooding in another if water isn’t properly managed. That’s where we come in - to ensure development, restoration, and planning decisions work for the watershed as a whole.”

Healthy watersheds are also a key part of climate resilience. Natural systems like forests, wetlands, and shoreline buffers help absorb stormwater, filter pollutants, and slow the flow of runoff during major rain events.

“We’re seeing more extreme weather and unpredictable seasons,” says Tregunno. “Maintaining forests, wetlands, and other wild spaces across the watershed is one of the best tools we have to reduce the impacts of flooding, protect drinking water, and safeguard wildlife habitat.”

At Kawartha Conservation, everything we do - from monitoring water quality to reviewing planning applications, from supporting farmers to restoring shorelines - is guided by the principle that we are all connected by water.

“When you understand how a watershed works, you realize we all live downstream from someone,” says Aspden. “Protecting the health of our water means working together, across boundaries, to make decisions that support the entire system, now and for future generations.”

For more information on how Kawartha Conservation can help.
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General info: geninfo@kawarthaconservation.com
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Planning: planning@kawarthaconservation.com