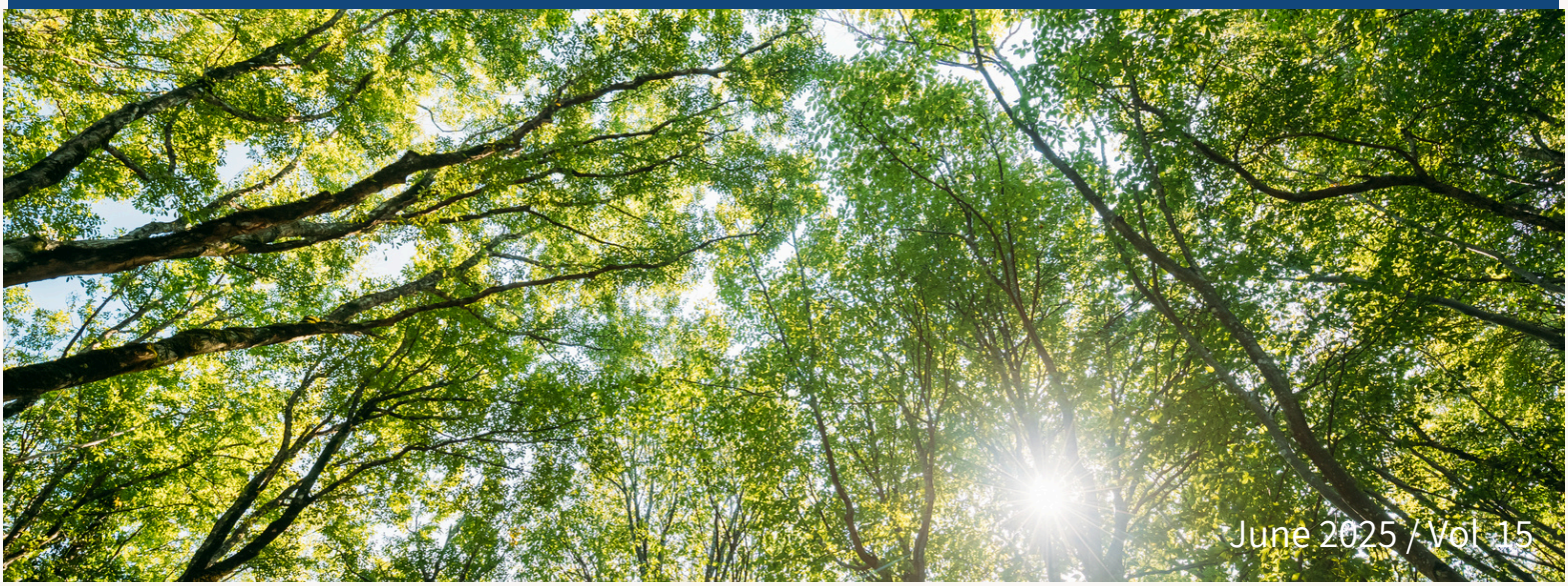
# Watershed Watch Newsletter




**Inside This Issue: Lake Health, Pollinator Power, and Wetland Wisdom**

June in the Kawarthas brings a vibrant return of life to our landscapes - from the gentle hum of bees and the croak of frogs in local wetlands, to the dedicated fieldwork underway on our lakes and shorelines.

In this month's edition of Watershed Watch, we're shining a light on the important work being done to protect and understand the health of our watershed. You'll read about the launch of our five-year Lake Health Monitoring Project, designed to provide critical data on 11 local lakes to guide long-term stewardship and management. We're also celebrating National Pollinator Week by highlighting the actions landowners, farmers, and community members are taking to support the bees, butterflies, and birds that keep our ecosystems thriving.

We take time to reflect on the enduring legacy of the Walkerton tragedy, 25 years later - a moment that reshaped how Ontario protects drinking water at the source. Through Source Water Protection programs, education, and collaboration with landowners and municipalities, we continue to safeguard the water that sustains us all. And as our wetlands reach their summer peak, we explore the ecological importance of these often-overlooked ecosystems - from filtering runoff and preventing floods to providing habitat for countless species.

This season reminds us that conservation is a shared responsibility, and that every garden planted, wetland preserved, or lake monitored is part of a larger story of resilience. Whether you're a waterfront property owner, rural land steward, or in-town resident, we all have a role to play in protecting the natural heritage of the Kawarthas - now and for future generations.

With gratitude for your continued support,

The Kawartha Conservation Team

Ticks are active in Ontario during warmer months and can transmit Lyme disease through their bites. Protect yourself by wearing light-colored clothing, using insect repellent with DEET or picaridin, and checking for ticks after outdoor activities. Learn more from the HKPR District Health Unit:

**MORE INFORMATION**

# NEW MULTI-YEAR LAKE HEALTH MONITORING PROJECT LAUNCHES ACROSS THE KAWARTHA LAKES

Kawartha Conservation has officially launched a comprehensive, five-year Lake Health Monitoring Project that will provide valuable insights into the health of 11 key lakes in our watershed. Running from 2025 through 2029, the project is designed to support long-term lake stewardship and inform future planning and management efforts.

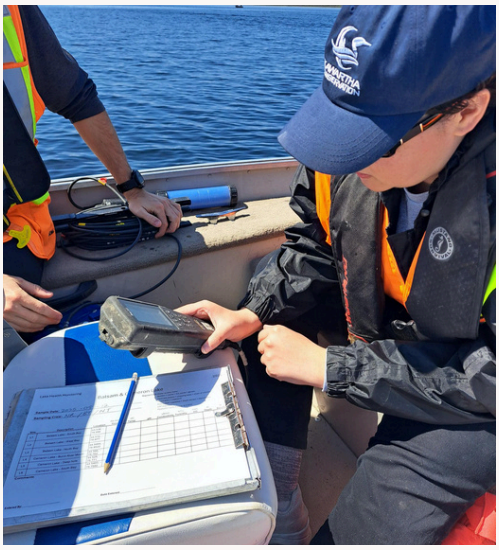
Natasha Talbot, Environmental Field Technician.

The monitoring program will take place annually between May and October, focusing on a range of critical lake health indicators. These include water quality metrics such as phosphorus and chloride levels, water clarity, the extent of aquatic plant growth, and the condition of shoreline vegetation. Data will be compared against provincial and federal benchmarks to help evaluate the ecological health of each lake.

This year, monitoring efforts will begin with five lakes: Sturgeon, Balsam, Cameron, Pigeon, and Scugog. Alongside water quality testing, aquatic plant surveys will be conducted on Sturgeon Lake and the north end of Lake Scugog to assess biodiversity and identify the presence of invasive species.

To maximize resources and ensure consistency, the program will follow a rotating schedule - conducting full monitoring cycles in Years 1, 3, and 5 of the project. This approach allows for a deeper understanding of how lake conditions evolve over time, enabling more effective and responsive lake management.

By collecting robust scientific data, the Lake Health Monitoring Project will help build a stronger foundation for conservation decisions, foster healthier lakes, and support the many people, communities, and ecosystems that rely on these freshwater resources.



Kawartha Conservation staff recording data from a YSI Multi-parameter probe.

Nathan Rajevski, Assistant Watershed Resource Technician.

# SMALL WINGS, BIG IMPACT: SUPPORTING POLLINATORS ACROSS THE KAWARTHA WATERSHED

As bees hum through blooming meadows and butterflies trace lazy circles above the water, it's easy to forget that pollinators are doing essential work. Across the Kawartha watershed, these small but mighty species - bees, butterflies, hummingbirds, and even certain beetles - are quietly sustaining ecosystems, supporting food systems, and maintaining biodiversity. And ahead of National Pollinator Week (June 17–23), Kawartha Conservation is highlighting the many ways individuals and landowners can help protect them.

**“For us, supporting pollinators is about more than planting a few flowers,” said Danielle Marcoux-Hunter, Landowner and Community Specialist at Kawartha Conservation. “It’s about helping people connect the dots between their actions and the health of the environment around them.”**

Danielle Marcoux-Hunter, Community and Landowner Specialist and Carolyn Snider, Community Engagement Technician preparing for the semi annual native plant sale.

That connection starts at ground level. While Kawartha Conservation’s annual Native Plant Sale closed in May, the organization continues to promote long-term pollinator support through free, easy-to-use Healthy Garden Guides - available both online and as printed booklets at the Kawartha Conservation administrative building at Ken Reid Conservation Area.

The guides offer plant suggestions tailored to specific conditions - like dry soil, shady areas, or waterfront slopes - and provide maintenance tips to ensure your garden thrives year after year. One of the most popular options is the Native Plant Pollinator Garden Guide, which helps landowners create vibrant nectar corridors using native wildflowers.

“People sometimes think they need a big property or years of experience to make a difference,” said Marcoux-Hunter. “But a small garden with the right native plants can support hundreds of pollinators throughout the season. You don’t have to be an expert - you just have to start.”

**Pollinators in the Fields**

While gardens and shorelines play a critical role, pollinators also depend on healthy agricultural landscapes. That’s why Kawartha Conservation is working directly with local farmers to integrate pollinator-friendly practices into their land management.

**“Farms can be incredible places for pollinators when managed with diversity in mind,” said Joshua Noiseux, Agricultural Stewardship Technician. “We support producers in implementing Best Management Practices that improve both farm resilience and pollinator habitat.”**

These practices include planting cover crops, maintaining flowering field edges, restoring hedgerows, and reducing or carefully timing pesticide use. Riparian buffers along creeks and ditches - planted with native grasses and shrubs - not only filter runoff and improve water quality but also serve as important travel corridors for bees and butterflies.

**“Pollinators are essential to many crops, and their decline has a real economic impact,” Noiseux added. “By building habitat into the farm operation, producers can actually increase pollination rates and support yields over the long term.”**

Kawartha Conservation offers free consultations, technical advice, and funding opportunities through the Water Fund to help farmers adopt these practices.

“We’re not asking farmers to overhaul their operations,” said Noiseux. “We’re helping them take targeted actions that benefit both their business and the broader watershed.”

**A Watershed Approach to Pollinator Protection**

Pollinators are a shared responsibility, and supporting them means thinking across fences, property lines, and land uses. Whether it’s planting native milkweed in a backyard garden, restoring a natural shoreline, or enhancing a marginal piece of farmland with a pollinator strip, every action adds up.

“Pollinators don’t see boundaries - they just need food, shelter, and safe passage,” said Marcoux-Hunter. “That’s why it’s so important that we work together across the watershed.”

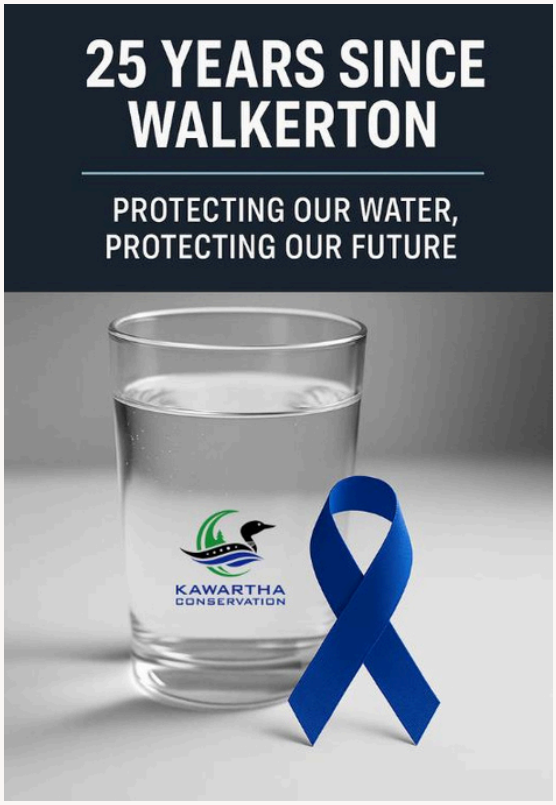
With climate change, habitat loss, and pesticide exposure putting pressure on pollinator populations, conservation efforts need to be proactive, connected, and community-driven.

**“There’s a lot of urgency, but there’s also a lot of opportunity,” added Marcoux-Hunter. “Pollinator Week is a great time to take stock of what we’re doing right - and what more we can do to support these species that are so vital to life in the Kawarthas.”**

For residents interested in learning more or picking up a copy of the Healthy Garden Guides, visit kawarthaconservation.com/healthygardens or stop by the Ken Reid Conservation Area administration office.

Geum triflorum, Prairie Smoke.

## 25 YEARS LATER: PROTECTING OUR DRINKING WATER AT THE SOURCE




Twenty-five years ago, the small town of Walkerton, Ontario became the centre of one of Canada's worst public health tragedies. In May 2000, E. coli contamination in the municipal drinking water system claimed the lives of seven people and made more than 2,000 others ill.

The cause? Contaminated well water that was neither adequately treated nor properly monitored. The aftermath? A sweeping overhaul of Ontario's drinking water safety legislation and the birth of the province's Source Water Protection framework - a proactive approach to ensuring clean, safe drinking water for generations to come.

In the years since the Walkerton tragedy, Ontario introduced the Clean Water Act, and with it, the development of Source Protection Plans across the province. These plans identify threats to municipal drinking water sources and outline policies to reduce or eliminate those threats - a shift from reactive to preventive water management.

At Kawartha Conservation, Source Water Protection isn't just a policy - it's a daily responsibility.

**"We work with municipalities, agricultural producers, businesses, and homeowners to reduce risks to drinking water right at the source," says Sarah Lavoie-Bernstein, Risk Management Official and Source Protection Technician at Kawartha Conservation. "Whether it's ensuring proper fuel storage, safe handling of road salt, or implementing best management practices for farmers using fertilizers or pesticides invulnerable areas, each action makes a difference."**

Drinking water sources include rivers, lakes, and groundwater wells. These sources are vulnerable to contaminants like fuel, fertilizers, chemicals, and pathogens - particularly in Intake Protection Zones and Wellhead Protection Areas, where water is drawn for public use.

Through its work with the Trent Source Protection Coalition - which includes five Conservation Authorities across a large portion of south-central Ontario - Kawartha Conservation helps implement the Trent and Ganaraska Source Protection Plan. This plan lays out science-based policies tailored to local conditions and land uses, ensuring communities have safe, clean water both now and in the future.

“Our team conducts property visits, reviews land uses, and supports landowners through risk management strategies,” says Lavoie-Bernstein. “Most of the time, people want to do the right thing - they just need help understanding what that is.”

Source Water Protection is a collaborative process. Risk Management Officials like Lavoie-Bernstein provide guidance to property owners and municipalities within vulnerable zones - helping implement safeguards such as improving and implementing best management strategies for agricultural practices or adjusting storage and handling of materials near drinking water sources.

Education also plays a key role. “We spend a lot of time building relationships and having conversations about what’s underground, what’s nearby, and how it all connects to the water coming out of the tap,” she adds. In fact, many residents are surprised to learn that what happens on land - even kilometres away - can directly affect the quality of their drinking water.

Ontario signage identifying drinking water protection zones.

**For many newer residents or younger families, Walkerton is a name they may not recognize. But the legacy of that event remains a central reason why Ontario’s drinking water is among the safest in the world today. “The system established in response to the tragedy of Walkerton is well-designed to catch risks before they lead to devastation,” says Lavoie-Bernstein, “It is an effective policy that facilitates respect for our sources of water. I am grateful to be a part of this essential program.”**

Source Water Protection may not always make headlines, but it’s one of the most effective tools we have to protect public health, the environment, and future generations.

Want to know if you live in a vulnerable area or how you can help protect drinking water sources in your community? Visit www.kawarthaconservation.com/sourcewater and click on Source Water Protection for maps, resources, and more information. You can also contact Sarah about any Source Water Protection questions by email at SlavoieBernstein@KawarthaConservation.com.

## GET TO KNOW YOUR LOCAL WETLANDS: NATURE'S SUMMER SYMPHONY AND ECOLOGICAL POWERHOUSE

As summer settles across the Kawarthas, the region's wetlands burst to life with a chorus of croaking frogs, fluttering dragonflies, and the gentle sway of cattails. While they may appear quiet and unassuming, wetlands are among the most vibrant, life - sustaining ecosystems in Ontario - and the summer months are their peak season.

McLaren's Creek Provincially Significant Wetland.

**"They're not just bug-infested wet or soggy places," said Brett Tregunno, Aquatic Biologist with Kawartha Conservation. "Wetlands are absolutely essential for biodiversity, water quality, and protecting our communities from flooding. They do more than most people realize."**

From Provincially Significant Wetlands to small, seasonal pools nestled in forests and fields, these landscapes play an outsized role in keeping our environment - and ourselves - healthy.

Frog calls are one of the surest signs of a thriving wetland. During summer evenings, the high-pitched chirping sound of the spring peeper and the deep croak of the bullfrog echo through marshes and shallow ponds.

"Frogs are like a pulse check for our wetlands," said Tregunno. "When amphibians are thriving, it's a strong indication that the surrounding habitat is in balance."

Because amphibians breathe through their skin and rely on both water and land, they are highly sensitive to pollution and changes in their environment. "If you're hearing a lot of frogs," added Tregunno, "it's usually a sign that the wetland is in good health."

Beyond the biodiversity, wetlands serve as natural filtration systems - quietly working to protect our lakes and rivers. Wetland plants and soils trap sediment, absorb nutrients, and break down pollutants before they can reach larger bodies of water.

**"It's like having a water treatment facility built right into the landscape," said Tanner Liang, Water Quality Specialist at Kawartha Conservation. "Wetlands take the runoff from rainstorms and agriculture and clean it up before it hits our lakes."**

This function becomes especially important during heavy rains. In summer, when intense storms are more frequent, wetlands can slow down and store water, reducing the risk of downstream flooding and erosion.

During severe weather, wetlands act as nature's sponges - absorbing excess rainwater and releasing it gradually over time. This not only protects communities from costly flood damage but also helps recharge groundwater supplies and maintain stream flows during dry periods.

"We often think about infrastructure - roads, bridges, culverts - when it comes to stormwater, but wetlands are one of the most effective natural solutions we have," said Nathan Rajevski, Watershed Resources Technician. "They provide a buffer that protects both natural areas and our built communities."

The Ontario government has estimated that wetlands can reduce the cost of flood damage by hundreds of millions of dollars across the province. Their importance will only grow as the effects of climate change bring more intense and unpredictable rainfall.

While wetlands cover only a small portion of Ontario's landmass, they support an outsized share of its biodiversity. More than 20 percent of the province's species at risk are found in wetlands, including all eight native turtle species.

Wetlands also provide critical stopover habitat for migratory birds and are home to countless insects, fish, and mammals that depend on their unique conditions.

"These are some of the most biologically rich ecosystems in our watershed," said Tregunno. "They're nurseries, shelters, feeding grounds - everything."

While large, Provincially Significant Wetlands are protected under provincial policy, smaller wetlands - sometimes no bigger than a backyard - can be just as important.

**"Every wetland matters," said Tregunno. "Even small or isolated wetlands can provide habitat, slow floodwaters, and clean runoff. Losing them has a ripple effect."**

In agricultural areas, small wetlands help reduce nutrient runoff into streams and lakes. In developed landscapes, they can prevent localized flooding and boost property resilience. Their presence also contributes to local climate regulation, carbon storage, and even recreational enjoyment.

McLaren's Creek Provincially Significant Wetland.

As development pressure increases and climate impacts become more severe, protecting wetlands of all sizes is becoming more urgent.

Tregunno encourages residents to learn more, visit their local conservation areas, and support policies that safeguard these vital ecosystems.

**"Wetlands are working for us all the time, whether we see them or not," he said. "By protecting them, we're really protecting ourselves."**

To learn more about wetlands and how you can help protect them, visit www.ontario.ca/page/wetland - conservation.

*For more information on how Kawartha Conservation can help.*
*Conservation Lands: conservationareas@kawarthaconservation.com*
*General info: geninfo@kawarthaconservation.com*
*Permitting: permits@kawarthaconservation.com*
*Planning: planning@kawarthaconservation.com*