Watershed Watch Newsletter

Looking Ahead to a Year of Action

A new year offers a natural pause, a moment to look back at what we've learned and to consider what comes next. Across the watershed, 2025 was shaped by extremes, from flooding and ice storms to dry summer conditions, all underscoring how closely our communities are connected to water and the land around us.

As we move into 2026, that understanding carries forward into action. Planning begins long before spring arrives, whether it's preparing to plant trees, improving shorelines, or finding practical ways to protect water on private land. The work ahead is quieter than a storm event, but just as important.

In this issue of Watershed Watch, we reflect on the year behind us while looking toward the opportunities ahead. You'll find highlights from the past year alongside information on programs now underway, including the annual Seedling Sale and the opening of the Water Fund application period. Both are examples of how small, well planned actions taken today can lead to lasting benefits for the watershed.

As winter settles in, now is the time to plan, to ask questions, and to think about how individual choices fit into a larger picture. The months ahead will bring planting, restoration, and continued stewardship, all building on the lessons of the year just passed.

With gratitude,

The Kawartha Conservation Team

2025: A YEAR SHAPED BY WATER, SCIENCE, AND STEWARDSHIP

In 2025, water reminded us of its power, its unpredictability, and its central role in shaping life across the Kawartha watershed. From winter snowpack to summer drought, from storm driven flooding to the quiet resilience of wetlands, the year unfolded as a living lesson in why watershed management matters.

Behind the scenes, Kawartha Conservation staff were monitoring, measuring, mapping, restoring, and responding, often long before most people noticed a change in conditions. Together, these efforts painted a clear picture of a watershed under pressure, and of the science, partnerships, and care required to protect it.

Watching the Water, Every Day of the Year

Flood forecasting and warning remained a cornerstone of watershed protection throughout the year. Using a growing network of real time monitoring stations, staff tracked precipitation, river flows, lake levels, and snowpack conditions around the clock. Flood risk was no longer a seasonal concern but a year round reality shaped by climate variability.

Winter measurements of snow depth and Snow Water Equivalent proved critical. Snowpack acted as a temporary reservoir, storing water that would later influence spring runoff, flood risk, and water availability. Understanding not just how much snow fell, but how much water it contained, allowed staff to anticipate changing conditions and prepare communities accordingly.

As seasons shifted, attention turned to the opposite extreme. Dry summer conditions highlighted how quickly abundance can give way to scarcity. Through the Low Water Response Program, Kawartha Conservation monitored rainfall and streamflow trends, issuing advisories when thresholds were crossed. The year reinforced a clear message: drought is not defined by absence alone, but by careful measurement, early warning, and shared responsibility.

Water Quality Specialist, Nathan Rajevski, collecting snow course data.

Mapping Risk, Guiding Growth

Accurate floodplain mapping continued to shape safer, more informed decision making across the watershed. Using advanced LiDAR technology, detailed flood models were completed and refined in communities such as Bobcaygeon, Fenelon Falls, and along the Burnt River.

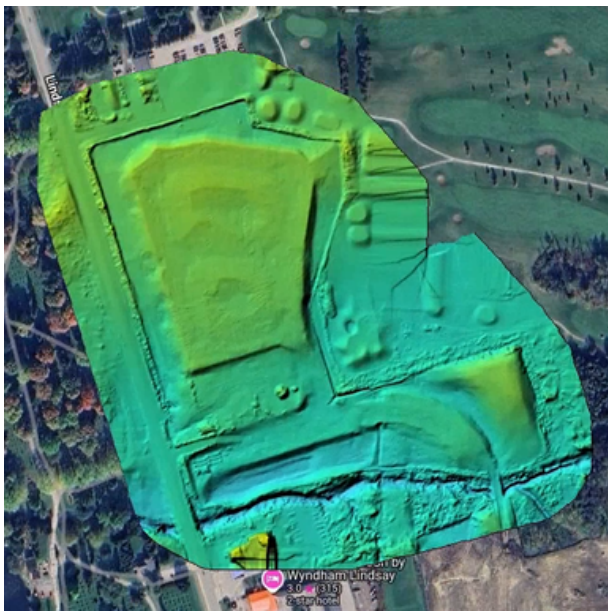
These maps became essential tools, guiding municipal planning, development decisions, emergency preparedness, and homeowner awareness. As extreme weather events become more frequent, the value of precise, science based mapping became impossible to ignore. Building smarter increasingly means building with water in mind.

Floodplain Mapping Technician, Galen Yerex collecting floodplain elevation data.

Innovation on the Ground and in the Air

New technology played an expanding role in environmental protection. In 2025, drone based mapping was introduced to assess erosion and sediment risks at active construction sites. By capturing high resolution terrain data, staff were able to identify vulnerable areas early and recommend targeted mitigation measures to protect nearby creeks and rivers.

Research also turned its focus to emerging shoreline technologies. A study examining the effects of aquatic thrusters offered early insight into how these devices alter submerged plant communities. While vegetation was significantly reduced, broader ecosystem impacts remain an area for further study. The work underscored Kawartha Conservation's role in providing objective, science based information to guide responsible shoreline management.



Detailed topographic map, from processed drone elevations.

Integrated Watershed Management staff collecting water quality data.

Storms, Setbacks, and Recovery

Nature tested resilience in dramatic fashion when a powerful spring ice storm swept through the region. Thousands of trees were lost across conservation lands, trails were blocked, and entire sections of forest were transformed overnight.

Recovery became a months long effort. Conservation Lands staff shifted priorities to hazard removal, trail repairs, and public safety, working methodically to reopen areas while respecting ecological recovery. The work was physically demanding and emotionally heavy, reflecting how deeply both staff and community value these natural spaces.

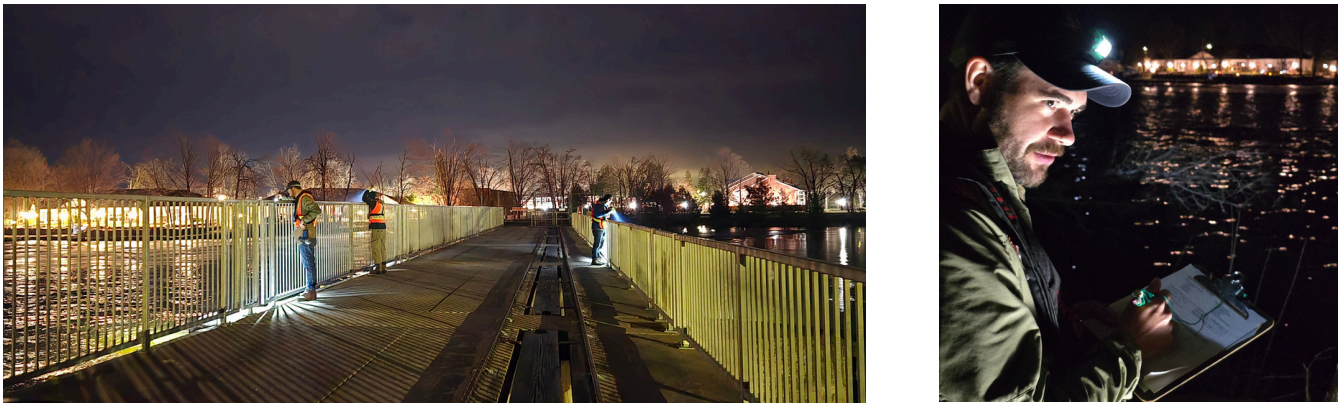
By summer, many areas had reopened, though recovery continues. The storm left a lasting reminder that conservation is not static, it is adaptive, responsive, and deeply human.

Images of the devestating impacts to Ken Reid Conservation Area from the Ice Storm in March

Life Beneath the Surface

While storms reshaped forests above ground, life below the waterline followed its own rhythms. The Walleye Watch program at the Bobcaygeon dam offered a quiet but powerful moment of connection. Nighttime counts during the spawning season helped track fish populations that are ecologically vital and economically significant to the region.

Wetlands also took centre stage in summer, alive with frogs, insects, birds, and plant life. Often overlooked, these ecosystems proved once again to be among the watershed's hardest working landscapes, filtering water, reducing flood impacts, supporting biodiversity, and storing carbon. Whether large or small, every wetland told a story of balance and protection.



Walleye Watch as part of the Bobcaygeon Dam Aquatic Assessment Project.

Stewardship in Motion

Across conservation areas, the work of stewardship continued day after day. Boardwalk repairs, trail maintenance, puncheon installation, mowing, signage, and storm cleanup formed the invisible foundation of every visitor experience. These efforts ensured that people could safely connect with nature while protecting sensitive environments from overuse and erosion.

It was a year defined not by a single project, but by hundreds of actions carried out with care and purpose.

Stewardship staff supporting the semi annual native plant sale.

Conservation Areas staff working on the marsh boardwalk at Ken Reid Conservation Area.

Looking Back, Looking Forward

Taken together, 2025 revealed a watershed in motion, shaped by climate extremes, guided by science, and sustained through collaboration. It was a year that reinforced the importance of monitoring before crisis, planning before development, and stewardship before loss.

Water connected every story. And through each challenge and achievement, one truth remained constant: protecting the watershed means protecting the communities, ecosystems, and future that depend on it.

PLANTING FOR THE FUTURE, ONE SEEDLING AT A TIME

As winter settles in and plans for spring begin to take shape, Kawartha Conservation's annual Seedling Sale is already helping landowners look ahead. The sale opened in December and continues to offer an accessible way to support healthier forests, stronger shorelines, and improved watershed conditions.

The Seedling Sale features native bareroot trees and shrubs sold in bundles of 25, selected specifically for local soils and growing conditions. Species such as White Pine, White Spruce, and Red Oak contribute to long term forest structure, while shrubs like Serviceberry, Highbush Cranberry, and Nannyberry provide important food and shelter for wildlife.

"People often underestimate how much impact a small planting project can have," said Hunter Girdler, Forestry and Landowner Services Technician with Kawartha Conservation. "Even a few bundles planted in the right place can improve habitat, reduce erosion, and contribute to better water quality over time."

Tree and shrub planting plays a direct role in protecting the watershed. Vegetation helps stabilize soil, slow surface runoff, and filter nutrients before they reach lakes and rivers. When these efforts are repeated across multiple properties, the benefits extend well beyond individual sites.

"The Seedling Sale is about giving landowners practical options," Girdler said. "We focus on species that are resilient, well suited to this region, and provide real ecological value. It's an easy way for people to make a positive contribution without needing specialized knowledge."

By offering affordable, locally appropriate seedlings, the program helps remove barriers for residents who want to restore or enhance their land but may not know where to start. Orders remain open through early March, with pickup scheduled for spring once planting conditions allow. Quantities are limited, and early planning is encouraged.

"Planting trees is a long term investment," Girdler added. "You might not see the full results right away, but over time those seedlings grow into something that benefits both the landowner and the watershed as a whole."

Each bundle planted this spring represents a step toward a more resilient landscape and a healthier watershed for years to come.

Example of a well planted seedling.

SUPPORTING PRACTICAL WATER PROTECTION THROUGH THE WATER FUND

Protecting water quality often comes down to everyday decisions made on the land. Along shorelines, across fields, and around homes and farms, small improvements can have a lasting impact on how water moves through the watershed. The Water Fund exists to support those efforts, helping landowners invest in practical projects that protect lakes, rivers, and groundwater while strengthening the long term resilience of their properties.

The 2026 Water Fund application period opens January 26 and runs through April 30, 2026. The program provides cost share funding for projects that improve water quality, reduce environmental risk, and address issues at their source.

Eligible projects include proven best management practices such as shoreline naturalization, erosion control, runoff management, livestock fencing, and tree and shrub planting. The Water Fund can also support septic system upgrades and the proper decommissioning of unused wells, both of which play an important role in protecting groundwater and nearby waterbodies.

“We’ve been hearing from more landowners about septic systems and unused wells,” said Julia Derue, Stewardship Technician with Kawartha Conservation. “These are projects the Water Fund has always been able to support, and they can make a meaningful difference in reducing the risk of contamination.”

The program focuses on shared responsibility and long term outcomes rather than short term fixes. Cost share funding helps offset project costs, making improvements more achievable and encouraging action that benefits both individual properties and downstream communities.

Water Fund projects often provide multiple benefits. Naturalized shorelines can reduce erosion and improve habitat. Livestock fencing protects streambanks and water quality. Tree and shrub planting adds shade, stabilizes soil, and supports biodiversity. Septic upgrades and well decommissioning help safeguard groundwater, an often unseen but essential part of the watershed.

Example of a past approved project for rainwater management. This system catches rainwater that is then used to water plants in a large greenhouse.

“Small changes can make a big difference,” Derue said. “When water is managed properly on the land, those benefits add up over time.”

Applications are reviewed based on environmental benefit, feasibility, and alignment with watershed priorities. Stewardship staff work closely with applicants throughout the process, from early conversations to project planning and implementation.

“The goal isn’t just to fund projects,” Derue added. “It’s to support landowners in making improvements that last and continue protecting water long after the work is done.”

As the application period opens, landowners are encouraged to consider how water moves across and beneath their property, and where practical improvements could help protect the watershed now and into the future.

To learn more about the 2026 Water Fund, eligibility requirements and project types, visit https://www.kawarthaconservation.com/waterfund.

Example of a past approved project. This is an example of an urban raingarden to help mitigate stormwater runoff.

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