



Annual Newsletter

2024 Edition

Celebrating
10 YEARS!

Muskrat Watershed Council





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Letter from the Chair

Congratulations Muskrat Watershed Council on TEN YEARS of fighting for better water quality!!!

Wow. Ten years. Looking back in my notebooks, Rene and I became members in August of 2014 when we were approached by friends to represent agriculture on the Council. The Council was a fledgling then. A newly-formed registered Not for Profit. Four years later it transformed into a registered charitable organization.

I look back and see all the people who worked so hard to get this organization up and running. Some that have moved on and some that are still with us today. New members, too. Partners who help with knowledge and donate their talents such as Algonquin College, Jp2g, Watersheds Canada, Whitewater Township, and others.

Hats off to you all. You have made a difference.

You have passion for your community/ watershed, and it shows. It's showcased in the finding/funding of projects, the sweat equity of plantings, fencing, water testing and purchasing memberships. It shines in the everyday tasks and paperwork needed to keep the wheels of such an operation running. Every little thing can make such a huge ripple in our watershed.

It is my hope that new members and volunteers will sign on to keep the work going.

I for one, have a lot greyer hair than when I started.

We have fun along with work at Muskrat Watershed Council...join us and make a difference to your world.

In conclusion, my last words go to the volunteers and partners; MWC appreciates you all.

Keep being the superheroes that you are.

Thank you for making our last ten years amazing.

Sincerely,

Karen Coulas

Chair of the Muskrat Watershed Council



Muskrat Watershed Council

10 Years in Review

2014 – present: Community Outreach: MWC volunteers speak to other organizations (e.g. Ontario Soil and Crop / Renfrew County Soil and Crop, lake associations, other water groups). MWC representatives attend events (e.g. Cobden Fair, Taste of the Valley, Pembroke Eco Fair, Renfrew County Plowing Match).

2014: MWC becomes a registered not for profit organization

2015: Science Night for the public (Nov.) speakers are Victor Castro and Seth Vanderveen from the Ministry of the Environment
Two farms put in hay buffers along the Snake River with donated seed.

2016-2017: Controlled Tile Drainage (CTD) comes to Renfrew County, MWC installs five CTD structures on three farm properties

2017: Swim For the Lake Fundraiser is held. Algonquin College's Sarah Hall swims the 16.5 km length of Muskrat Lake in six hours. Love Your Lake Program, all properties on the lake receive a shoreline assessment (things being done well & areas for improvement). A value survey is completed which results in MWC publishing a booklet "What YOU Can Do For Muskrat Lake"

2021: Loon Survey

2022 – 2023: Great Lakes Local Action Fund Project: two alternative watering systems are installed, 5,500 trees and shrubs are planted, 1,928 m (6,420 ft.) of cattle fencing is installed, five farms have their soil tested, and a soil workshop is presented to farmers.



2014 – 2019: Water Quality Monitoring Network is set up with MWC / Algonquin College / Ontario Ministry of Environment and Parks, 24 – 28 sites tested each year between May to August; sampling, results published in two water analysis reports (2015, 2019) collected by Algonquin College, tested in accredited labs and put together and analyzed in reports by Dr. Rebecca Dalton

2018: MWC achieves charitable status as an organization

2018 – 2020: Ontario Trillium Grant gives us a three-year planting program 45,000 trees planted

2019: MWC hosts the Interlake Association Meeting. Soil Workshop, 15 fields analyzed and farmers shown how to interpret results for farm planning.

2023: To date 4,000 shrubs and trees are planted, 21 acres are mechanically planted with 22, 000 trees in the spring of 2023, one alternative watering system for cattle is installed in the summer of 2023.

2017 – Ongoing: Cobden Beach Project: Aerators and beach mats put in at the swimming area to stop prolonged beach closures and excessive plant growth.

Community Services Recovery Fund Initiatives

Community Services
Recovery Fund



The Government of Canada delivered the Community Services Recovery Fund through three National Funders – Canadian Red Cross, Community Foundations of Canada, and United Way Centraide Canada. The National Funders distributed funding to eligible community service organizations, including charities, non-profits, and Indigenous governing bodies, providing services in communities across Canada.

Muskrat Watershed Council was one of the many fortunate organizations to receive this funding, and we put it to good use in so many ways!

The following projects were funded by the Government of Canada's Community Services Recovery Fund...

Funded by the
Government of Canada's
Community Services Recovery Fund



Project 1: Turtle Nesting Boxes

Level 3 and Level 1 Environmental Technician students from Algonquin College's Waterfront Campus constructed 10 turtle nesting boxes for the Muskrat Watershed Council. These boxes are designed to protect recently-laid turtle nests from common predators, giving their offspring a better chance of survival. Many of these boxes were deployed this spring along predetermined sites within the Muskrat watershed.



Project 2: Benthic Invertebrates and Water Quality in the Muskrat Watershed

Grade 9 science students from Opeongo High School met with Muskrat Watershed Council volunteers to learn about benthic invertebrates and water sampling within the Muskrat watershed. Many thanks to Algonquin College's Waterfront Campus for providing the sampling equipment and to the Community Services Recovery Fund for covering the transportation costs.

Project 3: Little Ray's Reptiles Zoo Inc. at Cobden Public School
The Muskrat Watersheds Council partnered with Little Ray's Reptile Zoo to present on native wildlife to students at Cobden Public School. Students were able to witness native wildlife up close while learning interesting features about them and the important roles they play in our local environment.



Project 4: Purchased New Water Testing Equipment

Muskat Watershed Council (MWC) purchased a Hariba-U52 multi-parameter probe for water sample analysis. It measures things like water temperature, dissolved oxygen, turbidity and conductivity, all on one probe. It is also easy to calibrate.

MWC also purchased a fluorometer to measure chlorophyll as well as phycocyanins, which are found in the cyanobacteria that occur in some types of blue-green algae. Having the proper equipment to measure water quality means we will no longer need to outsource our water testing and we will have hard data to submit when we apply for grants.

Project 5: Planting on Four Properties

In November, with the help of Watersheds Canada's Natural Edge Program and the Muskrat Watershed Council, four Algonquin College Students - Josh Collins, Ashley Conrad, Ben Dennison, and Kian Robson completed a shoreline planting project at four different properties on Muskrat and Olmstead Lakes. The objective of these planting projects is to naturally enhance the shorelines within the watershed to prevent erosion, increase water quality, and promote biodiversity. We would like to thank the Algonquin College students who volunteered their time to plant these shorelines.



Project 6: Virtual Meeting Improvements

Muskat Watershed Council purchased a new webcam and microphone. We also updated and improved our meeting guidelines and structure and trained all key contributors. We are seeing improvements in meeting efficiency, minutes and tracking of actions.

Many thanks and extreme gratitude to the Government of Canada's Community Services Recovery Fund for helping to make these projects and improvements possible.

Renfrew County Stewardship Council, the Eastern Ontario Farm Stewardship Collaborative and Muskrat Watershed Council



EASTERN ONTARIO
Farm Stewardship Collaborative

The Renfrew County Stewardship Council is creating a county-wide watershed-council-style organization to share information centrally and increase access to grants for farmers and rural landowners. The Eastern Ontario Farm Stewardship Collaborative is essentially a group of partner agencies with cost-share funding programs for farmers and rural landowners. Projects include livestock fencing, wetland creation/restoration, erosion control, tree planting and controlled tile drainage. This collaborative provides a wide-range of benefits to farmers and rural landowners, including a team approach to maximizing cost-share funding in projects.

Muskrat Watershed Council is honoured to join this collaborative. Together we will work to empower and support farmers and landowners and improve the watershed.



MWC Planted 4,000 trees this spring with Watersheds Canada



This spring, with generous funding from Coors Seltzer Canada, and as part of the Change the Course initiative, Muskrat Watershed Council restored two acres of shoreline around Muskrat Lake and successfully planted 4,000 native shrubs, including fruiting species for birds. Change the Course is a multi-year initiative; assessments were done for last year's planting and all plants are doing well.

Creating vegetative buffers is a nature-based solution to reduce nutrient loading, release cleaner waters into creeks and rivers, stabilize soils which can erode from overland runoff and flood events, and create a vital wildlife habitat.

This collaborative effort underscores a strong commitment to environmental stewardship and community engagement.

Media and Communications

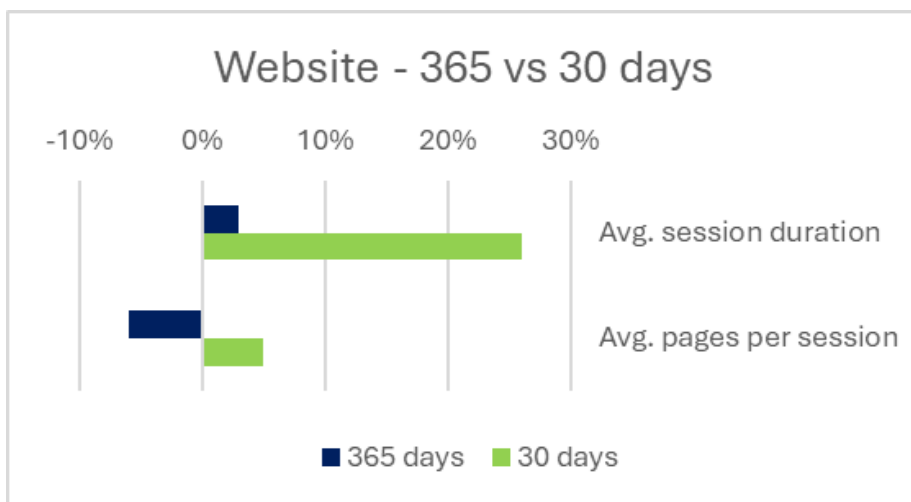
A Year in Review

WEB SITE ANALYTICS

Over the past year, Muskrat Watershed Council has seen a 95% increase in new web site traffic, but with a low returning customer rate at only 5%. The MWC email marketing campaign traffic accounts for 59% of site traffic.

Visitor engagement is down over the past year, but the average site session remained relatively stable.

However, over the past 30 days we are seeing some positive indicators with visitor engagement increasing, and unique visitors up 9%, site sessions up 15%, and a significant climb in post and blog views.

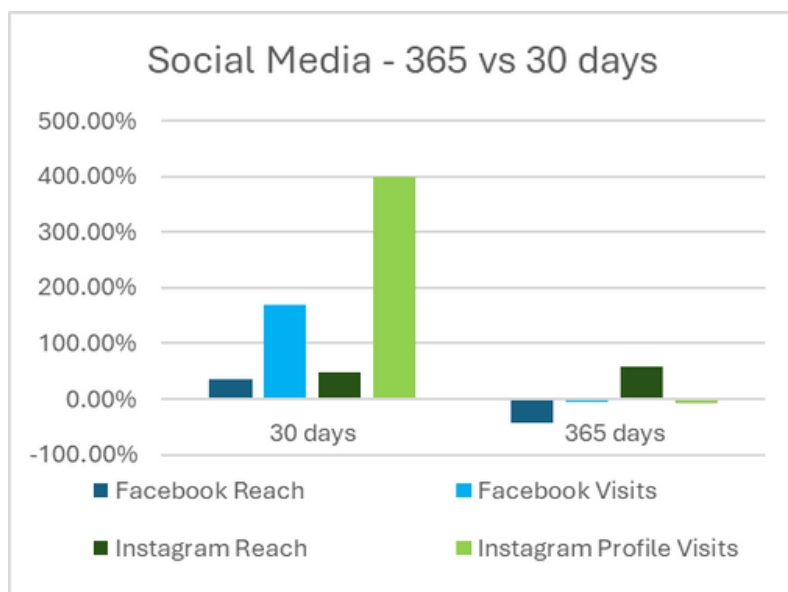


SOCIAL MEDIA TRENDS

Over the past year our Facebook reach declined 41.9% and visits declined only slightly by 5.6%. Much of this decrease can be attributed to the Canadian news content ban on the social media sites.

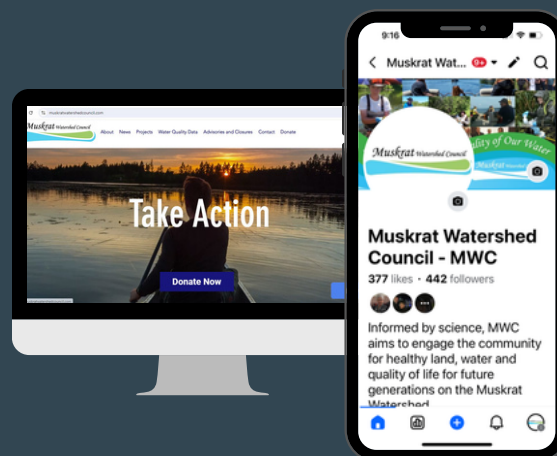
Interestingly, our Instagram reach increased 57.1%, but profile visits were still down a little at 8.6%.

However, in the past 30 days we are seeing very positive trends in Reach and Visits in both Facebook and Instagram.



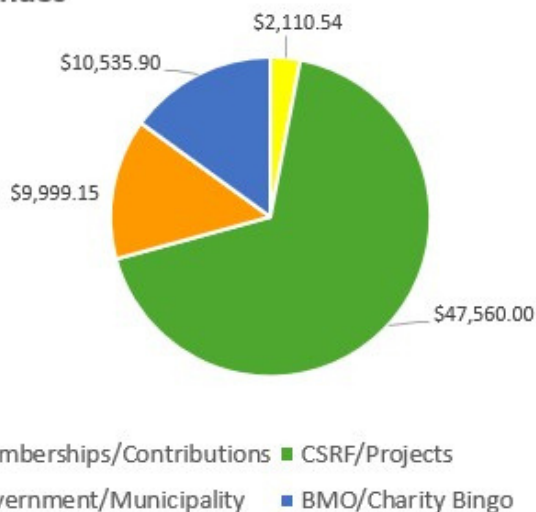
Lessons learned - Retrospective

- Facebook ban on Canadian News media prevented many posts we would have otherwise shared.
- X (Formally Twitter) has been experiencing update issues - technical issues with SurveyMonkey email campaigns.
- Limited marketing skills within volunteers and Media Director

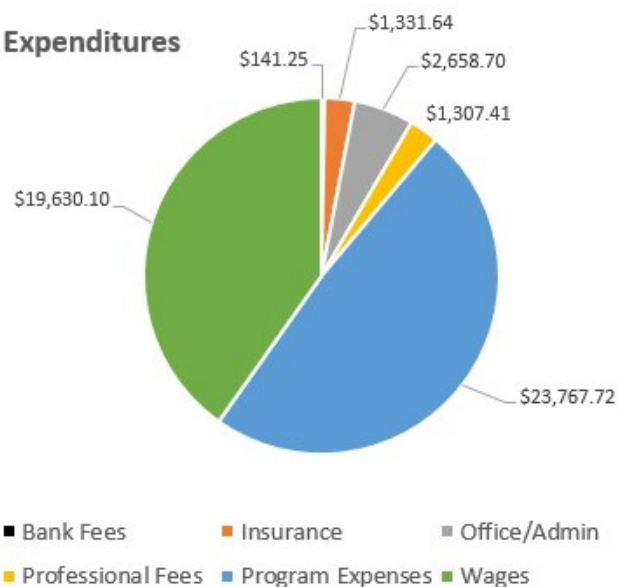


Financials - A Year in Review

\$ Revenues



\$ Expenditures



Muskrat Watershed Council					
Revenues			Expenditures		
	\$	%		\$	%
Memberships/Contributions	\$2,110.54	3%	Bank Fees	\$141.25	1%
CSRF/Projects	\$47,560.00	68%	Insurance	\$1,331.64	3%
Government/Municipality	\$9,999.15	14%	Office/Admin	\$2,658.70	5%
BMO/Charity Bingo	\$10,535.90	15%	Professional Fees	\$1,307.41	3%
			Program Expenses	\$23,767.72	48%
			Wages	\$19,630.10	40%
Total Revenues	\$70,205.59	100%	Total Expenditures	\$48,836.82	100%
			Net Result	\$21,368.74	

New Sign at Cobden Beach!

The Muskrat Watershed Council has installed a large and crisp-looking sign at Cobden Beach showcasing the size and area of the Muskrat watershed.

MWC is offering advertisement opportunities for local businesses who would like to support watershed improvement efforts.

Interested businesses can advertise on small cards that will be placed around the edges of the new sign.

Please contact info@muskratwatershedcouncil.com if you have a business and are interested in advertising on the sign at Cobden Beach.



Water Testing in the Muskrat Watershed

Muskrat Watershed Council's Promising Results and Call for Volunteers

Muskrat Watershed Council is thrilled to share that our water quality monitoring initiative, which began in May with our new testing equipment, is showing encouraging results. We have been analyzing water samples from several key locations around the Muskrat watershed, and by mid-July, we have already seen improvements in the percentage of dissolved oxygen. This is a positive sign for the health of our aquatic ecosystems.

Community feedback has also been heartening, with many noting the increased clarity of our local lakes this year. This improved water clarity is a promising indicator of the effectiveness of our recent environmental measures and the collective efforts of our community.



However, to get a more accurate and comprehensive picture of the watershed's overall health, we need to expand our testing efforts.

We are calling for volunteers to help us collect samples from additional locations around the watershed.

Your involvement will be crucial in providing the detailed data necessary for assessing and enhancing the health of our environment.

If you are interested in getting involved and are within the Muskrat Watershed area, we would love to hear from you.

Training will be provided at Cobden Beach on September 7th, 2024, at 10am.

Please contact us at chair@muskratwatershedcouncil.com if you would like to sign up to take the training and help collect water data.

Together, we can continue to make a significant impact on the health and clarity of our beloved watershed.



Volunteer of the Year - Barbara Green

Barbara Green, our current secretary, has a lifelong connection to Whitewater Region. She started her teaching career in Pembroke and has been cottaging on Muskrat Lake for over 40 years. She has been a volunteer with Muskrat Watershed Council since its very beginning, more than 10 years ago. In fact, she attended the Muskrat Lake Water Quality Symposium on October 5, 2013, the meeting that led to the formation of the Muskrat Watershed Council in February 2014.



Barbara had long been concerned about water quality in the lake, so when she heard about the symposium she knew she had to attend and offer her talents to the cause. Barbara brings a lot of great skills, experience and passion to MWC. She spent many years teaching French and English as a Second Language (ESL), was an ESL consultant, and managed to squeeze in a degree in Journalism, which led to many writing and editing opportunities. Barbara clearly has a passion for language and writing and a desire to make the world a better place.

Barbara started as a general volunteer with MWC, then worked as media director for a short time before becoming secretary in 2021. She regularly helps with writing and editing, volunteering at the charity Bingo and representing MWC at fairs and community events.

Ten years in, Barbara wishes we could eliminate algae blooms for good. She says it would also be great to get rid of invasive species like zebra mussels and reduce the impact of Canada geese and their droppings on our water quality.

Though we are making steady progress, these are long-term goals and it will take time to see meaningful change. Still, Barbara is not discouraged. She reminds us we have accomplished so much over the past 10 years, from planting thousands of trees and shrubs that reduce nutrient runoff into the watershed to partnering with government agencies, educational institutions and environmental groups. These collaborations are creating a critical mass of concerned citizens.

When asked why she continues to volunteer, Barbara says she is inspired by women like activist Maude Barlow who encourages us not to be overwhelmed by the size of the problem we are seeking to solve, and anthropologist Margaret Mead who famously said, "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed individuals can change the world. In fact, it's the only thing that ever has."

The Muskrat Watershed Council thoroughly appreciates everything Barbara has done and continues to do for the council and our community. You are much appreciated, Barb, thank you for a marvellous and very meaningful 10 years!

Appreciating 10 Years of Volunteer Service

Muskrat Watershed Council would also like to recognize and express gratitude to Andy Laird, Evelyn St. Amour and Debbie Macdonald, for 10 years of volunteering service.

Evelyn also attended the first meeting in October 2013.



Thank you Andy, Evelyn and Debbie for your many years of dedication and for helping MWC make a difference!

Appreciating our Partners and Sponsors

Delta Bingo and Gaming in Pembroke, Ontario, have supported the Muskrat Watershed Council with a variety of projects since our partnership began in March 2018. Funds raised through our volunteer program with SBCNA, have contributed to initiatives such as purchasing Hoskin water testing equipment, beach signs, and beach buoys. This partnership continues to ensure the success of our environmental projects within the Muskrat watershed.



Muskrat Watershed Council extends heartfelt appreciation to our dedicated partners and sponsors, whose support is essential to our mission. Their generous contributions and collaborative efforts have significantly advanced our projects, from water conservation initiatives to community education programs.

Our Sponsors and Partners



We are profoundly grateful to our Sponsors and Partners for their support, which empowers us to continue our important work and make a lasting impact on our watershed and beyond.



Closing Remarks

When we look back at the last ten years and all that Muskrat Watershed Council has accomplished, it really is impressive and astounding what a small group of volunteers has been able to achieve. The people who have been involved along the way, from organizations to agencies, to institutions to individuals, have all contributed to making a difference, and one we can all be proud of.

Muskrat Watershed Council would like to thank everyone who has been involved, but most of all we are grateful to the individual volunteers who sacrifice their personal time to make a difference in our community.

Thank you! Here's to another 10 years of making a difference!

Contact Us

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If you are interested in knowing more about what we are doing in the local community or if you wish to volunteer your time, please join us. Our regular monthly meetings are held every third Thursday of the month at 6:30 p.m. in the basement of the Whitewater Township building, 44 Main Street, Cobden, Ontario, and on Google Meet.

All are welcome!



Muskrat Watershed Council

