

WATERSHEDS CANADA NATIONAL CONFERENCE

*Connecting Leaders, Inspiring Change:
Practical Stewardship for Canada's Freshwater*



MAY 1-2, 2025 – CONFERENCE PROGRAM



WATERSHEDS CANADA NATIONAL CONFERENCE

CONNECTING LEADERS, INSPIRING CHANGE:
PRACTICAL STEWARDSHIP FOR CANADA'S FRESHWATER



Immerse yourself in Watersheds Canada's inaugural conference, where inspiration leads to action!

Taking place May 1-2, 2025 in Haliburton, ON, this event is bringing together fellow lake and watershed enthusiasts for an engaging experience that takes you beyond the conference room and into the field with hands-on stewardship project demonstrations and interactive seminars. Network with passionate lake leaders and environmental professionals, share innovative success stories, and discover science-driven practical solutions. Leave empowered, connected, and ready to make a tangible impact on Canada's watersheds and your own community!

AGENDA OVERVIEW

Thursday, May 1st

- 5:00 PM Registration
- 6:00 PM Opening Reception & Keynote Speaker
- 7:30 PM Night Sky Workshop & Campfire

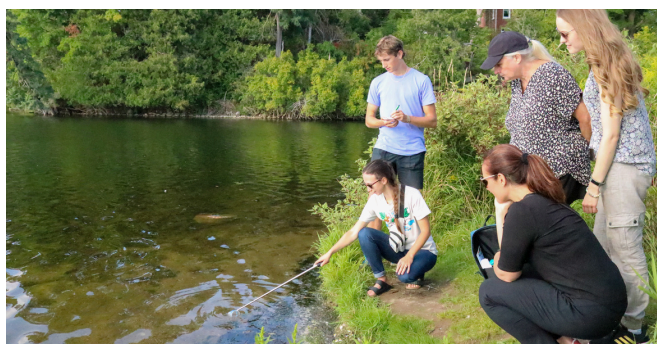
Friday, May 2nd

Morning Session

- 8:00 AM Breakfast & Networking
- 9:00 AM Welcome & Keynote Speaker
- 9:45 AM Plenary Session
- 10:35 AM Coffee Break
- 11:15 AM Plenary Session
- 12:00 PM Lunch & Networking

Afternoon Session

- 1:00 PM Plenary Session
- 1:40 PM Outdoor Demonstration Activities
- 5:20 PM Closing Remarks
- 6:00 PM Closing Reception & Networking



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PROGRAM - THURSDAY, MAY 1, 2025



5:00 - 6:00 PM

Registration

Check into the conference, settle into your accommodations, and spend some time meeting other attendees and the evening speakers.



6:00 - 7:00 PM

Opening Reception & Keynote Speaker

The Watersheds Canada National Conference kicks off with a keynote presentation by Mark Mattson, President of Swim Drink Fish and Lake Ontario's Waterkeeper.

"Somewhere some waterbody is a part of who you are. Nurture it."

After 35 years of practicing environmental law, it is easy to look back and see a pattern of success. Cleaning up landfills, restoring habitat, treating sewage and eliminating harmful pollutants is challenging work but there are many stories of success. It may come as a surprise to many that it is not the laws, policies or scientific investigations that predict success. It is in fact the level of connection and love for a waterbody that determines swimmable drinkable fishable water.

After the presentation, walk outside to see the Biinaagami Giant Floor Map. Trace the steps of an Anishinaabe Water Walker as she welcomes you to the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence watershed on this 8 by 11 metre rich tapestry that gives voice to the waters and amplifies Indigenous knowledge.



7:30 - 10:00 PM

Night Sky Workshop & Campfire

After a short food break inside, join members of the Peterborough Astronomical Association to use the naked eye, binoculars, and telescopes to view constellations, learn about the impacts of light pollution on night sky viewing, and enjoy stories around the campfire (weather permitting).



PROGRAM - FRIDAY, MAY 2, 2025

8:00 - 9:00 AM

Buffet Breakfast & Networking



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10,000 GARDENING QUESTIONS. ANSWERED.



9:00 - 9:45 AM

Welcome & Keynote Speaker

The Friday morning keynote speaker is Mark Cullen, expert gardener, author, broadcaster, and tree advocate.

"Plant Intelligence, and a new understanding of life on earth"

Mark led the campaign to reforest Canada's Highway of Heroes with 2.5 million trees and now (second chapter) Trees For Life/Hero Forests. He believes in action over apathy, and now more than ever, he is digging into books more than gardens in his desire to understand and more profoundly address worldwide environmental urgency. Inspired and informed by the best seller "The Light Eaters" by Zoe Schlanger and "Our Green Heart: The soul and science of forests" by Canadian author Diana Beresford-Kroeger, Mark will plant environmental activism ideas you never expected.



9:45 - 10:35 AM

Plenary Session #1 with Joel Zhang

This session will be led by Joel Zhang, Ph.D. candidate in the Fish Ecology and Conservation Physiology Lab at Carleton University, mentored by Dr. Steven Cooke and Dr. David Philipp.

"Rethinking Black Bass Management"

There are insufficiencies in the current monitoring of Largemouth and Smallmouth Bass in Ontario leading to management strategies that may not be protecting these fish during their reproductive period. Decades of research has now shown that catch-and-release angling of Largemouth and Smallmouth Bass impacts their nesting success and thus, the number of fish that can successfully become part of the population. In this presentation, we will explore key past and current research showing potential declines of Black Bass in Ontario. We will also speak to potential alternative management strategies that are being tested in the province and future considerations for the acceptance of these strategies.

10:35 - 11:15 AM

Coffee Break



11:15 - 11:50 AM

Plenary Session #2 with Dr. Norman Yan

This session will be led by Dr. Norman Yan, Senior Research Scholar at York University, and Director at Friends of the Muskoka Watershed.

“Citizen Science – Seriously.”

Half a century of work on lakes has convinced Dr. Norman Yan that it takes only knowledge and the will to use it to solve threats to our watersheds, but how can they be generated? Dr. Yan believes the core underlying values are humility and hope. Join him to see how the Friends of the Muskoka Watershed has embraced these values to encourage hundreds of Muskoka residents to help address two severe and widespread threats to Muskoka's watersheds: calcium decline, and the excessive use of road salt. Dr. Yan shows that involving the community works for these threats, and can also work for the many other threats our watersheds face.

12:00 - 1:00 PM

Buffet Lunch & Networking



1:00 - 1:35 PM

Plenary Session #3 with Frank Figuli & DFO

This session will include a presentation by Frank Figuli, Program Coordinator at U-Links Centre for Community-Based Research.

“Science by the People, for the Lakes.”

The Woodlands and Waterways EcoWatch – Testing the Waters program is a lake association-driven water quality monitoring initiative designed for Haliburton County. Engaging nearly 50% of the county's lake associations, this program relies on a citizen scientist volunteer model to carry out consistent field sampling across the region. By filling critical data gaps in aquatic monitoring, the program not only supports evidence-based decision-making but also empowers local lake stewards with knowledge and tools to protect the water bodies they care about most.

This session will also include a presentation by Lee-Ann Smith, Manager of the Provincial Partnerships team at Fisheries and Oceans Canada.

“Working In and Around Water – Compliance with the ‘Fisheries Act’ and the federal ‘Species at Risk Act’”

Do you have a project that is taking place in or near water? In this session, Fisheries and Oceans Canada will provide an introduction to its organization, key legislation, and the process for determining if your project should be submitted for review.



Fisheries and Oceans
Canada Pêches et Océans
Canada



Outdoor Demonstration Activities

Attendees can choose up to four sessions they wish to attend. There are six options in total. Groups are limited to 20 people per round. Sessions are 30 minutes in length, with a 30-minute coffee break taking place from 3:20-3:50 PM.



“Bugs with Barb!”

Barbara Elliot, Retired Professor at Fleming College, Owner of Environmental Consulting Business

Get buggy with Barb Elliot and her infectious fascination for all things aquatic, in particular the insects and other bottom-dwelling animals that live in our lakes, rivers, and wetlands. Use D-nets, buckets, trays, and magnifiers to collect and explore these organisms that are critical links in aquatic food webs and can tell us about the health of our watersheds. Be prepared to get down and dirty in this active outdoor learning session. Rubber boots and outdoor gear are strongly recommended – we will play with the bugs – outdoors – rain or shine!



“Shoreline Protection in Action”

Chloe Lajoie, National Conservation Director at Watersheds Canada
Chantal Lefevre, Natural Edge Regional Coordinator at Watersheds Canada

Grassroots action for lake health starts with turning grass lawns into habitat havens using native trees, shrubs, and wildflowers. Join our expert restoration staff to learn about the important role native plants play along shorelines. Bring your ideas and questions as we complete a real-time restoration plan and share common recommendations. We will also give you a sneak-peek of our new waterfront climate change resilience tool. Put into practice what you learn right away with a hands-on planting opportunity along Pinestone Resort’s shoreline. Come prepared with boots and gloves to get down in the dirt at the water’s edge.



“Exploring New Community Science Methods”

Gabi Parent-Doliner, Director of Water Rangers

With so much evolution in the field of community science over the last decade, Water Rangers is excited to showcase new water quality tests and methods developed specifically for community scientists. This session invites those new to community science as well as seasoned leaders in community-based water monitoring (CBWM) to join us on a sampling excursion on-site. You will have the chance to try baseline water quality monitoring equipment and new equipment that we are piloting (winter road salts, nutrients, probes, E.coli). Participants will have a chance to test the equipment, and provide feedback on new testing methods. If you have any equipment, methods, or things that you want to try out with a group, please do bring it along.



“Birding for Conservation”

Kathy Jones, Biologist and Volunteer Manager at Birds Canada

Birds are easy to detect and count which makes them ideal for conservation science. Come out and learn from Kathy about how volunteer bird science works and how it helps conserve the wildlife we all love. Kathy will introduce you to birding, bird identification, and using optics. She will also highlight the Canadian Lakes Loon Survey delivered by Birds Canada and how you and the program can help loons and other birds on your lake. She will also talk about modern bird identification tools, learning options, and how you can contribute your own observations for conservation through other programs such as NatureCounts, eBird, and iNaturalist. Come prepared for any weather (waterbirds do not mind being wet); bring your loon, bird, and conservation questions; have your phone/tablet available to download some handy apps; and get ready to be captivated by birding.



“Hooked on Fish Habitat”

Melissa Dakers, Habitat and Stewardship Program Manager at Watersheds Canada

To celebrate our Fish Habitat program's 10th anniversary, Watersheds Canada is ready to share everything we have learned through the completion of 55 fish habitat projects with this hands-on training session. Rope and wrangle mock brush bundles that create woody debris structure for lakes in need. This high-energy, physical activity session requires audience participation, and is a great opportunity for conservation-minded anglers and lake association volunteers to learn from Ontario's leading expert in delivering community-based habitat enhancement for walleye, lake trout, brook trout, bass, and other species.



“Building Nature Connection for Families at the Lake”

Monica Seidel, Lead Educator at Watersheds Canada

A generational shift is coming to our lakes, and it is critical to provide the next generation of environmental stewards with engaging programs to foster their connection with freshwater and wildlife. In this session, become a student again and participate in fun activities that introduce children and youth to different environmental topics. Whether you are running regular programming for permanent waterfront residents, or only have a few hours to connect with weekend cottage visitors, these low-cost activities will be sure to foster community building and nature connection. Attendees will leave with ready-to-use materials.



5:20 - 5:40 PM

Closing Remarks

We will come back inside as a group for the closing remarks. Learn about "The Doug Smith story" and the legacy that made this year's conference possible.



6:00 - 8:00 PM

Closing Reception & Networking

Join us after a full day of hands-on learning and networking when we will bring everyone together again for reflection, action planning, food, and drinks!

MAKE SURE TO TAG US ONLINE AS YOU SHARE YOUR CONFERENCE EXPERIENCES!



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Use our Conference hashtag!
#WatershedsConf25

Scan this QR code to stay in touch with us after the Conference:



WATERSHEDS CANADA NATIONAL CONFERENCE

OVERVIEW OF OUR PROGRAMS



The Natural Edge

The Natural Edge provides waterfront property owners, groups, and municipalities with custom shoreline planting restoration plans and native plants to take action. Partners across Canada use our unique iOS planting design software and resources to make every planting a success. Since 2013, The Natural Edge has planted 158,184 native plants across 41,785m of shoreline and restored 398,017m² of riparian habitat.



Fish Habitat Program

With the steady increase in development along Ontario's lakes and rivers, critical fish habitat is being compromised and degraded. Watersheds Canada works with local organizations to protect, enhance, and restore freshwater fish habitats, including cold-water creeks, lake trout and walleye spawning beds, and in-water habitat with brush bundles. Since 2015, this program has completed 55 enhancements on 38 waterbodies with support from 50 partners.



Love Your Lake

A healthy lake starts with healthy shorelines. Protecting these sensitive areas benefits the lake and waterfront properties. Love Your Lake is a stewardship program that evaluates a lake and provides each property owner with a personalized, private report outlining voluntary actions that can enhance their shoreline and overall lake health. Love Your Lake teams have assessed 229 lakes, generating 52,252 property reports across 5 provinces. This program is delivered in partnership with Canadian Wildlife Federation.



Freshwater Stewardship Community

This virtual space connects individuals, Indigenous and community groups, policy-makers, businesses, and scientists as we all work together to tackle different freshwater issues. Since 2021, the community has hosted 52 webinars and has created a vast e-library of resources which have been used by 12,000+ people in 23 countries.



Planning for our Shorelands

Responsibility for conserving shorelands in Ontario is shared across a diversity of stakeholders including municipal councillors, planners, and lake-river associations. Planning for our Shorelands is an information hub for municipal stewards and professionals, providing science-based solutions and resources related to shoreland management and land-use.



Nature Discovery Backpacks

Nature is for everyone, at all learning levels! Nature Discovery Backpack lending libraries reduce barriers for children and youth to explore local nature, whether they live in the city or the country. Since 2021, 11 partner groups have run 10 lending libraries in 4 provinces, reaching 3,200+ participants. This program is offered in French and English.



Watersheds
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watersheds.ca



Great Blue Heron

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