



Agenda

Friday, November 27, 2020

1:00 pm

Zoom Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/83878010799?pwd=VGlwRy9NT2NkWUJBQkVwQkVwNUppZz09>

Meeting ID: 838 7801 0799

Passcode: 448488

1. **Opening Remarks** – *Chair Geoff Ross (5 min)*
 - 1.1. Approval of Minutes (by consent)

THAT the [Minutes](#) of the Muskoka Watershed Council meeting dated October 23, 2020 be approved.
 - 1.2. Correspondence
 - 1.2.1. [Letter to Climate Action Muskoka](#) in support of their resolution to declare a climate emergency.

2. **Presentations** (60 min)
 - 2.1. Trillium Lakelands District School Board [Climate Change Action Plan](#) – *Student Representatives from the TLDSB G7 Student Summit*
 - 2.2. [Canada, Climate Change and Education: Opportunities for Public and Formal Education](#) – *Dr. Ellen Field, Faculty of Education, Lakehead University and Learning for a Sustainable Future*

3. **Project Updates** (5 min each)
 - 3.1. Integrated Watershed Management – *Kevin Trimble*
 - 3.1.1. Motion to approve the Water Management paper

THAT the paper titled "[The Evolution of Water Management in the Muskoka River Watershed](#)" by Chris Cragg dated November 2020 be approved and posted to the MWC website.
 - 3.2. Muskoka Watershed Advisory Group – *Patricia Arney*
 - 3.3. Algae Monitoring Program – *Peter Sale*
 - 3.4. MWC Strategic Plan – *Karen Maxwell*
 - 3.5. Official Plan Reviews – *Geoff Ross*
 - 3.6. MWC Communications – *Pete LeMoine*

4. **Partner Updates** (5 min each)
 - 4.1. Government Updates – *Open to elected municipal representatives and staff*
 - 4.1.1. Overview of the Muskoka Geohub, a new online portal that allows the public to access important geographical information in Muskoka – *Graham Good (10 min)*

4.2. Partner Updates (e.g., Province, District of Muskoka, Health Unit, Lake Associations, Community Organizations) – *Open to All*

5. **New Business**

6. **Adjournment**

Upcoming Muskoka Watershed Council Meeting

Friday, January 22nd at 1:00 pm through Zoom. This meeting will be MWC's Annual General Meeting.

Next Working Group Meeting

Thursday, December 3rd at 2:00 pm through Zoom.



Minutes

Friday, October 23, 2020

1:00 pm

Zoom Online Meeting

Present

Geoff Ross (Chair)
Margarete Cameron
Allen Edwards
Michael Peppard
Kevin Trimble

Patricia Arney
John Cooper
Pete LeMoine
Aaron Rusak

Sandy Cairns
George Crawford
Karen Maxwell
Peter Sale

Staff

Christy Doyle
Rochelle Jeffries

Rebecca Willison
Kevin Boyle

Samantha Hastings

Presenters

Meaghan Luis
Invasive Species Centre

Colin Cassin
Invasive Species Centre

Sarah Rang
Invasive Species Centre

Guests

Alison Brownlee
Sylvain Desjeans
Neil Stoop
Carolyn Gould
Linda Mathers
Deb Sparks

Cathy Oakden
Michelle Hudolin
Geoff Carleton
Michelle Fraser
Sarah Warren

Katherine Denune
Tamara Brincat
Gillian Mitchell
Sue McKenzie
Len Ring

Welcome

Geoff Ross called the meeting to order at 1:05 pm by welcoming everyone. Patricia Arney reported that the province has released the Muskoka Watershed Advisory Group's [interim report](#), which contains 19 recommendations on priority actions and projects to support the development and implementation of the Muskoka Watershed Conservation and Management Initiative.

Confirmation of Minutes

MOTION

THAT the minutes of the Muskoka Watershed Council meeting dated September 25, 2020 be approved.

CARRIED (by consent)

Correspondence

- Letter to the Muskoka Steamships and Discovery Centre in support of their application for a Climate Action and Awareness Grant.

- Letter from the Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks in response to MWC's letter re: environmental monitoring programs and laboratory services in the Province of Ontario during the COVID-19 outbreak.

Presentation

[Invasive species resources and tools to support Muskoka Watershed Communities](#) – Sarah Rang, Meaghan Luis and Colin Cassin, Invasive Species Centre

Sarah provided an introduction to the Invasive Species Centre and its various activities and resources. Meaghan highlighted some of the impacts of invasive species, followed by Collin, who provided some of the recent developments in invasive species legislation, infestation and eradication. He highlighted a recent report on the [economic impacts of invasive species](#), particularly for municipalities. Meaghan discussed some of the resources available to municipalities for managing invasive species, including the new [Municipal Community of Practice](#). She also introduced the Invasive Species Centre Support Services with a detailed list of services available on the ISC website.

The issue of mystery snails increasingly being found in Muskoka was raised during the question period. Tamara Brincat shared a factsheet on [Chinese Mystery Snails](#) and another on [Banded Mystery Snails](#) developed by the Severn Sound Environmental Association.

Following a question and answer period, Geoff thanked Sarah, Meaghan and Colin for their very informative presentation.

Climate Action Muskoka's "Declaration of Climate Emergency"

Samantha Hastings reported that District Council considered the resolution put forward by Climate Action Muskoka and, following much discussion, passed a resolution declaring a climate emergency. She noted that a corporate Climate Change Action Plan will be released by the end of the year, and a greenhouse gas inventory for both DMM and the community are being undertaken. She highlighted the typically process undertaken to implement large-scale programs like this, for instance, the Muskoka Water Strategy. Kevin Boyle provided an update on the Muskoka Climate Change Action Plan (MCCAP) and the District's actions around climate change.

Mike Peppard noted some of the unanswered questions that follow after declaring a climate emergency, such as how do we reduce GHG emissions by 50% by 2030?

Peter Sale would like MWC to decide how to proceed on the resolution independent of what DMM is doing. Peter has an issue with the way CAM has put together their proposal. He would like to see MWC support their declaration but remain independent on the way to get there (the actions). He suggested endorsing the resolution only and not the supporting narrative.

Allen Edwards agreed with Mike Peppard that District Council is supportive of declaring a climate emergency but would like to see the MCCAP before determining next steps.

Patricia Arney noted that the "community working group" proposed in the resolution is already being undertaken by a number of community groups, like MWC and CAM. Kevin Boyle clarified what the Stakeholder Working Group would be comprised of and what the purpose would be (i.e. moving actions forward).

Kevin Trimble is struggling with the details of the CAM resolution. MWC has endorsed IWM and many of the climate actions themselves are aligned with actions that will come out of IWM, but with IWM they will be at a watershed scale. He is disappointed that watershed management isn't mentioned in the resolution.

Christy Doyle noted that CAM is seeking MWC's formal endorsement of their 8-point resolution to declare a climate emergency and not of the supporting actions.

Peter suggested that MWC issue a media release about what specifically MWC is endorsing.

MOTION

Moved by Michael Peppard, seconded by Karen Maxwell

THAT Muskoka Watershed Council endorse Climate Action Muskoka's proposed attached "[Declaration of Climate Emergency Resolution](#)", given that climate change is unparalleled in terms of its scientific certainty, scale of impacts, and the required urgency for action as outlined in international and national evidence-based work, including MWC's own "Planning for Climate Change in Muskoka" report.

CARRIED

Next MWC Meeting

Friday, November 27th at 1:00 pm through Zoom. Featuring a presentation by Dr. Ellen Field from Learning for a Sustainable Future and Lakehead University on her Climate Change Education in Canada Research Study that establishes benchmarks of Canadians' understanding of climate change, their perspectives on climate change impacts and risks, and views on the role of schools and climate change education. We will also have a presentation by three students from the Trillium Lakelands District School Board's G7 Student Summit about the TLDSB climate change action plan created by students.

Adjournment

Geoff Ross adjourned the meeting at 3:05 pm.

Declaration of Climate Emergency Resolution, developed by members of Climate Action Muskoka

WHEREAS the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) 2018 Report ‘Global Warming of 1.5C’ states the urgency of keeping global heating below the 1.5C goal and also acknowledges that the world is currently on track for more than 3C increase in temperature rise based on policies that are now in place; and

WHEREAS this current track of climate heating will lead to catastrophic social, economic, cultural and environmental impacts in our community and elsewhere and that the IPCC estimates less than 11 years to avoid the worst impacts of climate change; and

WHEREAS many municipalities across Ontario and Canada understand the major benefits of and the need to be at the forefront of action on climate change, with many having declared a climate emergency already; and

WHEREAS much of the financial damage associated with climate change will come from impacts to municipal core infrastructure such as roads, bridges, water, wastewater and storm water systems and from destruction of natural infrastructure; and

WHEREAS it is necessary not only to reduce carbon emissions, but also to increase community resiliency in the face of climate change, and that these approaches can offer multiple benefits including improved health and air quality, increased innovation, economic development and reduced costs in the long run; and

WHEREAS many people in Muskoka have demonstrated a strong interest and commitment to address climate change and continue to make Muskoka a leader in environmental action and protection;

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT the District of Muskoka officially

1. Declare a Climate Emergency immediately to name and deepen the District’s commitment to protecting our economy, our community, and our ecosystems from the impacts of climate heating; and
2. Develop a Climate Action Plan (CAP) to reduce corporate and community greenhouse gas emissions (GHGs), which includes the identification of firm, ambitious targets with a goal of greater than 50% reduction of GHG emissions by 2030 and reaching zero GHG emissions by 2050; commit to becoming a drawdown/regenerative community, taking an active role in the repair and regeneration of our systems, including in the areas of the built environment, natural infrastructure, land use, transportation, energy, waste, health, and food security; and

3. Support and participate in the establishment of a Community Working Group, which will provide input to the CAP and will assist in the regular review and updating of the CAP as the science evolves. The Community Working Group should be diverse and representative of the Muskoka community; be balanced according to ethnic background, geography, economic status, gender identity, age; act in partnership with Indigenous leaders; and include scientists and other key stakeholders; and
4. Collaborate with other municipal governments, institutions and industry associations to improve standards and protocols that can positively address climate adaptation and mitigation; and
5. Seek and secure funding opportunities from both internal and external sources for 2020 and beyond to adequately finance climate actions necessary to meet 2030 and 2050 emission reduction targets; and
6. Commit to putting climate action at the forefront of all decision-making, large and small, working to achieve community wellbeing and resiliency, equity, reconciliation, and leaving no one behind. Require all future reports to council to include a section titled Climate Change Implications that will identify how the recommendations will contribute to meeting the objectives of the CAP; and
7. Work with other community stakeholders to educate the public at large about steps that can be taken by individuals and businesses to reduce GHGs; and
8. Urge both Provincial and Federal governments and opposition parties to work rapidly to deliver the GHG emission reductions needed to keep global heating below the 1.5C goal to minimize the life-threatening impacts of climate change. Forward the resolution to the Premier of Ontario, the Ontario Minister of Environment, Conservation and Parks, the Association of Municipalities of Ontario, Parry Sound Muskoka representatives Hon. Norm Miller MPP and Hon. Scott Aitchison MP, and the leaders of the other political parties.



MUSKOKA WATERSHED COUNCIL

70 Pine Street, Bracebridge, ON P1L 1N3 T: (705) 645-2100 x4387
E: info@muskokawatershed.org W: www.muskokawatershed.org

13 November 2020

To: Linda Mathers
Climate Action Muskoka

Submitted by email to climateactionmuskoka@gmail.com

Dear Ms. Mathers,

RE: Endorsement of Declaring a Climate Emergency

Muskoka Watershed Council (MWC) welcomed Climate Action Muskoka's presentation of February 6, 2020 regarding your proposed Climate Emergency Resolution. Then, and now, we are supportive of urgent action on the part of all governments and agencies to deal with climate change mitigation and adaptation. We strongly support CAM's proposed resolution for a municipal declaration of a climate emergency from District and Area Municipalities across Muskoka.

At the Muskoka Watershed Council meeting on October 23, 2020 the following resolution was passed:

Moved by Michael Peppard, seconded by Karen Maxwell

THAT Muskoka Watershed Council endorse Climate Action Muskoka's proposed attached "Declaration of Climate Emergency Resolution", given that climate change is unparalleled in terms of its scientific certainty, scale of impacts, and the required urgency for action as outlined in international and national evidence-based work, including MWC's own "Planning for Climate Change in Muskoka" report.

CARRIED

Formal endorsement of actions or proposals by outside groups is something that is rarely, if ever, done by MWC. It has been a long-standing MWC policy that we typically do not engage in advocacy for or against specific proposals. Years ago, MWC reasoned it could be much more effective if it focused on providing scientifically-informed advice for public consideration on specific topics, but not by endorsing specific proposals, programs, policies or products put forward by external organizations or individuals.

However, CAM's proposed resolution is quite unique due to the overwhelming scientific evidence that action is urgently needed throughout the world on climate change. Science tells us clearly that without mitigative action, the health of the ecosystems upon which Muskoka's environment and economy are dependent is certain to be seriously impaired, and without adaptive action, the well-being of all Muskokans is directly threatened. This is evidenced throughout MWC's own recent work on "Planning for Climate Change in Muskoka"

(<https://www.muskokawatershed.org/resources/planning-for-climate-change/>), which builds on data from international and national sources. Climate change is unparalleled in terms of its scientific certainty, scale of impacts, and the required urgency for action. In response, CAM's proposed resolution calls for appropriate action in a non-prescriptive and broadly collaborative context. It is in recognition of these factors that MWC is prepared to take the unusual but important step of endorsing CAM's proposed resolution.

As MWC staff discussed with you earlier this month, it is MWC's understanding that the proposed resolution contains eight points, with additional information outlining supportive material and examples. I wish to be clear that while many of the examples appear to be reasonable, MWC is offering to endorse only CAM's proposed 8-point resolution (Appendix A) and not the accompanying supporting examples or strategies. MWC recognizes that successful implementation of the resolution as presently proposed is primarily in the jurisdiction of all levels of government. However, even without having its own regulatory power, MWC pledges to advance and assist all related initiatives and collaborations where possible to ensure that any municipal declaration of a climate emergency in Muskoka is met with active, evidence-based engagement from us. Once we have received your acknowledgement of MWC's offer to endorse CAM's proposed 8-point resolution, we will be pleased to have MWC's name and/or logo added to CAM's lengthy list of organizations endorsing this important initiative.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'G Ross', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Geoff Ross, Chair

Declaration of Climate Emergency Resolution, developed by members of Climate Action Muskoka

WHEREAS the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) 2018 Report ‘Global Warming of 1.5C’ states the urgency of keeping global heating below the 1.5C goal and also acknowledges that the world is currently on track for more than 3C increase in temperature rise based on policies that are now in place; and

WHEREAS this current track of climate heating will lead to catastrophic social, economic, cultural and environmental impacts in our community and elsewhere and that the IPCC estimates less than 11 years to avoid the worst impacts of climate change; and

WHEREAS many municipalities across Ontario and Canada understand the major benefits of and the need to be at the forefront of action on climate change, with many having declared a climate emergency already; and

WHEREAS much of the financial damage associated with climate change will come from impacts to municipal core infrastructure such as roads, bridges, water, wastewater and storm water systems and from destruction of natural infrastructure; and

WHEREAS it is necessary not only to reduce carbon emissions, but also to increase community resiliency in the face of climate change, and that these approaches can offer multiple benefits including improved health and air quality, increased innovation, economic development and reduced costs in the long run; and

WHEREAS many people in Muskoka have demonstrated a strong interest and commitment to address climate change and continue to make Muskoka a leader in environmental action and protection;

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT the District of Muskoka officially

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5. Seek and secure funding opportunities from both internal and external sources for 2020 and beyond to adequately finance climate actions necessary to meet 2030 and 2050 emission reduction targets; and
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THE EVOLUTION OF

Water Management

IN THE MUSKOKA RIVER WATERSHED



By Chris Cragg
November 2020

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Introduction

With 42 dams and 36 lakes connected by over 170 km of rivers, the Muskoka River Watershed is among the most complex in the Province. Management of the water in this watershed has evolved over 80 years to balance many competing needs, including, but not limited to, hydro electric power, transportation, tourism, environmental protection and shoreline landowners. Constrained by its backbone geology, management of water must adapt to a range of seasonal weather inputs plus an increasing frequency of extreme events driven by climate change. To fully understand the challenges of improving water management in this dynamic environment requires an appreciation of a broad range of information which is currently scattered in diverse sources. Without this appreciation there is a tendency to believe that changing the flow regime in the watershed is a simple matter.

This paper synthesizes watershed information from disparate sources for use by the “Water Quantity Task Force” recommended by the Muskoka Watershed Advisory Group (MWAG) in its Interim Report¹ and is also intended to enhance public understanding of the complexity of water management.

History of Water Management in Muskoka

*Dams and locks were originally constructed in the Muskoka River Watershed to enable transportation, industry and power production...but **not** to control water levels or stop flooding.*

Steamboat transport was largely responsible, along with land grants, for opening up Muskoka. Major adjustments were made to lake elevations and connections from 1869 to 1873 to facilitate navigation². A cut was made at Port Sandfield to better link Lakes Rosseau and Joseph. This eliminated an 18-inch water elevation difference between these lakes. Locks were built at Port Carling establishing a 2 ft difference between Lakes Rosseau and Muskoka/Indian River where before there had only been 1 ft. Sandbars were dredged along the Indian River and at the mouth of the Muskoka River, and

the falls at Bala were regulated by construction of the North control dam. Prior to this dam being built in 1873, there were water level fluctuations of several feet on Lake Muskoka³. The narrows around Bala Park Island were dredged of debris shortly afterward.

Lumbering was a major industry in Muskoka, so further dams and log chutes were built to facilitate the transport of logs to sawmills at Gravenhurst and other railheads⁴. The last major log drive was in 1930. Dams were built at Baysville (Lake of Bays) in 1873, Huntsville (Fairy Lake) in 1876, Port Sydney (Mary Lake) in 1881, and Hollow Lake (now named Kawagama Lake) in 1890. The Baysville Dam was replaced with a larger dam in 1918, which raised Lake of Bays 5 ft.

¹ Witzel, M. et al, 2020. “Interim Advice and Recommendations to Address Priority Environmental Issues in the Muskoka River Watershed”, <https://www.ontario.ca/page/advisory-group-report-protecting-muskoka-river-watershed>, 76pp.

² Tatley, R. 1983. The Steamboat Era in the Muskokas, Volume 1, To The Golden Years, Boston Mills Press, 304pp.

³ Tatley, R. 1983. The Steamboat Era in the Muskokas, Volume 1, To The Golden Years, Boston Mills Press, 304pp.

⁴ Long, G. 1989. This River the Muskoka, Boston Mills Press, 184pp

Between these and several smaller dams near Algonquin Park, the Department of Public Works (DPW) took over control of all storage works in 1926⁵.

Bracebridge started the move to town electric power by building Ontario's first municipal hydroelectric plant at Bracebridge Falls in 1894⁶. They added a second plant at Wilson Falls in 1910. The Hydro Electric Power Commission of Ontario (HEPC) then built several run-of-the-river plants along the South Branch of the Muskoka River: South Falls (1904), Hanna Chute (1926) and Trethewey Falls (1929). Then they built larger plants on the Musquash River: Ragged Rapids (1938) and Big Eddy (1941). None of these "run-of-the-river" plants has a headpond but they do take advantage of the water storage in Lake of Bays and Kawagama Lake impounded by the Kawagama Dam and the Baysville Dam. HEPC was the original constructor and owner of the Kawagama Dam as well as a contributor to several other impoundment dams. The lack of headponds on the river-located hydroelectric plants means they cannot store significant volumes of water. The minor storage they do have, known as pondage, allows them to respond to short term (morning and evening) peak electricity demands. The upstream storage does allow seasonal response to the winter electricity demand. To make more efficient use of their investment would require altered management of the water stored by these dams. This realization led to cooperation between DPW and HEPC formalized in the 1940 Hackner-Holden Agreement. The 1940 Agreement established water levels for summer navigation and then optimized water usage for power generation at other times. By 1969, other interests needed to be accommodated so the agreement was

revised to reduce lake fluctuations on cottage developed lakes, set timing of winter drawdown, limit spring drawdown on Lake trout lakes, and limit Lake Joseph drawdown to prevent freezing of water intake lines⁷. The redesign of the electricity market in Ontario in the late 1990's led to the introduction of Water Management Plans throughout the Province. Currently, there are about 70 such plans, 50 of which are rated as "simple" and 20 as "complex". The Muskoka River Water Management Plan (MRWMP) was

completed in 2006 to replace the Hackner-Holden Agreement. A wider range of interests were input to the MRWMP, however, there was little change to the original navigation levels from 1940. The progressive plan changes did lessen the amount of storage, particularly on the South Branch of the Muskoka River, which has reduced the attenuation of peak flows in this part of the watershed and increased the risk of peak flows from the North and South Branches arriving simultaneously in the Lower Subwatershed.

The original 1940 water management agreement balanced navigation, industry and power production usages. Subsequent iterations accommodated other interests with little change to summer water levels but reduced storage in the south branch.

Watershed Description

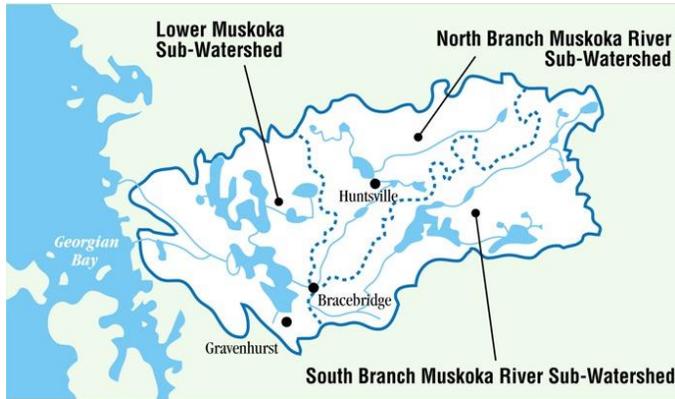
The Muskoka River Watershed is a tertiary level watershed that extends from Algonquin Park to Georgian Bay, a distance of 120 km, covering an area of 5,100 km² and including some 2,000 lakes with a lake area of 780 km² (15% of the watershed). Within the watershed the Muskoka River traverses a length of 210 km and falls 345 m in elevation. Some 60% of this elevation drop

⁵ Hackner Holden Agreement, 1940. Muskoka River – Notes of Conferences and Agreements Re Lake Levels and River Flow.

⁶ Boyer, R.J. 1994. Power from Water, Muskoka Publications Press, 84pp.

⁷ Hackner Holden Agreement, 1969. Addendum No. 1 to Notes of Conferences and Agreements Re Lake Levels and River Flow.

occurs in the first 30% of the river's length⁸. The Muskoka River Watershed can be divided into three main basins, or sub-watersheds: the **North Branch** of the Muskoka River (1,655 km²); the **South Branch** of the Muskoka River (1,755 km²) and the Lower Muskoka Sub-watershed, containing **Lakes Muskoka, Rosseau, Joseph** and the outflow **Moon and Musquash Rivers**. Each basin comprises about a third of the total area (Figure 1).



Further divisions of the Muskoka River Watershed into quaternary watershed areas are shown in Figure 2 and Table 1 below.

Figure 1. The three main basins of the Muskoka River Watershed as identified in the Muskoka River Water Management Plan⁹.



Figure 2. Map of the quaternary watersheds within the Muskoka River Watershed.

⁸ Hatch Engineering Report, February 12, 2020. Technical Report for Muskoka River Floodplain Mapping Study, The District Municipality of Muskoka, H356689-0000-200-0002, Rev.0, Ver.04.03, 131pp.
⁹ Muskoka River Water Management Plan, 2006. Final Plan Report.

Table 1. Characteristics of the quaternary watersheds in the Muskoka River Watershed.¹⁰

Quaternary Watershed	Area	Wetlands		Interior Forest		Lakes		
	km ²	%	km ²	km ²	%	#>8ha	km ²	%
North Branch								
Big East River	647	5	34	373	58	47	54	8
Little East River	96	7	8	47	49	13	8	9
Mary Lake	663	11	73	328	49	45	66	10
North Muskoka River	249	9	22	115	46	21	11	4
	1655	8	137	863	52	126	139	8
South Branch								
Oxtongue	607	5	30	319	53	38	76	13
Hollow	408	4	16	211	52	43	66	16
Lake of Bays	385	6	23	173	45	25	85	22
South Muskoka River	355	12	42	192	54	27	27	8
	1755	6	111	895	51	133	253	14
Lower Muskoka TO Bala								
Rosseau River	129	15	19	78	60	7	5	3
Skeleton River	92	6	5	36	39	11	24	26
Dee River	148	11	16	64	43	7	12	8
Lake Rosseau	426	5	21	117	27	52	135	32
Lake Muskoka	430	8	34	120	28	30	140	33
	1225	8	95	415	34	107	316	26
Lower Muskoka BELOW Bala								
Moon River	715	11	47	298	42	37	76	11
Gibson River	186	17	32	84	45	10	16	9
	901	9	79	382	42	47	92	10

This detail shows the North Branch has the least amount of lake area to contain surface water and attenuate flood flows¹¹. As a result, the North Branch contributes half the flow to Lake Muskoka and delivers it faster than the South Branch. Flow from the upper lakes is usually under 17% of the total inflow. Forests cover over 50% of the North Branch and South Branch Sub-watersheds, while development has reduced the coverage to under one third of the Lower Muskoka Sub-watershed.

The Muskoka River Watershed sits atop the Canadian Shield with prominent Precambrian bedrock outcroppings covered by thin soils (<3 m). The exception to this is a band of deep sand deposits, frequently over 25 m thick, following along the Highway 11 corridor which is the former beach ridge/shoreline of glacial Lake Algonquin. Figure 3 shows the general geology of the Muskoka River Watershed.

¹⁰ Muskoka Watershed Council, 2018. Watershed Report Card.

¹¹ Muskoka Watershed Council, 2018. Watershed Report Card.

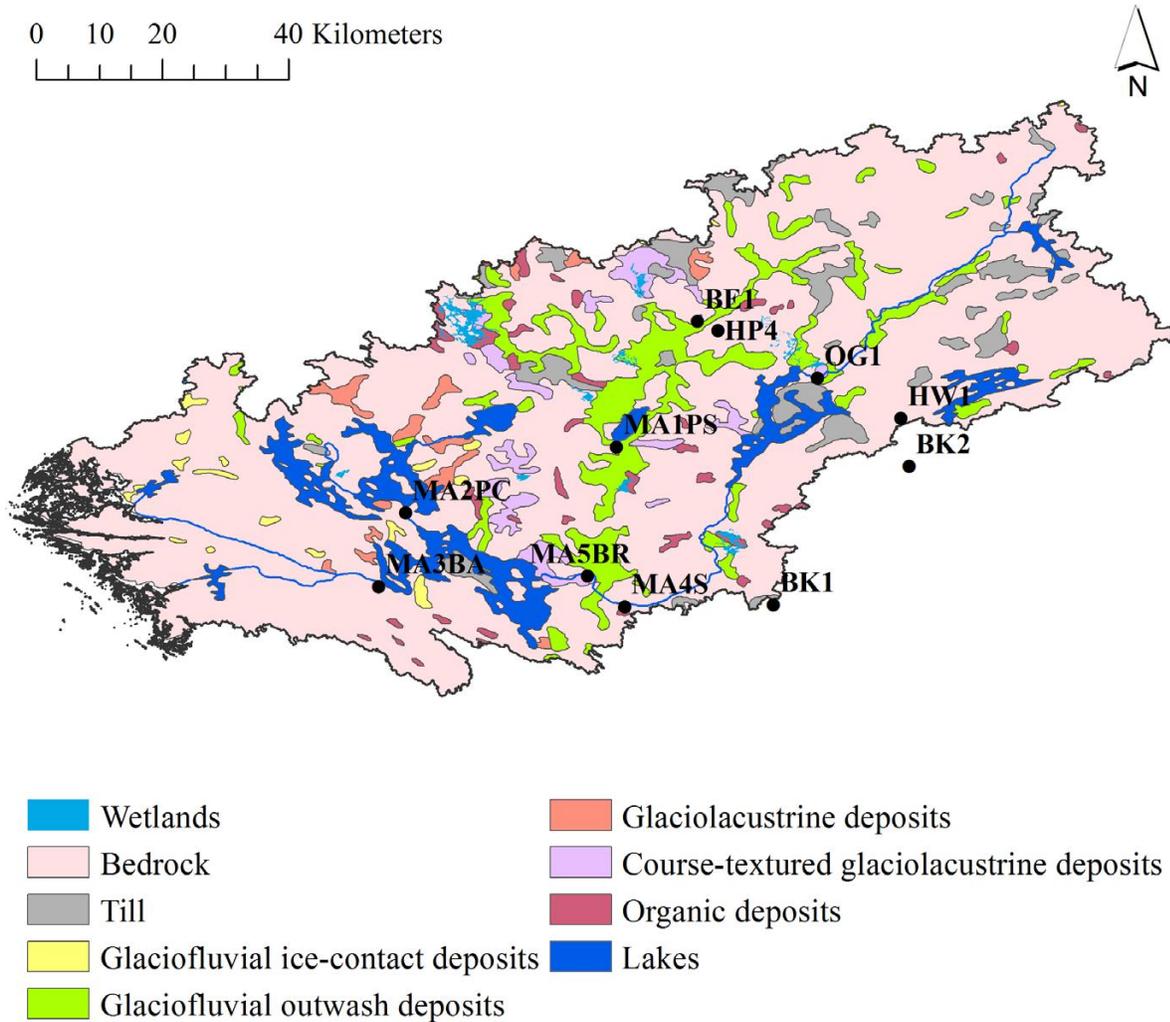


Figure 3. Quaternary geology of the Muskoka River Watershed¹².

The combination of steep topography, few lakes and large areas of exposed bedrock make the upper reaches of the watershed, particularly the Big East River, prone to rapid runoff and flash flooding.

Enhancing storage in the North Branch or South Branch Sub-watersheds and making use of wetlands, maintaining forests and, where possible, restoring forests in the Lower Muskoka Sub-watershed offer potential options to mitigating flooding in the watershed.

¹² James, A.L., et al, 2020, "The Isotope Hydrology of the Muskoka River Watershed, Ontario, Canada", Hydrological Processes, 34, 914-926.

Technical Considerations

Let's start with a basic water balance (Figure 4). When precipitation falls on the land in Muskoka, approximately 50% of it returns to the air via evaporation or, courtesy of the vegetation, evapotranspiration, seasonally. There is no significant evapotranspiration in winter¹³. The remainder either flows overland to the lakes and rivers or seeps into the ground and becomes groundwater. In winter, due to frozen, saturated soil plus snow and ice cover, a high percentage potentially runs off. In summer, dry ground absorbs more precipitation and much less runs off. Typical runoff values for hard surfaces, such as roads or ice crusted snow, may be up to 80%. Summer values for forested areas range from 5-20%.

The first practical implication of the water balance is that any improvement in evapotranspiration or decrease in the runoff coefficient reduces the amount of surface water flowing through the watershed and, consequently, reduces flooding. Maintaining and improving forest health is important to regulating the water cycle¹⁴ and has the potential to increase annual evapotranspiration by some 20%¹⁵. Similarly, reducing hard surfaces on a property and diverting surface runoff through collection ponds encourages infiltration into the ground and slows impacts on lake levels. Allowing precipitation to infiltrate into the ground also keeps surface contaminants from being washed into the lake, thus improving water quality.

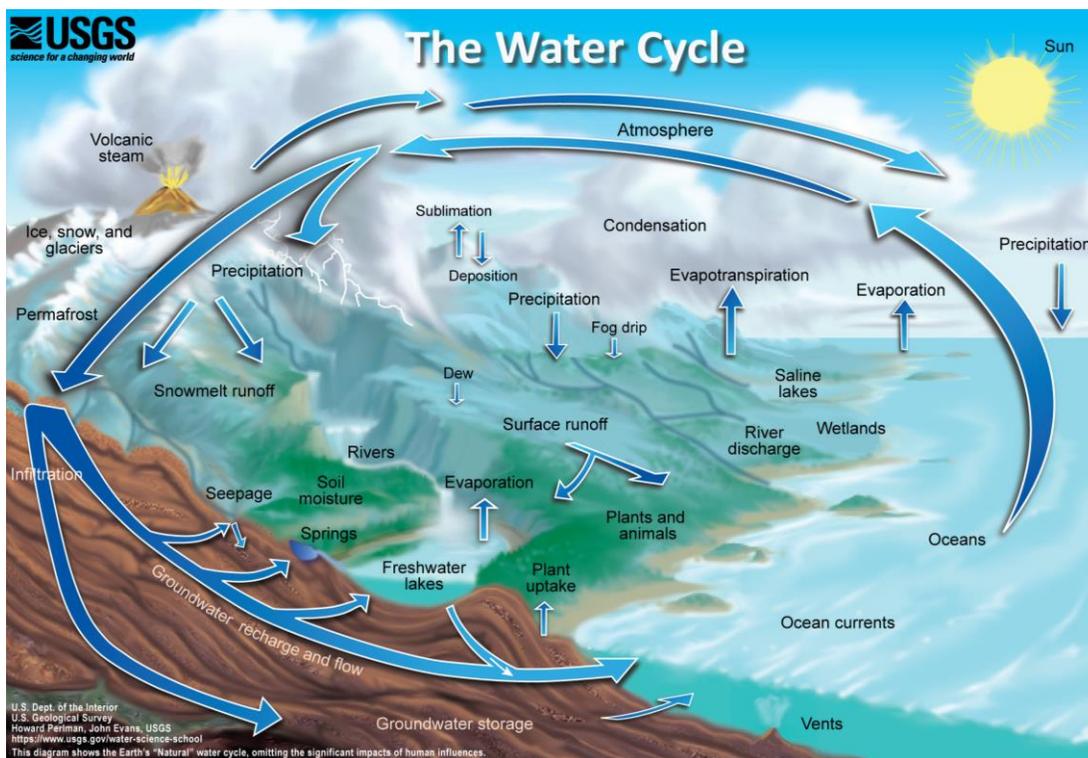


Figure 4. A diagram showing the Earth's "Natural" water cycle, omitting the significant impacts of human influences. Credit: Howard Perlman and John Evans, US Geological Survey.

¹³ Sinnige, J. 2020. Personal communication re: monthly evapotranspiration in Ontario.

¹⁴ Kozil, N. et al, 2020. Partitioning growing season water balance within a forested boreal catchment using sap flux, eddy covariance and a process-based model. *Hydrol. Earth Syst. Sci.*, 24, 2999-3014.

¹⁵ Green, M.B. et al, 2013. Decreased water flowing from a forest amended with calcium silicate. *PNAS*, Vol 110, No 15, pp5999-6003.

Lake Muskoka is the farthest downstream major lake in the watershed and acts as a tailwater lake. Over 90% of the watershed flows through Lake Muskoka en route to Georgian Bay via the Moon and Musquash Rivers. Due to such physical factors as distance, slope and surface roughness, rainfall in Algonquin Park takes some eight to ten days to peak in Lake Muskoka. By contrast, Lakes Rosseau and Joseph are essentially headwater lakes. They are predominantly filled by rain on their surface and surrounding lands and can produce peak water levels in a couple of days. Figure 5 shows generically how lake levels rise after a storm due to overland surface runoff, then recede when excess water drains from the local watershed.

In springtime the rainfall impact in Figure 5 is superimposed on snowmelt. The water contribution from the snow is released by melting temperatures with daytime temperatures above 10°C and/or nighttime temperatures above 0°C causing accelerated melting. Melting can contribute to runoff in the range of 1 to 5 mm/hr/°C.

Due to the complexities of selecting the factors for runoff, historical measurements of streamflow in response to weather impacts on a watershed are generally used for watershed hydraulic analyses.

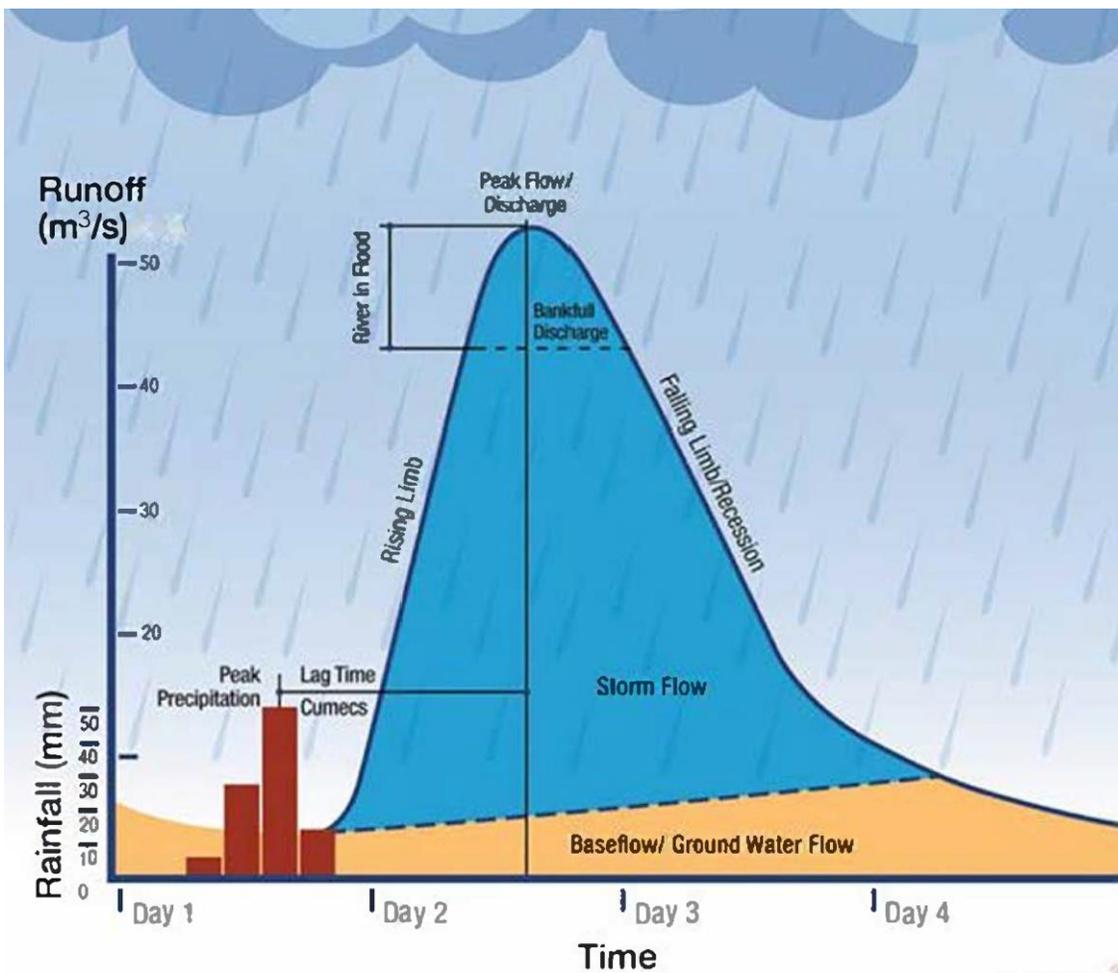
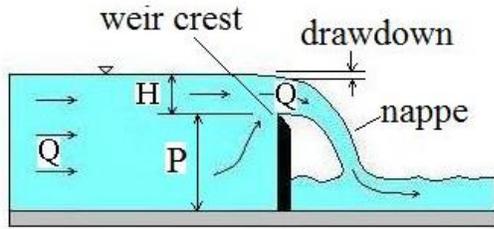


Figure 5. Flood hydrograph showing the typical flow of water during a precipitation event.

Impact of Water Retaining Structures



Flow Over a Sharp Crested Weir

There is a widespread belief that lowering lake levels ahead of a spring freshet will directly prevent flooding. This assumes that lakes have vertical sides, like swimming pools, which is not the case. Lake shores may be as steep as 1:1 (Horizontal to Vertical) in rocky areas but could be as flat as 20:1 where sandy shorelines exist. Also, the lake bottom is not flat but dotted by many shoals that become exposed as the water is lowered. Just ask anyone who has unexpectedly dinged a propeller during low water in fall season. Collectively less storage is gained as lake

levels are drawn down. This means that extra drawdown has progressively less benefit for storage. Second, there is a negative consequence to lowering any lake upstream of a control dam, as lowering water level reduces the flow quantity that can pass the dam due to the weir equation (left). In this equation, flow over the dam sluice is proportional to the height of water above the sill (bottom) of the sluice. The higher the water level (H), the faster the flow (Q). And, conversely, the lower the water level above the sill, the slower the flow.

As an example, during the 2019 flood, inflow to Lake Muskoka peaked at $500 \text{ m}^3/\text{s}$ while outflow at Bala did not build to $400 \text{ m}^3/\text{s}$ until several days later (Figure 6). By this time inflow had decreased to match the $400 \text{ m}^3/\text{s}$ outflow. During the time inflow exceeded outflow, lake levels rose rapidly. Contrary to popular belief, modestly lower drawdown levels do not make an appreciable improvement in peak water levels as the build rate (rate of water level rise with inflow) eliminates the drawdown gain in a few hours to a day.

Three choke points restrict flow entering Bala Bay to the extent that, during floods, Bala Bay water levels are 0.3 to 0.5 m lower than the general level of Lake Muskoka. This means that the flow capacity of the North and South control dams (over $400 \text{ m}^3/\text{s}$ last year) exceeds the inflow capacity of the choke points.

Early in 2020 the flow capacity at Bala was augmented by the addition of the North Bala Generating Station ($92 \text{ m}^3/\text{s}$). The plant intake is at a lower elevation than the dam sills which has the potential to enhance outflow capability for Bala Bay.

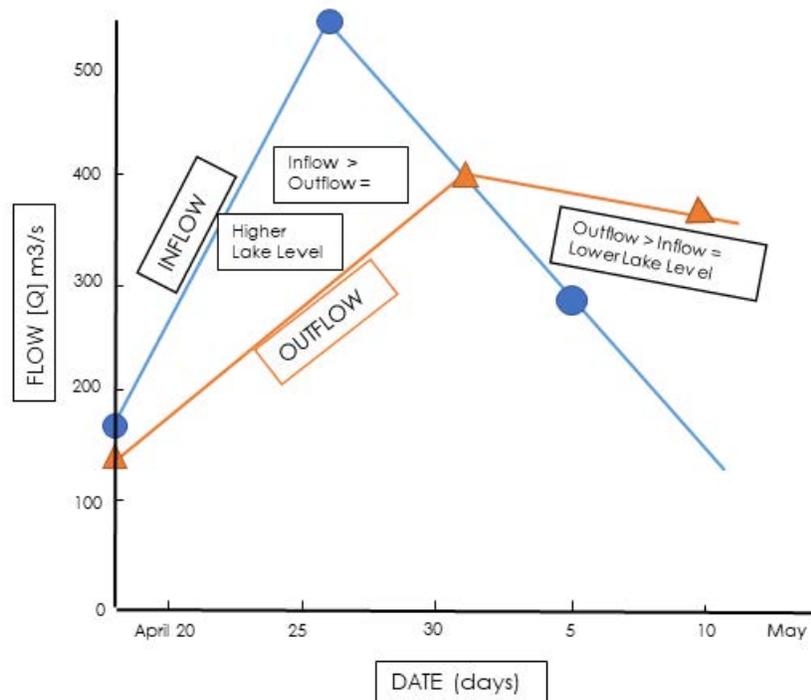


Figure 6. Chart of inflows vs outflows at Bala Bay in the spring of 2019.

The Current Water Management Plan

The 2006 Muskoka River Water Management Plan¹⁶ (MRWMP) incorporates the experience the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry (MNRF) has accumulated since 1965 in Snow Water Equivalent (SWE) measurement across the watershed and operating experience back to 1940. With 42 dams/generating stations, the MRWMP has the most structures of the 20 complex Water Management Plans in the Province. The water levels in the plan are based on a custom hydrological model of the Muskoka River Watershed and employed weather data for the period from 1970 to 2000 in its modelling. Rule curves, representing average conditions, are defined for each structure/waterbody. Operational flexibility is given within a Normal Operating Zone (NOZ) with deviation permitted in response to defined snow, rain and thawing temperature triggers. Specifically, lower winter drawdowns are triggered if SWE is more than 25% of mean snowfall on the North Branch or more than 50% above mean snowfall on the South Branch. Even deeper drawdown is triggered by 100% exceedance of mean SWE. These deeper drawdowns may be implemented in advance based on snow cores. Drawdowns to the bottom of NOZ may also be triggered by rain events exceeding 25 mm (1 in) on frozen ground or by temperatures exceeding 10°C for two days or by nighttime temperature above 0°C for more than 2 days. However, these latter drawdowns cannot be done in advance but, rather, wait until actual weather occurs. There is no reliance placed on weather forecasts, even short-term forecasts, being accurate. Currently the best accuracy for weather is only 48 hours in advance and temperature predictions are better than precipitation forecasts. It is well known that combination weather events (rain + snow + melt) pose the greatest risks for flooding. The MRWMP does not provide guidance on drawdowns for combination weather events.

In terms of storage capacity, the 2006 MRWMP is little changed from the 1969 version. The main difference is less winter drawdown in Kawagama Lake to reduce spawning impacts on Lake trout. Another small change (8 ha) was the decommissioning of the Findlayson Pond dam on the Big East River¹⁷.

Fish Spawning Impacts

Fishing in Muskoka are lakes is a significant contributor to the tourism industry¹⁸. Water levels and flows in the MRWMP have features to protect the spawning of Lake trout and Pickerel (Walleye). There are approximately 32 lakes in Muskoka classified as "Lake trout lakes" by the MNRF. For these lakes, water is drawn down in the fall spawning season to encourage the trout to lay eggs on spawning shoals deep enough to avoid freezing of the fry hatchlings during spring drawdown. Spring drawdown of Kawagama Lake was limited to 0.2 m below Fall drawdown in the 2006 MRWMP based on a 2004 spawning study¹⁹. The revision of lake drawdown was aimed at reducing mortality from an unacceptable 30% to a projected 6%. A follow up study in 2007 found significantly reduced mortality but not as good as the 6% target²⁰.

¹⁶ Muskoka River Water Management Plan, 2006. Final Plan Report.

¹⁷ Donnelly, C.R. et al, 2005. "Once removed – decommissioning Findlayson dam", Water Power magazine, 16 May 2005.

¹⁸ Paterson, A. Sept 18, 2019. Water quality of aquatic ecosystems in Muskoka, Presentation to MWAG, 58pp.

¹⁹ Acres International, May 2004. Kawagama Lake – Lake Trout Spawning Studies, Report for Ministry of Natural Resources, P15380.00, 66pp.

²⁰ Azimuth Environmental Consulting Inc. February 2007. Lake Trout Spawning and Egg Disposition Survey in Kawagama Lake, Report for Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources, AEC 06-213/214, 33pp.

The reduced storage capacity in Kawagama Lake reduces the ability of the South Branch of the Muskoka River to slow the passage of flood peaks and increases the risk of peak flows from the North and South Branches arriving simultaneously in the Lower Muskoka Sub-watershed.

Spawning beds for Walleye at the mouth of the Moon River entering Georgian Bay were enhanced in 2008 by the Moon River Walleye Rehabilitation Initiative. Fluctuations in Georgian Bay water levels are beyond the scope of this paper but are well treated elsewhere²¹.

Hence the importance of adopting a watershed wide view afforded by Integrated Watershed Management (IWM), which allows the competing interests of flood mitigation and lake ecology to be reviewed to ensure that any single alteration is assessed for implications throughout the watershed.

Recent Water Quantity Experience

Since the implementation of the 2006 MRWMP, flood levels have been experienced in most major lakes across the watershed in three years: 2013, 2016 and 2019 (Table 2). These events appear to be strongly correlated with very heavy rain on frozen ground events [ie >51 mm or 2"] which were not anticipated in the MRWMP (Table 3). Table 4 shows that these events have occurred six times in the 20 years since 2000. By contrast, far fewer extreme rain events occurred during the 30-year period of record used for the MRWMP. But very heavy rainfall is not enough by itself to produce a spring freshet flood. It is the combination of events - extreme rain plus a secondary heavy rain plus snowmelt that produces the volumes of water that "overwhelms" both the storage and the flow capacity of the watershed to contain water within the desired confines of lake and river shorelines. When this occurs, nearshore floodplains are inundated, including any lakeside structures.

Recent work by Lammers²² indicates that the 2019 flood produced one cubic kilometer of water that had to be routed through the watershed's lakes and rivers. This work calculated the available storage capacity of the lakes, when drawn down, to be 0.6 km³. The remaining 0.4 km³ water volume had to flow through the system in a few days. This flow is impeded in several places by channel restrictions, also known as choke points. Some of the better-known choke points are:

- The Moon Chutes – restrict outflow from Bala Reach to the Moon and Musquash Rivers [85 m³/s*]
- Bala Park Island narrows [Wallis Cut, Jannack Narrows, Coulter Narrows] - restrict outflow from Lake Muskoka into Bala Bay
- The Muskoka River delta – increases flooding of residential and business properties along Muskoka River between Bracebridge and Lake Muskoka
- The Main Street Bridge in Huntsville – causes flow to flood downtown properties [50 m³/s*]
- Port Carling small lock channel [30 m³/s*]

*Flow in cubic meters of water per second

The amount of lake level or river level rise behind each choke point depends on the quantity of inflow, the size of the "reservoir" behind the choke point and the individual flow characteristics

²¹ Egan, D. 2017. The Death and Life of the Great Lakes, W.W.Norton & Company, 333pp.

²² Sale, P. et al. 2020. The Case for Integrated Watershed Management in Muskoka, Muskoka Watershed Council, 25pp.

of the choke point. Examples of lake level rise versus inflow are shown in Figures 7 and 8 for Lake Muskoka and Bala Reach, respectively.

The flow volume calculation²³ can be repeated for other flood and 'near miss' years to establish a reference "flood volume" for watershed management purposes. Annual margin against flooding can then be assessed by subtracting the snow [SWE] and "normal" rainfall from the "flood volume". This process may form the basis for a risk-based approach to modifying the drawdown triggers in the MRWMP.

Table 2. Peak spring water levels (in metres) for major lakes in Muskoka from 2003 to 2019.

NOZ top level	225.75	226.25	315.38	281.1	284.15	355.7
Flood Level	225.97	226.37	315.5	281.15	284.62	356.07

Gauge Location	Beaumaris Max (m)	Port Carling Max (m)	Baysville Max (m)	Port Sydney Max (m)	Fairy Lake Max (m)	Kawagama Max (m)
2019	226.45	226.44	315.53	281.58	284.95	355.80
2018	225.60	226.18	315.40	280.89	283.98	355.76
2017	225.91	226.37	315.47	281.13	284.26	355.88
2016	226.04	226.47	315.54	281.09	284.25	355.72
2015	225.73	226.27	315.33	281.18	284.43	355.74
2014	225.84	226.34	315.37	281.01	284.11	355.67
2013	226.15	226.46	315.57	281.44	284.80	356.21
2012	225.59	226.20	315.32	280.93	284.18	355.61
2011	225.67	226.26	315.42	281.00	284.05	355.73
2010	225.54	226.18	315.29	280.88	283.98	355.63
2009	225.74	226.21	315.37	280.97	284.15	355.74
2008	225.93	226.35	315.41	281.05	284.26	355.72
2007	225.72	226.21	315.33	281.09	284.16	355.61
2006	225.65	226.17	315.37	280.95	284.00	355.69
2005	225.59	226.16	315.32	280.87	283.83	355.70
2004	225.66	226.22	315.36	280.96	284.01	355.74
2003	225.66	226.17	315.33	280.95	284.03	355.65

	Record Flood Level
	Flood above MRWMP Flood level
	Near Miss - Flood just below MRWMP Flood level

²³ Sale, P. et al, 2020. The Case for Integrated Watershed Management in Muskoka, Muskoka Watershed Council, 25pp.

Table 3. Flooding factors (orange shading indicates a flood on Lake Muskoka).

Year	Rain >51 mm [over 2 days]	2 nd Rain >25 mm [Within 6 days]	SWE > Normal	Flooding [Lake Muskoka]
2019	Yes [58 mm]	Yes	Yes [187 mm]	Yes
2016	Yes [55 mm]	Yes	No [82 mm]	Yes
2013	Yes [76 mm]	Yes	Yes [134 mm]	Yes
2008	No [46 mm]	No	Yes [194 mm]	No
2007	Yes [57 mm]	No	No [87mm]	No
1998	Yes [57 mm]	No	No [125mm]	No
1985	Yes [59 mm]	Yes	Yes [202 mm]	Yes

Table 4. Frequency of spring rain storms.

Time Period	# Spring Storms > 51 mm	# Spring Storms > 25 mm
2000 – 2019 [20 years]	6	31
1970 – 1999 [30 years]	3	30

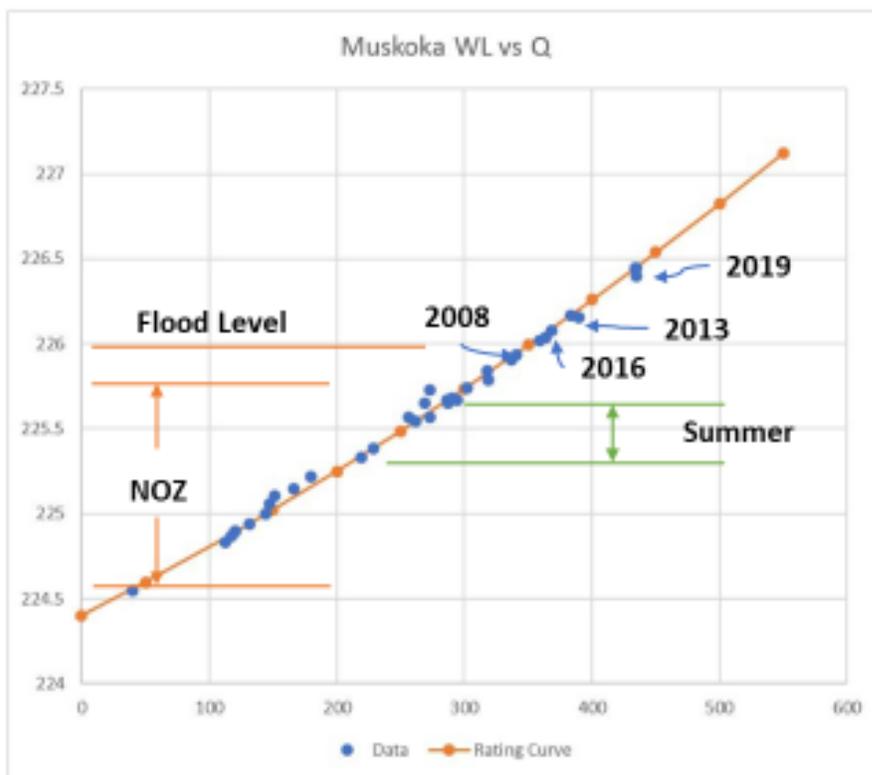


Figure 7. Lake elevation (metres) versus Inflow (Q in m³s) for Lake Muskoka²⁴.

²⁴ Hatch Engineering Report, February 12, 2020. Technical Report for Muskoka River Flood Plain Mapping Study, The District Municipality of Muskoka, H356689-00000-200-230-0002, Rev.0, Ver. 04.03, 131pp.

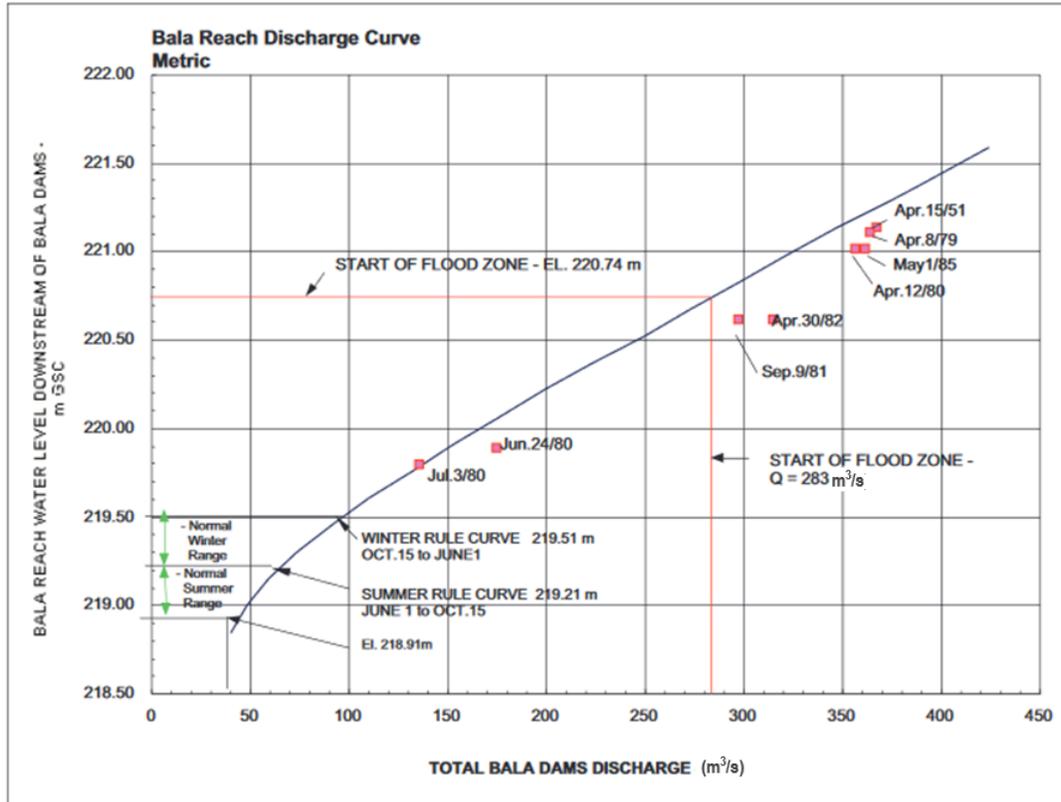


Figure 8. Elevation versus Inflow for Bala Reach²⁵.

Climate Change Implications

Recent climate change studies²⁶ forecast earlier and higher winter/spring flows and less summer flow (Figure 9). They also predict increased frequency of higher volume storms. Figure 10 shows that the current 1 in 50-year recurrence time storm may be a 1 in 10-year storm by year 2100. This means that the conditions that gave rise to the floods of 2013, 2016 and 2019 are predicted to occur more frequently in the future. This also means that when mitigation of floods is being considered, solutions need to be watershed based with preference given to increasing upstream storage over increasing flow past choke points, as upstream storage will also help mitigate lower summer flows/potential droughts.

It is recommended to assess all major upstream wetland areas as potential flood storage locations. These natural assets could be evaluated as the initial part of an integrated watershed management plan (IWM). IWM is an evidence-based approach to addressing land use decisions, environmental projects, infrastructure projects and broader public policy options on a watershed scale.

²⁵ Muskoka River Water Management Plan, 2006. Final Plan Report.

²⁶ Environment and Climate Change Canada, 2019. Canada's Changing Climate Report.

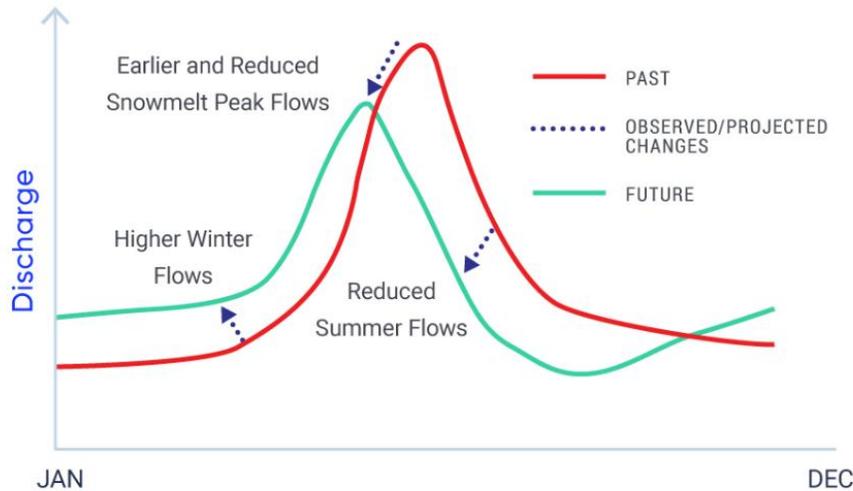
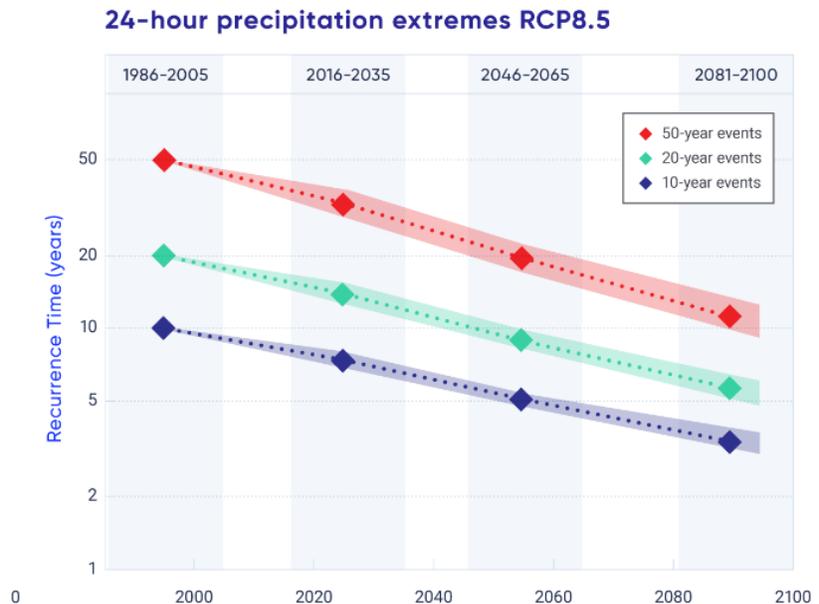


Figure 9. Projected change in stream flows with climate change.

Wetland areas could be enhanced by temporary storage dams, known as rubber dams^{27 28}, which can be inflated to retain up to 3 m of water during freshet season. After freshet, dams could be deflated to restore recreational canoe/kayak use of these waterways²⁹. As wetlands play a key role in the preservation of water quality as well as mitigating water quantity issues, preservation of these features needs official encouragement. Consideration of some form of tax incentive, such as is done for “managed forests” is recommended. The Conservation Land Tax Incentive Program may provide this service.

Figure 10. Increasing frequency of extreme storms over time due to climate change.



²⁷ Tam, W.M.P. 1998. Application of inflatable dam technology – problems and countermeasures, Can. J. Civ. Eng. Vol 25, pp 383-388.

²⁸ Kolte, D. March 2017. Rubber Dam, International Conference on Emerging Trends in Engineering, Science, Management, Hyderabad, India.

²⁹ Wilson, H. 2003. Canoeing and Hiking Wild Muskoka: an eco-adventure guide, Boston Mills Press, 144pp.

Droughts

The flip side of flooding is drought. MNRF has advised that there have been eight droughts since 1988. Most recent is the the drought of 2016, which followed a spring flood and broke the 123-year-old Provincial record for dryness (Figure 11). Dry or wet summers are now associated with stuck weather patterns where an omega wave pattern of the jet stream delivers long periods of a) cold wet air from the north, or b) hot dry air from the south. Severe dryness, besides lowering lake levels by evaporation, stresses the forests and raises forest fire risks. Treatment for floods needs to be considerate of raising forest fire risks in cottage country.

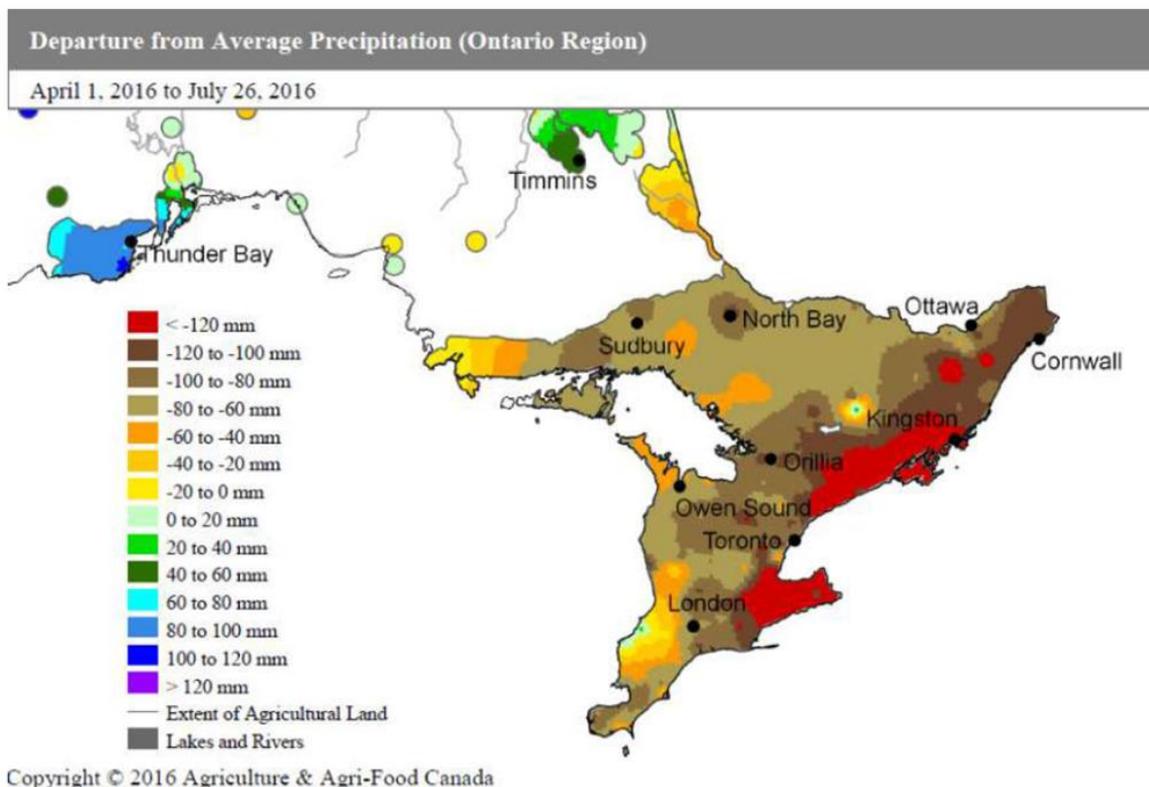


Figure 11. Rainfall deficit below the average, April 1 to July 26, 2016.

Development Implications

When the MRWMP was developed in 2006, it was acknowledged that a large quantity of high value property (i.e. docks and boathouses) is located within the Upper Operating Zone and even a small portion in the Normal Operating Zone³⁰. Public input to the MRWMP via the Public Advisory Committee (PAC) listed many concerns about high spring water and ice damage that were documented but, while recognized, were not specifically addressed. Maps from 1899 indicate that many structures predate all water management initiatives in the watershed (see, for example, Figure 12 below). In a previous flood (1985), shoreline landowner concerns voiced by the Muskoka Lakes Association (MLA) resulted in a major, multi-volume study under the 1988

³⁰ MRWMP, pg 12-102, 12-106.

Canada-Ontario Flood Damage Reduction program³¹. Despite having less capable analysis tools, this study produced a conservative 1:100 year water level forecast for Lake Muskoka that is remarkably similar to what was experienced in 2019 (Table 5). The District Municipality of Muskoka (DMM) was in the process of floodplain mapping the major development areas of the watershed when the 2019 flood occurred. So, this experience is now included in the mapping results³². Due to timing, the 2019 floodplain work does not form part of the recently updated District Official Plan. Updates to town and township Official Plans, based on the district Official Plan, are now in progress. The extent to which the recent floodplain work will be incorporated in these plans is an open question.

Table 5. Comparison between 1988 flood predictions and the 2019 actual flood.

Lake Muskoka	1988 FDRP 1:100-year Flood	2019 Actual Flood
Flood Elevation (m)	226.49	226.45
Drawdown Elevation (m)	224.70	224.76
Snow Water Equivalent (mm)	200	187
3 day rain (mm)	45	58*
Flow @ Port Sydney (m ³ /s)	291	235
Flow @ Baysville (m ³ /s)	226	160
Flow @ Bala (m ³ /s)	514	430

*plus 36 mm 6 days later

Guidance on the location of shoreline structures, elevation of structures and floodproofing construction of structures would be an appropriate addition at this time. This is entirely supportive of the recommendations of the Special Flood Advisor³³ and consistent with recently released Provincial Flooding Policy.

Remaining silent, as had been done previously, is no longer appropriate. In addition to treatment in Official Plans, a better public education initiative and possibly registration of water levels on deeds, as recommended by the Flood Advisor, should be considered.

Figure 12. Flood record in the Anderson Boathouse (built 1922) near Beaumaris on Lake Muskoka.



³¹ Marshall Macklin Monaghan, March 1988. Hydrology Study for the Major Lakes in the Muskoka Watershed, Report for the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment Canada, FDR 43, 321pp.

³² Hatch Engineering Report, February 12, 2020. Technical Report for Muskoka River Flood Plain Mapping Study, The District Municipality of Muskoka, H356689-00000-200-230-0002, Rev.0, Ver. 04.03, 131pp.

³³ Report of Ontario's Special Advisor on Flooding, 2019, p. 104.

In addition to water level information, building departments need to advise builders about loadings imposed by the expansion of lake ice³⁴ so that owners may take appropriate measures to protect their structures. As shown in Table 6, lake ice can exert forces on docks and boathouses in the range of 3,000 to 6,000 pounds per lineal foot of structure. These near irresistible forces are unleashed when temperature rises rapidly by 15 to 20°C during one day and there is little insulating snow over the ice. As little as 10 to 15 cm of ice thickness is needed. South facing structures, exposed to the sun, are most susceptible.

Table 6. Ice loads on dams³⁵.

Ice Loads Primarily Thermally Generated		Maximum Load	
Dam Name	Years of Record	kN/m	Kips/ft**
Paugan Dam, Hydro-Quebec	3	70	4.8
Outdoor Basin, National Research Council	1	47	3.2
Seven Sisters Dam, Manitoba Hydro	1	62	4.2
Pine Falls Dam, Manitoba Hydro	2	61	4.1
McArthur Falls Dam, Manitoba Hydro	2	85	5.8
Ice Loads Generated by Combination of Ice Temperature & Significant Water Level Change*			
Dam Name	Years of Record	kN/m	Kips/ft**
Arnprior Dam, Ontario Power Generation [OPG]	4	210	14.3
Otto Holden Dam, OPG – main reservoir	3	52	3.5
Otto Holden Dam, OPG – East Bay	2	65	4.4
Seven Sisters Dam, Manitoba Hydro	4	374	25.6
Churchill Falls Dam, Newfoundland Hydro	1	89	6.1

*Water level cycled 1 to 2 times per day; intermediate amplitude cycle 10 to 30 cm, large amplitude cycle 40 to 70 cm ** one Kip/ft = 1,000 pounds force per lineal foot of structure

Options for Action

There are two major types of options for decreasing the impacts of floods: mitigation (reducing the amount of flooding), and adaptation (protecting the property at risk from flood damage).

There is no real option to eliminate flooding as the volume of flood water produced by extreme combination weather events exceeds the storage capacity of the entire Muskoka River Watershed. The following are potential ways to lessen the amount of flooding:

1. Modest improvement may come from earlier and deeper lake drawdowns when heavy snow persists on the ground into Spring;

³⁴ Comfort, G. et al. 2006. Static Ice Loads on Dams, Can. J. Civ. Eng. Vol 30, No 1, pp 42-68.

³⁵ Comfort, G. et al, 2006. Static Ice Loads on Dams, Can. J. Civ. Eng. Vol 30, No 1, pp 42-68.

2. Structural improvement to watershed choke points can release water more quickly past impediments that are currently causing back ups;
3. Improving upstream storage could decrease the volume of water passed downstream (and potentially later mitigate downstream water shortage in “dry” years); and
4. Offsetting the timing of peak flows from the North and South Branches of the Muskoka River can reduce the coincident peak flow entering the Lower Muskoka Sub-watershed.

On a watershed scale, these options each have potential downside effects to consider. Earlier and deeper drawdowns potentially affect previous season Fall navigation, some water intake pipes and, for shallow properties, use of boathouses and boatlifts. There are also significant unknown effects on aquatic ecosystems and water quality. Removing choke points helps areas upstream while passing the extra volume on to areas downstream. Conversely, enhanced upstream storage may lessen impacts downstream while increasing impacts upstream.

In addition to the above mitigation options, each property owner faces choices in adaptation or flood proofing their own property. To make informed choices, everyone needs to be aware of the risks of and potential damage from high water. With results of the latest floodplain mapping on hand, municipalities should inform new builds and rebuilds on the waterfront about appropriate building levels/setbacks in Official Plan revisions. Broad public education is needed to promote a “build back better” mindset when the service life of structures expire and retrofits are being planned.

Summary

The Muskoka River Watershed is complex. As a result, there is no simple solution to flooding. Even predicting flooding is a difficult task as major floods are associated with the interaction of extreme weather events that are hard to predict.

While there are options to lessen flooding effects, implementing them without considering other elements of the watershed would inevitably come to an incomplete solution. The solution must include the watershed ecosystem, the interests of landowners and the local economy. All three pillars are needed to achieve the environmental quality that we depend on.

Overall, an integrated approach balancing flood management with the needs of all property owners, while preserving the environment that we all value, is needed. In other similar jurisdictions in Ontario, cottager associations have banded together to “share the pain” under the mantra of equitable water flow. In the Muskoka River Watershed, the solution to balance these interests is through Integrated Watershed Management. This will require that all levels of government and NGOs commit to collaborative investment in comprehensive studies to characterize the watershed, land and water resources, our changing climate, and social and economic interactions to ensure one fix doesn’t break something else. In Muskoka, our environment is our economy.

Acknowledgements

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