Watershed Watch Newsletter



A SEASON TO SLOW DOWN AND RECONNECT

Welcome to the December issue of Watershed Watch. It's been a busy year at Kawartha Conservation, from monitoring local lakes and rivers to restoring habitat and bringing people together to talk about the future of our watershed. As 2026 draws to a close, we're grateful to the volunteers, partners and community members who helped make that work possible.

There are still two opportunities to get together at Ken Reid Conservation Area this year. Christmas at Ken Reid returns Dec. 5 with wagon rides, visits with Santa and a market featuring local makers. From Dec. 11 to 27, the Illuminated Forest offers a quieter evening outdoors, with thousands of lights guiding visitors through the woods.

In this issue, we also head to the Scugog River in Lindsay, where three years of monitoring fish and aquatic plants are helping us establish a baseline for understanding the effects of stormwater runoff. And we share how Kawartha Conservation Aquatic Biologist Brett Tregunno brought our fieldwork to a packed audience at Brock University, explaining how staff use drones to support erosion and sediment control.

With so much going on this time of year, we hope you can take a breath, slow down and enjoy time with family, friends and loved ones. Whether you're heading out for a walk under the lights or spending a quiet evening at home, all of us at Kawartha Conservation wish you a happy and restful holiday season.

Thank you for reading Watershed Watch this year. We look forward to sharing more stories about the people, places and work shaping our watershed as we head into 2027.

The Kawartha Conservation Team

Help Keep the Holiday Magic Alive!

Support our annual Christmas events and help us keep the holiday magic free for our community! Consider making a charitable donation or becoming an event sponsor. For sponsorship opportunities, contact csnider@kawarthaconservation.com.

Donate HERE.

SANTA, THE GRINCH AND BIRDS OF PREY HEADLINE CHRISTMAS AT KEN REID

The Grinch will lead a walk through the woods, Santa will welcome visitors to his workshop, and The Eyrie will bring birds of prey to Candy Cane Corner when Christmas at Ken Reid returns Saturday, Dec. 5. The outdoor celebration runs from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. at Ken Reid Conservation Area near Lindsay. Admission is free.

The day starts at 10 a.m. with balloon animals by The Ballooning Company at the Warming Centre. At 10:30 a.m., the City of Kawartha Lakes Public Library will host storytime and showcase its Library of Things, while The Eyrie presents the first of three birds of prey shows. The other shows start at 1 p.m. and 3 p.m.

The Grinch leads Storybook Walks at 11:30 a.m. and 2:30 p.m. Santa welcomes visitors from 11:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. and again from 2:30 to 4 p.m. Gerald Van Halteren performs on the lawn outside Santa's Workshop from 12:30 to 2:30 p.m.

The Christmas Market, food trucks and Kids' Craft Corner are open throughout the event. Ampere will host games at Candy Cane Corner, and horse-drawn wagon rides will run with a midday break.

"One of the things I enjoy about the market is seeing people stop to ask how something was made or what inspired it," said Carolyn Snider, Kawartha Conservation's Community Engagement Technician.

Sponsors and community partners help keep admission free. In announcing this year's holiday events, Snider said the support Kawartha Conservation receives from businesses, donors and community partners helps "keep Christmas at Ken Reid free to attend."

This year's sponsors are Ari Zider, Tina Doyle of RE/MAX All-Stars Realty, Kawartha Financial Services, Cambium Consulting & Engineering, McLeod's EcoWater, Phillips & Son Financial Inc. and Sterling Mutuals, Double R Plumbing Inc., F1RE, Canadian Tire Lindsay, Fleming College, Seriously Coffee Services, KRISCAM Landscape Services, Wagg's, and Nix Tire Inc. & Auto Repair. Kawartha Conservation also recognizes Jamie Schmale, MP, for advertising support.

Getting There

Free shuttle buses will run throughout the event from three Lindsay locations. The accessible shuttle leaves from the Canadian Tire rear parking lot at 377 Kent St. W. Buses also run from I.E. Weldon Secondary School at 24 Weldon Rd. and Fleming College's Lot G at 200 Albert St. S.

Visitors who want to park at Ken Reid must buy a pass in advance. The 100 on-site spaces are available first come, first served at $20 per vehicle, including HST. Passes are non-refundable, and there will be no on-site parking sales on event day.

To learn more or purchase your day of, on-site parking pass, visit www.kawarthaconservation.com/christmas.



THE ILLUMINATED FOREST RETURNS FOR 17 NIGHTS OF HOLIDAY WALKS AT KEN REID

At Ken Reid Conservation Area, one of the season's favourite outings begins after dark. Starting Friday, Dec. 11, thousands of lights wrapped around trees will guide visitors through the woods as the Illuminated Forest returns for its fifth year.

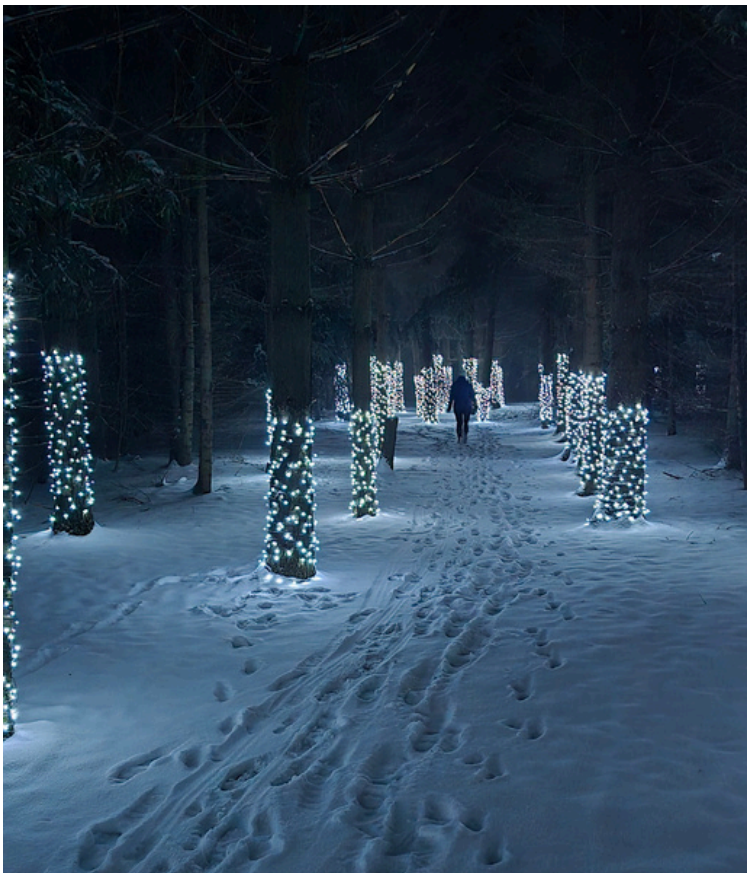
It's the kind of outing that fits easily into the holidays. Bring the kids for a walk after dinner, meet friends for an evening outdoors or take visiting relatives somewhere you'd like them to see. Along the trail, there's time to stop for a photo, let the kids lead the way or simply linger under the lights.

Carolyn Snider, Kawartha Conservation's Community Engagement Technician, said the support of local businesses, donors and community partners "helps us welcome families."

This year's Illuminated Forest sponsors are Colin Coppins Electric, Watson Plumbing, D.M. Wills and Fieldside Yoga + Retreats. Volunteers, donors and community partners also help bring the tradition back each December.

The lights will be on from 5 to 9 p.m. every evening from Dec. 11 through Dec. 27, including Christmas Day. That leaves 17 evenings to make a first visit or return for another walk before the season ends.





WHAT FISH AND AQUATIC PLANTS REVEAL ABOUT THE SCUGOG RIVER

Three years into a five-year study, monitoring in Lindsay is establishing a baseline to help measure stormwater management efforts.

The Scugog River's fish and aquatic plants have a story to tell about the water flowing through Lindsay. Some can tolerate challenging conditions. Others are more sensitive to pollution, warmer water and changes in their habitat. Tracking which species are present, and how those communities change, can help reveal the river's condition.

In 2026, Kawartha Conservation completed the third year of a five-year project examining the river's nearshore fish and aquatic plant communities. Running through 2028, the monitoring will establish baseline conditions to help understand and manage the impacts of stormwater runoff from Lindsay's urban area.

The work focuses on a river with considerable local importance. The Scugog River and its connected waterbodies support recreational and subsistence fishing that contributes significantly to the City of Kawartha Lakes' economy. Directly below the Lindsay dam, the river provides important spawning habitat and is recognized as a provincial fish sanctuary.

Preliminary findings from this year's sampling reaffirm that importance. The river supports sport fish, baitfish, and sensitive fish and plant species, giving it value from recreational, cultural and conservation perspectives.

"Fish and aquatic plants are important indicators of water health," said Brett Tregunno, Aquatic Biologist with Kawartha Conservation. "By establishing a baseline and tracking these communities over time, we can better understand conditions in the Scugog River and help evaluate stormwater management efforts."

Reading the river's signals

The health of fish populations is directly related to the quality of the water in which they live. In Lindsay, runoff reaches the Scugog River through tributaries and storm sewers.

Waterbodies flowing through urban areas, or receiving substantial urban runoff, often experience a pattern known as "Urban Stream Syndrome." Its symptoms include changes in aquatic life, water chemistry, water flow and the physical form of channels.

Those pressures can change the balance of species. Sensitive fish and plants are less able to tolerate conditions such as excessive salt, reduced dissolved oxygen, elevated water temperatures, increased sedimentation and contaminant inputs. More tolerant species can thrive in degraded conditions.



Aquatic Biologist, Brett Tregunno, sampling fish.

The 2026 nearshore sampling found fish communities dominated by coolwater and warmwater species with intermediate to high tolerance of degraded conditions. Submerged aquatic plants with intermediate tolerance dominated the plant community. Sensitive species were detected in both groups, but their representation was limited.

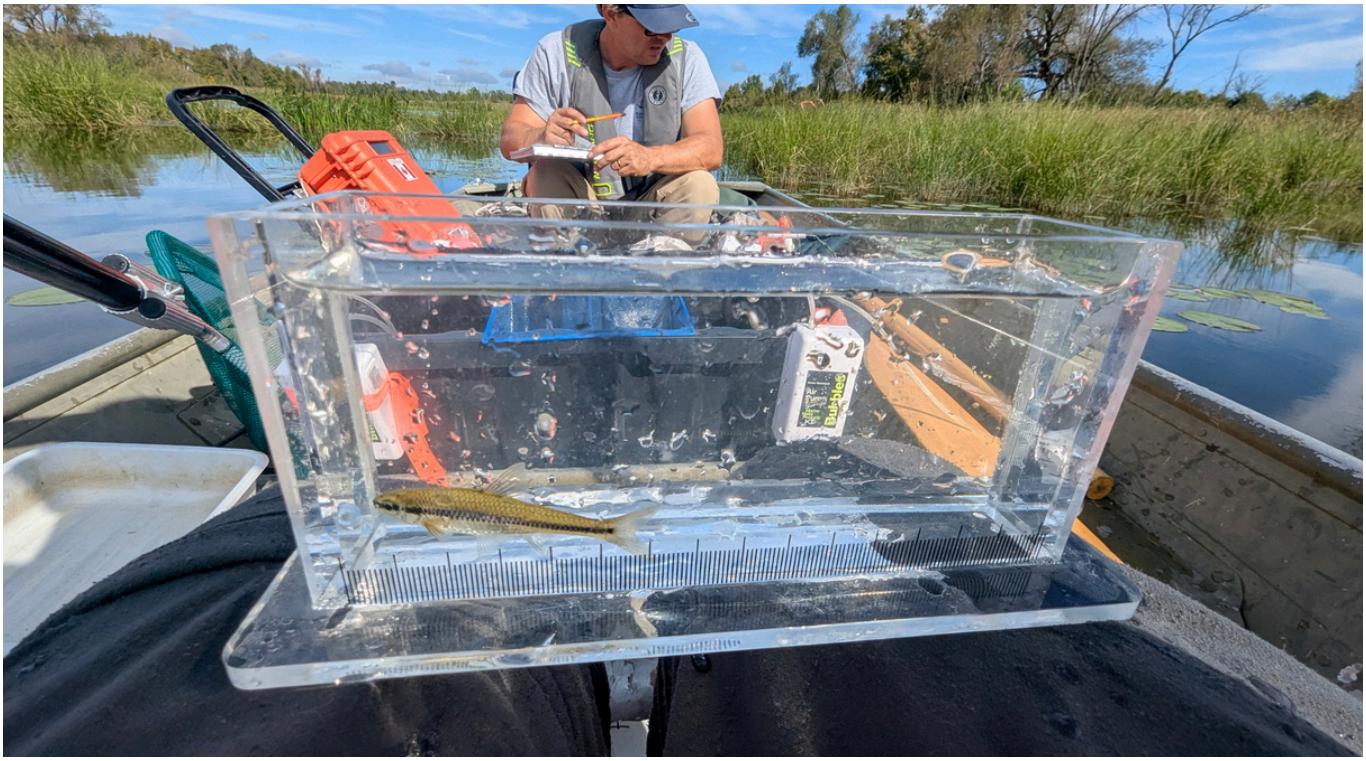
Comparisons of key fish and aquatic indicators since 2024 generally show no significant changes.

A baseline for the years ahead

The limited presence of sensitive species likely reflects decades of untreated stormwater runoff, pollution and habitat alteration in the region. Improvements in runoff quality and aquatic habitat over time are expected to support incremental increases in sensitive species.

With increased development planned in Lindsay, continued monitoring is especially important. Annual sampling through 2028 will help characterize the river's baseline conditions, providing a reference against which stormwater management efforts can be measured.

For the Scugog River, the study is building a clearer picture of the aquatic life present today and a foundation for understanding change in the years ahead.



NEW PERSPECTIVES: USING DRONES TO SUPPORT CONSERVATION



Kawartha Conservation Aquatic Biologist Brett Tregunno spoke to a packed audience at Brock University in St. Catharines about how the conservation authority uses drones to support its work, particularly in erosion and sediment control. The presentation grew out of Kawartha Conservation's STEP pilot partnership and gave Tregunno an opportunity to share how staff are putting drone technology to use in the field.

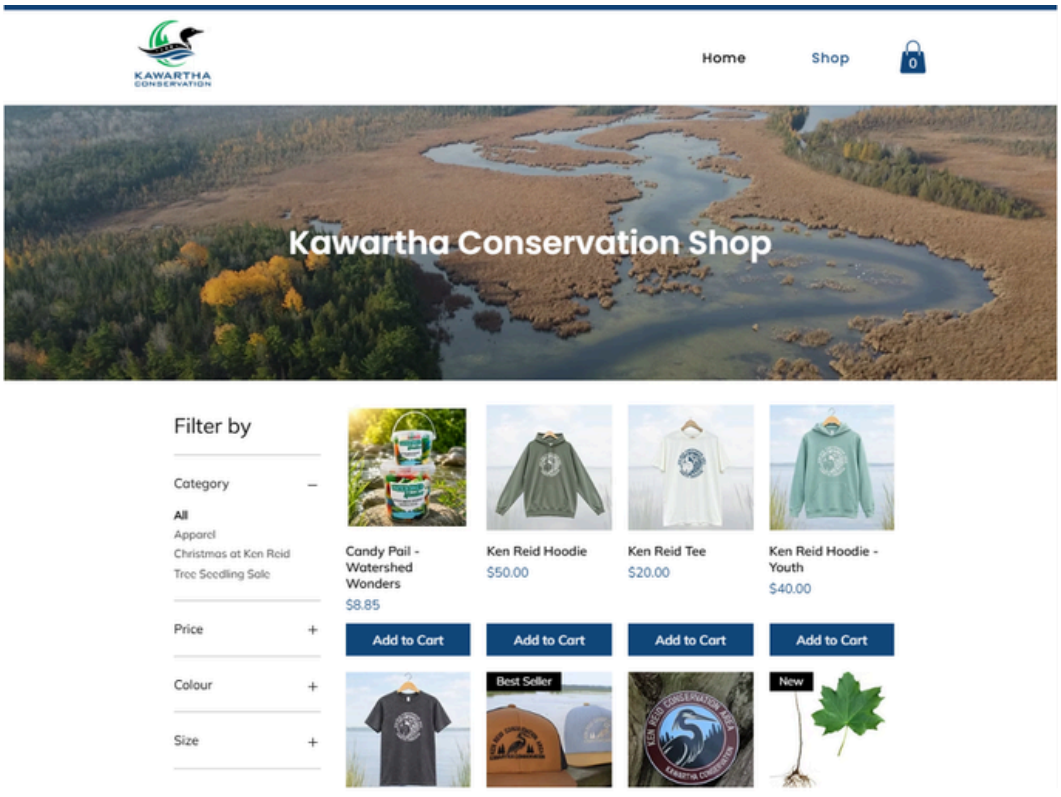
CHRISTMAS GIFTS FOR PEOPLE WHO'D RATHER BE OUTDOORS

What do you give someone who has everything? If they spend their weekends on the trails or already have plans for spring planting, Kawartha Conservation's online shop has a few ideas, from Ken Reid hoodies and trucker hats to bundles of tree seedlings.

A Ken Reid hoodie makes a practical gift for someone who's always up for a walk. Hoodies and T-shirts come in adult and youth sizes, and a trucker hat is an easy pick for someone who knows the trails by heart. For a stocking stuffer, tuck in a Ken Reid sticker for a water bottle or field notebook.

For someone with room to plant, tree and shrub seedlings make a different kind of Christmas gift. The annual Seedling Sale includes sugar maple, bur oak, white pine and other species, sold in bundles of 25 of the same species. Choose something suited to their property, then put a note under the tree promising to help plant it in the spring. The gift comes with a chance to spend an afternoon outdoors together.

Orders are available for local pickup in Lindsay. Browse the Kawartha Conservation shop for apparel, accessories and the spring seedling selection. To view go to www.kawarthaconservation.com/shop



For more information on how Kawartha Conservation can help.

Conservation Lands: conservationareas@kawarthaconservation.com
General info: geninfo@kawarthaconservation.com
Permitting: permits@kawarthaconservation.com
Planning: planning@kawarthaconservation.com