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A SEASON OF CHANGE ACROSS THE WATERSHED

October brings some of the most visible changes to our watershed. Leaves turn colour, cooler air settles in, and migrating birds make their way through the region. It is a wonderful time to visit one of our conservation areas, walk the trails and take in the sights and sounds of fall.

The season invites us to slow down and notice what is happening around us. A familiar trail can look entirely different beneath a canopy of red and gold, while the lakes and wetlands continue to change in ways that are less obvious from shore. Understanding those changes, and what they mean over time, is an important part of caring for our watershed.

That idea runs through this issue of Watershed Watch. We look back at September's State of the Lakes Symposium, where community members, researchers and partners shared knowledge and talked about what comes next for our lakes. We also introduce new online results from the Lake Health Monitoring Program, making it easier to explore findings for five Kawartha lakes.

On Lake Scugog, new temperature loggers will help us see how conditions beneath the surface shift throughout the year, including during seasons when monitoring has been difficult. It is one more way to build a fuller picture of a lake that many people care about.

We are also looking ahead to another season of gathering outdoors. Christmas at Ken Reid and the Illuminated Forest return in December, and local sponsors and donors can help bring these community traditions to life. For now, we hope you enjoy the stories in this issue and find time to experience the changing watershed for yourself.

The Kawartha Conservation Team

AT STATE OF THE LAKES SYMPOSIUM, THE CONVERSATION TURNED TO WHAT COMES NEXT

More than 140 people gathered in Fenelon Falls to share research, compare perspectives and discuss how communities can help protect the Kawartha watershed.

The questions did not end when the presentations did. During breaks at Kawartha Conservation's State of the Lakes Symposium, attendees sought out speakers, visited community exhibitors and continued conversations about the lakes they study, work on and live beside.

Held September 18 at the Fenelon Falls Community Centre, the symposium brought together 144 people, including community members and landowners, Indigenous partners, researchers, lake associations, environmental organizations and government representatives. Across 15 sessions, speakers explored lake monitoring, aquatic plants and fisheries, source water protection, public health and the actions landowners can take to care for the watershed.

The event was part of Kawartha Conservation's Lake Management Implementation Action Plan. It gave people a chance to hear what monitoring is revealing and to meet others working on the same challenges from different directions.

"Our goal was to give people room to talk with one another, as well as hear from the speakers," said Carolyn Snider, Community Engagement Technician at Kawartha Conservation. "Those conversations help us understand what communities want to know and where we can work together."

Two panel discussions put that exchange at the centre of the day. One Watershed, Many Voices brought Indigenous, lake association, academic, federal and source water protection perspectives into a conversation about shared responsibility. Preparing Our Watershed for the Future asked panelists to look ahead at pressures including climate change, development and tourism.



A full crowd at the Fenelon Falls Community Centre for the State of the Lakes Symposium.



Exhibitors having the opportunity to interact with the community.

Eleven community organizations also took part as exhibitors. The connections made between sessions reflected a central theme of the symposium: protecting healthy lakes depends on relationships that continue after an event ends.

“People want to know what they can do with the information they hear,” said Danielle Marcoux-Hunter, Coordinator, Stewardship at Kawartha Conservation. “Stewardship becomes more useful when we connect monitoring results with practical actions that landowners, lake associations and partners can take.”

That interest came through in the attendee survey. Many singled out the panels for bringing different perspectives into the same conversation. They also asked for more time to discuss results, hear examples of successful partnerships and learn what residents can do when monitoring identifies a concern.



Ministry of Natural Resources employees discussing the health of the fisheries in Fisheries Management Zone 17.



Keynote speaker Erica Ehm and Kawartha Conservation's Corporate Strategy, Communications and Engagement Specialist, John Chambers.

One resource for those continuing conversations is Kawartha Conservation's [Lake Health Monitoring Program](#). Its public pages bring together 2025 results for Balsam, Cameron, Scugog, Pigeon and Sturgeon lakes, with StoryMaps that let readers explore findings for individual lakes.

The symposium closed with a keynote from Erica Ehm focused on community and the ways people communicate about stewardship. By then, the day had offered both a picture of current lake health and a clear request from attendees: keep sharing the evidence, show how it leads to action and make space for people to work together.

WHAT THE LAKES ARE TELLING US

New online results bring water quality, aquatic plants and shoreline conditions together for five Kawartha lakes.

A water sample can reveal how much phosphorus is in a lake on a particular day. It cannot, on its own, show whether aquatic plants are spreading, whether a shoreline is losing natural cover or how conditions are changing over time.

That is the idea behind Kawartha Conservation's [Lake Health Monitoring Program](#). A new public hub brings together monitoring information for Balsam, Cameron, Scugog, Pigeon and Sturgeon lakes. Visitors can choose a lake, read its latest findings and follow a link to maps and more detailed results.

The program examines three connected parts of lake health: water quality, aquatic plants and shoreline conditions. Staff measure indicators such as phosphorus, chloride, temperature and dissolved oxygen in lakes and their tributaries. Plant surveys document where species grow, including invasive plants. Shoreline assessments look at natural vegetation and habitat along the water's edge. Repeating this work gives communities a record they can use to spot changes and weigh them against the goals in their lake management plans.

“A single result can tell us something important, but the pattern over time tells us much more,” said Nancy Aspden, Director, Integrated Watershed Management at Kawartha Conservation. “By looking at the water, the plants and the shoreline together, we can give communities a clearer picture of what is happening and where attention may be needed.”

The first findings show why each lake needs its own story. Balsam Lake's 2025 results indicate generally good water quality, while phosphorus remains a concern. On Cameron Lake, most water quality indicators remain in good condition, but the phosphorus assessment has declined from fair to poor since the earlier lake management planning process.



Lake Health Monitoring being conducted on one of the four core lakes in City of Kawartha Lakes.

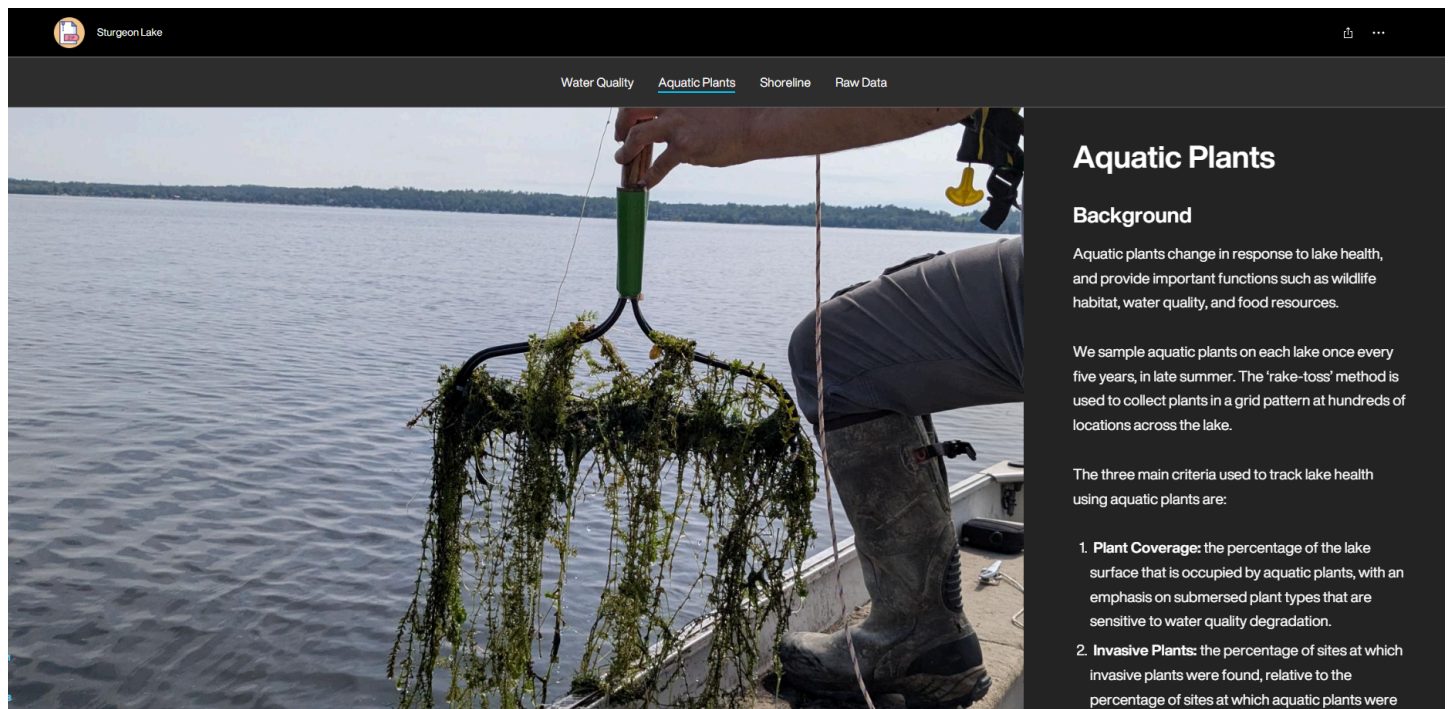
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Lake Scugog’s results offer a broader picture because its 2025 findings include all three areas of monitoring. They identify phosphorus as the lake’s primary water quality concern, document widespread invasive aquatic plants and show a moderate loss of natural shoreline plant cover since 2002. Other lakes are at different points in the monitoring cycle, with further plant and shoreline surveys scheduled to add to their current findings.

The program also looks beyond the water’s edge. Rain and runoff can carry nutrients and sediment from surrounding lands into streams and then into a lake. Sampling tributaries alongside lake stations can help staff investigate where pressures may be coming from, while shoreline and plant surveys show how conditions are changing within the lake itself.

For waterfront residents, lake associations, municipalities and researchers, the new pages offer a common starting point. They make the findings easier to explore and connect them to decisions about stewardship and long term lake management. The next round of monitoring will add more evidence to that record.

Readers can [explore the Lake Health Monitoring Program](#) and select the lake that matters to them.



Screen grab of the Lake Health Monitoring dashboard for Sturgeon Lake.

ENHANCED TEMPERATURE MONITORING WILL EXPAND OUR UNDERSTANDING OF LAKE SCUGOG

Understanding what is happening beneath the surface of Lake Scugog is an important part of understanding the health of the lake. A new enhancement to Kawartha Conservation's existing water temperature monitoring program will provide a more complete picture of how conditions change throughout the water column and, importantly, throughout the different seasons.

Kawartha Conservation staff already monitor water temperature as part of ongoing water quality work on Lake Scugog. This new component builds on that monitoring by collecting consistent, hourly temperature data at different depths, including during times of year when staff have traditionally had limited access to the lake.

With cooperation from Parks Canada, the project uses a temperature string, a chain suspended from an existing buoy with small temperature loggers set at one-metre intervals. Each logger records the water temperature at its particular depth every hour.

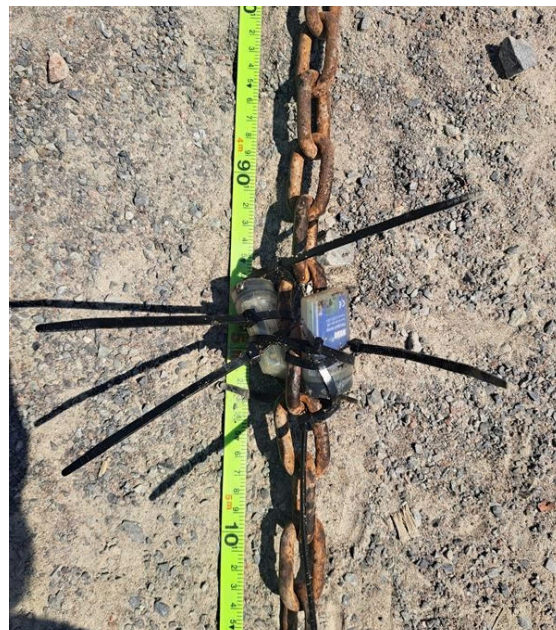
"By measuring temperature at different depths every hour, we can see when the lake is mixing and when different temperature layers may be developing," explains Tanner Liang, Water Quality Specialist with Kawartha Conservation. "That is important because mixing influences things like dissolved oxygen levels and the release of nutrients from lake sediments."

Why mixing matters on Lake Scugog

Water temperature plays an important role in the physical and ecological processes taking place within a lake. During ice-free periods, warmer water is less dense and tends to remain above colder, denser water. In deeper lakes, this can create distinct temperature layers that remain separated for extended periods.

Lake Scugog presents an interesting monitoring opportunity because it is relatively shallow. Wind can mix the lake more readily, moving water, oxygen and nutrients throughout the water column.

Tracking temperatures at multiple depths (and weather-related data at nearby weather stations) will allow Kawartha Conservation staff to better understand when that mixing occurs, how frequently it happens and how conditions change throughout the seasons. Over time, the data can also help build a stronger understanding of the relationship between temperature, dissolved oxygen and nutrient dynamics within the lake.



Temperature logger.

Filling in the seasonal gaps

Much of the traditional water quality information collected on lakes is gathered during the warmer months, when conditions allow staff to safely access monitoring locations. That can create a seasonal bias in the available data.

Spring and fall can be particularly difficult periods for field monitoring, when changing ice conditions can make accessing the lake unsafe. Winter monitoring also presents a knowledge desert with hardly any data on Lake Scugog.

The temperature loggers can continue collecting hourly information through those periods. This is important to record data during short and intense events when staff are not on the lake, example is an 3-day extreme heat wave, or an intense afternoon windstorm.

"Most of our lake data is generated during the summer, so having information from the spring and fall shoulder seasons, as well as through the winter, helps us develop a much more complete understanding of the system," says Liang. "Instead of seeing only a snapshot of Lake Scugog during the summer, we can start looking at how it behaves throughout the year."

That year-round perspective will help staff better understand seasonal transitions, including how quickly the lake warms and cools and how mixing patterns change as weather and environmental conditions shift.

Building a long-term picture

The information also has value beyond Kawartha Conservation's own monitoring programs. Lake Scugog is recognized as a Provincially Significant Inland Fishery, and temperature information can contribute to the broader body of data available to support fisheries management by the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry.

“Water temperature is one of the fundamental factors shaping aquatic habitat and the conditions fish and other aquatic species experience,” said Brett Tregunno, Aquatic Biologist with Kawartha Conservation. “Having consistent temperature data across depths and seasons will give us a better understanding of how habitat conditions in Lake Scugog change throughout the year and help us identify patterns that we simply haven’t been able to see with summer monitoring alone.”

There is no predetermined end date for the program. The goal is to keep the temperature string operating for as long as possible, building a long-term dataset that becomes increasingly valuable with each passing season and year.

For a lake as dynamic as Lake Scugog, that consistency matters. Hour by hour and season by season, the new temperature loggers will help fill in some of the gaps in our understanding of what is happening beneath the surface, providing another important piece of the puzzle as Kawartha Conservation continues to monitor and understand the health of the lake.

TWO HOLIDAY TRADITIONS, ONE COMMUNITY EFFORT AT KEN REID

Christmas at Ken Reid and the Illuminated Forest return in December. Local sponsors and donors can help bring both events to life.

In a few months, families will gather at Ken Reid Conservation Area for a day of holiday activities. A week later, visitors will return after dark to walk through a forest lit by thousands of lights.

Christmas at Ken Reid returns Saturday, December 5, followed by the Illuminated Forest, which opens Friday, December 11 and runs nightly through Sunday, December 27. Together, the events have become part of the holiday season for many local families. Bringing them back each year takes support from across the community.

“Christmas at Ken Reid and the Illuminated Forest give people different ways to spend time together outdoors during the holidays,” said Carolyn Snider, Community Engagement Technician at Kawartha Conservation. “Local support helps us create those experiences and keep Christmas at Ken Reid free for everyone to enjoy.”

The December 5 celebration will feature seasonal activities, entertainment, vendors and holiday treats. Admission will remain free. The Illuminated Forest offers a quieter experience later in the month, with visitors strolling the illuminated trails at their own pace.

Kawartha Conservation is now looking for business sponsors for both events and welcoming donations from individuals and families. For a local business, sponsorship is a way to help sustain two community traditions. For someone who has made memories at Ken Reid, a donation is a way to help others enjoy them too.

Businesses and organizations interested in sponsorship can contact Carolyn Snider at csnider@kawarthaconservation.com or 705-328-2271 ext. 212. Individuals and families can [make a donation](#). Dates and event details are available on the [Kawartha Conservation festivals page](#).



For more information on how Kawartha Conservation can help.
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