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A SEASON OF NEW BEGINNINGS

September has a way of bringing life back into focus. After the long days and looser rhythms of summer, children return to school, calendars begin to fill and households settle into new routines. Mornings feel a little cooler, evenings arrive a little earlier, and subtle changes across the landscape remind us that a new season is beginning.

It is a time of transition, but also one of renewal. The shift from August into September offers an opportunity to reconnect with our communities, spend time outdoors and pay closer attention to the places around us. Across the Kawartha watershed, green landscapes will soon give way to the first hints of red, orange and gold, while the familiar pace of fall gradually returns.

There is something grounding about this time of year. Familiar roads, trails, shorelines and neighbourhoods begin to look and feel different as the light softens and the landscape slowly changes. Even on the busiest days, a cool morning, the sound of migrating birds or the first brightly coloured leaves can encourage us to pause and notice what is happening around us.

September can also feel like a fresh start. New schedules and responsibilities may bring a busier pace, but they can also create opportunities to establish new habits, spend more intentional time together and find simple ways to stay connected with nature. A walk after dinner, a weekend outdoors or a few quiet minutes beside the water can help bring balance to changing routines.

As summer begins to fade, we invite you to welcome the changing season, make time for the people and places that matter, and enjoy everything September has to offer.

The Kawartha Conservation Team

STEP INTO THE SEASON: DISCOVER FALL ON OUR CONSERVATION AREA TRAILS

There is a point each September when the landscape begins to change.

The mornings arrive a little cooler. The light softens. The first hints of red, orange and gold appear among the green, and familiar trails begin to feel new again.

It is one of the most beautiful times of year to get outside, slow down and experience the conservation areas found across the Kawartha watershed.

Whether you are looking for a quiet walk beneath the trees, a family outing, a place to watch birds or a trail that gets your heart pumping, Kawartha Conservation's conservation areas offer many ways to enjoy the changing season.

More Than a Walk in the Woods

Spending time outside can be one of the simplest ways to care for ourselves.

A walk along a trail provides an opportunity to move, breathe fresh air and step away from the noise and routines of everyday life. It can create space to think, reconnect with family and friends, or simply notice the natural world around us.

There is no required pace and no finish line. A visit can be a long hike, a short walk, a bicycle ride or a quiet pause at a lookout. What matters is making the time to get outside.

Fall adds something special to the experience. Leaves begin to change colour, migrating birds pass through the watershed, and forests, meadows and wetlands take on new sights and sounds. Even a trail you have walked many times before can offer something different from one week to the next.

Five Areas, Five Different Experiences

Just north of Lindsay, Ken Reid Conservation Area offers nearly 12 kilometres of trails through forests, meadows and wetlands. Visitors can explore boardwalks, stop at an observation platform or follow the trails toward views of McLaren's Creek Wetland. With picnic areas, a playground, the Talking Forest, an off-leash dog park and Nature's Edge Disc Golf Course, Ken Reid offers plenty of options for individuals, families and four-legged companions.

Near Omemee, Windy Ridge Conservation Area provides a shorter 1.8-kilometre trail system that is well suited to a relaxed outing. Its trails, lookout, picnic shelter, Talking Forest experience and word scramble course make it an inviting place for families or anyone looking to fit a little time outdoors into a busy day.



Ken Reid Conservation Area

On the Oak Ridges Moraine in Scugog Township, Durham East Cross Forest Conservation Area offers seven kilometres of marked trails through mature woodlands, open meadows and wetland habitats. Its sandy soils, cold springs and varied landscapes create a distinctive trail experience, with opportunities for hiking, mountain biking, horseback riding and birdwatching.

At Pigeon River Headwaters Conservation Area, visitors can explore trails through forests, wetlands and open meadow habitat. The area's mix of landscapes provides opportunities for walking, birdwatching and discovering the plants and wildlife that make their homes in this ecologically important part of the watershed.

For visitors looking for rolling terrain and expansive views, Fleetwood Creek Natural Area offers three loop trails through forests, meadows and gentle hills. Its scenic lookout is an especially rewarding destination during the fall, when the changing landscape stretches out across the surrounding countryside.

Each area has its own character. Together, they provide opportunities to experience the diversity of the Kawartha watershed, from wetlands and headwater forests to open meadows, sandy trails and elevated lookouts.

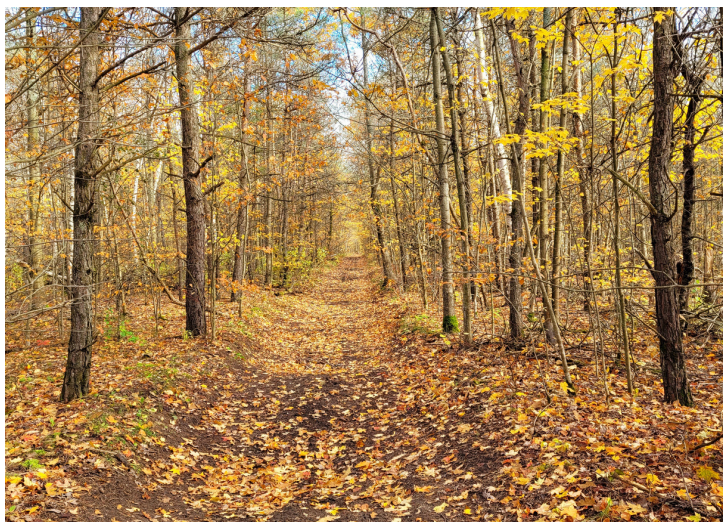
Let the Season Set the Pace

Fall does not arrive all at once. It moves gradually across the landscape, changing the view day by day.

That makes September an ideal time to begin exploring. Visit one conservation area this weekend and another a few weeks later. Return to a favourite trail to watch its colours deepen. Bring binoculars, pack a snack, take photographs or leave the phone in your pocket and simply listen.

Before heading out, check the trail map and information for your destination, dress for the weather and wear footwear suited to changing trail conditions. Dogs are welcome but must remain leashed, except within the designated off-leash area at Ken Reid Conservation Area. Please stay on marked trails, carry out what you bring in and help protect the natural spaces that make these experiences possible.

The season will move quickly. The colours will change, the leaves will fall and the landscape will prepare for winter. For now, the trails are waiting.



Durham East Cross Forest Conservation Area



Windy Ridge Conservation Area

WATER FUND PROJECTS TAKE ROOT ACROSS THE WATERSHED

A patch of low-lying lawn that regularly collected water had become a challenge for one local property owner.

Rather than continuing to struggle to maintain grass in a place that naturally wanted to be wet, the landowner tried something different. With support from Kawartha Conservation's Water Fund, the area was transformed into a native plant meadow.

Three Kawartha Conservation native plant kits were planted alongside 245 native grass and sedge plugs and another 50 wildflowers. The project, funded in 2025 and recently completed, followed another change the landowner had made a year earlier, when an area receiving discharge from a sump pump was transformed into a "bog garden."

It is one example of what the Water Fund can look like on the ground: taking a challenging part of a property and finding a solution that works with the landscape rather than against it.

"Water Fund projects can look very different from one property to the next, and that's really one of the strengths of the program," said Julia Derue, Stewardship Technician with Kawartha Conservation. "Whether it's naturalizing a wet area, improving a shoreline or supporting a community project, we're able to work with people on projects that respond to the needs of their property and their goals."

More than \$90,000 awarded in 2026

Across the City of Kawartha Lakes and Scugog, Water Fund support is helping move dozens of projects forward this year.

In the City of Kawartha Lakes, 18 landowners have been awarded a combined \$50,000 toward projects representing approximately \$174,600 in community investment.

Those projects include four agricultural, seven rural, four waterfront and three urban water quality improvement projects. The work ranges from livestock exclusion fencing and windbreak planting to waterfront naturalization, necessary septic upgrades and well decommissions.

Another six community organizations in Kawartha Lakes have been awarded a combined \$20,000 for projects aligned with shared environmental goals. Together, those initiatives represent an additional \$256,500 in investment from the participating community groups.

The projects themselves are varied: children's educational programming, re-naturalization efforts, and school-led community tree planting. All of these projects will ultimately support local water quality, habitat enhancement, and community engagement with conservation efforts.

In Scugog, seven landowners have been awarded a combined \$20,000, leveraging approximately \$96,400 in community investment. The funding is supporting one agricultural project, two rural projects and four shoreline naturalization and erosion control projects.

Altogether, \$90,000 has been awarded to landowners and community organizations through the Water Fund in Kawartha Lakes and Scugog this year.

A classroom taking root outdoors

Many of the projects receiving funding in 2026 are still underway, including one that will turn part of a local high school property into a living classroom.

Students at I.E. Weldon Secondary School are planning an arboretum featuring different native tree and shrub species. The project will support the school's new Green Industries program, which includes areas of study such as agriculture, horticulture, forestry, floristry, and landscape construction and design.

Students have taken an active role in the project, selecting species and developing the budget used in the Water Fund application. The project is also providing opportunities to develop hands-on skills in areas including plant identification and forestry techniques.

Once planted, the arboretum will replace a currently mown area beside the school's track with a more biodiverse landscape.

For Derue, projects such as the arboretum demonstrate that the impact of a Water Fund project can extend beyond the physical work being completed.

"The students aren't just going to see the finished project," Derue said. "They've been involved in selecting the species and working through the project itself, so they're gaining practical experience while creating something that will increase biodiversity on the school property."

From a homeowner reconsidering what to do with a persistently wet patch of lawn to students imagining what could grow beside their school track, this year's projects share a common thread.

They begin with looking at a piece of land, identifying an opportunity and deciding that it could work differently.



Before



After

STATE OF THE LAKES SYMPOSIUM BRINGS THE BIGGER PICTURE INTO FOCUS

A lake is more than the water within its shoreline.

Its health is shaped by what happens upstream and on the land around it. It is reflected in the fish beneath the surface, the plants along the shoreline, the quality of the water, the safety of public beaches and the resilience of nearby communities. It is influenced by changing weather, development, agriculture, recreation and the decisions people make across the watershed.

That interconnected story will be at the heart of Kawartha Conservation's State of the Lakes Symposium on Friday, September 18, at the Fenelon Falls Community Centre.

The full-day event will bring together scientists, Indigenous leaders, environmental professionals, government representatives, lake associations, community organizations, landowners and residents to explore what we know about the Kawartha Lakes, what pressures they face and how people can work together to protect them.



Lake Health Monitoring Program being conducted on Balsam Lake

“The health of our lakes isn’t determined by any one issue, organization or community,” said Carolyn Snider, Community Engagement Technician with Kawartha Conservation. “It is shaped by everything happening across the watershed and by the collective knowledge and actions of the people who live, work and care for this area. The symposium is an opportunity to bring those perspectives together, learn from one another and better understand how all of the pieces connect.”

The program reflects an important reality: understanding the state of the lakes is not a one-dimensional exercise.

Water-quality monitoring can reveal changes and emerging trends, but it is only one part of the picture. Aquatic vegetation can provide valuable habitat while also creating challenges for recreation and lake management. Fish populations offer insight into the health of aquatic ecosystems, while public-health surveillance helps communities understand conditions at local beaches. Drinking water protection, floodplain mapping, shoreline stewardship, forest restoration and agricultural projects all contribute additional pieces to the same watershed story.

No single organization, program or person holds all the answers. Meaningful progress depends on combining scientific evidence with Indigenous knowledge, local experience, public policy, community leadership and the observations of people who live beside, work on and care for the lakes.

That is why conversation and collaboration will be as important as the formal presentations.

Panel discussions will bring different perspectives together to examine the shared responsibility of caring for one watershed and preparing it for the future. Speakers will consider how communities can respond to environmental pressures, support healthy lakes and strengthen their resilience in the face of change.

The symposium will also highlight practical ways landowners can contribute through stewardship, forestry and agricultural programs. These individual projects may happen on separate properties, but collectively they can help improve habitat, protect shorelines, reduce environmental impacts and strengthen the watershed as a whole.

Deputy Chief Jeff Forbes of the Mississaugas of Scugog Island First Nation will open and close the gathering and lead a discussion about collaboration and shared project work. The day will conclude with a keynote address from Erica Ehm focused on encouraging connection and communication, two qualities that are essential to successful watershed stewardship.

Vendor displays and networking opportunities will give participants time to continue those conversations, meet the people behind the programs and research, and connect with others who share an interest in the future of the Kawartha Lakes.

Whether you are a waterfront resident, lake association member, municipal representative, environmental professional, landowner or someone who simply values clean water and healthy lakes, the symposium offers an opportunity to step back from individual issues and see how the pieces fit together.

The State of the Lakes Symposium takes place Friday, September 18, at the Fenelon Falls Community Centre. Registration is \$15 and includes lunch.

Visit the Kawartha Conservation website to explore the full day's agenda and register to attend. Be part of a broader conversation about the knowledge, relationships and collective action needed to care for the Kawartha watershed.

[State of the Lakes Symposium Registration HERE.](#)



A SIMPLE WAY TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE CLOSE TO HOME

The lakes, rivers, forests and wetlands of the Kawartha watershed help define this region. Protecting them requires more than individual projects. It takes a community of people who recognize their value and want to help care for them.

Becoming an annual member of the Kawartha Conservation Foundation is one way to be part of that community.

For more than 30 years, the Foundation has helped support the programs and projects of Kawartha Conservation. It is a registered environmental charitable organization governed by an elected volunteer Board of Directors and operated entirely by volunteers.



Memberships and donations help bring local conservation initiatives to life, supporting work such as connecting children with nature, environmental awareness campaigns, community events, boardwalk improvements and trail building. Foundation support also contributes to tree planting, water quality protection, wildlife habitat restoration, environmental education, and sustainable land and water management projects.

As an annual member, you will receive early invitations to special events and volunteer opportunities while joining others who share a commitment to protecting the watershed. It is an opportunity to support meaningful work in the places you know and care about, while helping ensure future generations can continue to experience the natural beauty of the Kawarthas.

Annual memberships begin at \$25. Joining is simple and can be completed through the [Kawartha Conservation Foundation webpage](#).

For more information, contact Corporate Services Assistant Melanie Dolamore at mdolamore@kawarthaconservation.com or 705-328-2271, extension 216.

For more information on how Kawartha Conservation can help.
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