Ministry of Natural Resources

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354-2026-523

August 10, 2026

Jeff Lehman
District Chair
The District Municipality of Muskoka
Jeff.Lehman@districtcouncil.ca

Dear Chair Lehman:

In January 2025, the Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR) began our assessment of the recommendations from the Muskoka Watershed Conservation and Management Initiative (MWCMI) and potential water management plan amendments.

This initial review is now complete, however additional technical analysis is needed to determine the effectiveness of the proposed changes and to assess any potential unintended impacts. For example, this past winter we proactively lowered Lake Muskoka water levels to the bottom of the Normal Operating Zone (NOZ) by March 1, 2026, as recommended by the MWCMI. Despite this effort, flooding still occurred this spring.

I recognize the concerns raised by property owners and municipalities following the flooding this spring. Building on the MWCMI work, MNR is taking action to strengthen watershed management in Muskoka. We will work with the District of Municipality of Muskoka (DMM) and research partners to:

- Use advanced modelling and analysis tailored to the Muskoka River Watershed to explore operational improvements (e.g., potential amendments to the water management plan).
- Invest in enhanced water and weather monitoring within the Muskoka River watershed to improve community preparedness, support decision-making and flood response.

Our goal is to complete a substantial amount of this work before the 2027 spring freshet. Ministry staff will continue to connect with your team as we proceed.

Flood management is a shared responsibility. It requires coordinated action with municipalities to keep development out of flood-prone areas, with dam owners to

responsibly manage their infrastructure, and with MNR to provide flood forecasting and clear, timely public communication.

We continue to support DMM's Integrated Watershed Management (IWM) initiative, including ongoing technical input and collaboration with our municipal partners to improve communication and land use planning. My ministry will continue to ensure timely, coordinated and proactive communication with our municipal partners leading up to and during freshet. We continue to be available to meet with our municipal partners.

The Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing (MMAH) administers the Municipal Disaster Relief Assistance (MDRA) program, which helps municipalities pay for extraordinary emergency response and clean up costs due to natural disasters, including floods. Funding can be used to repair essential property and infrastructure, such as roads and bridges. More information can be found here: Apply for disaster recovery assistance | ontario.ca and Guidelines to apply for Municipal Disaster Recovery Assistance (MDRA) | ontario.ca

We will continue to work with you and other partners in the District of Muskoka to strengthen watershed management to protect people and property from the flooding.

Sincerely,



The Honourable Mike Harris
Minister of Natural Resources

c: Premier Ford
The Honourable Rob Flack, Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing
The Honourable Graydon Smith, Associate Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing
The Honourable Todd McCarthy, Minister of the Environment, Conservation and Parks
All Municipalities and Indigenous Nations in the Muskoka River Watershed
Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO)
Township of Lake of Bays
Town of Bracebridge
Town of Huntsville
Township of Muskoka Lakes