



Lake Steward Q&A's

Wollaston
Lake Health
Q & A's with

Fred McConnell, Lake Steward.

Q. What is a Lake Steward?

A. In Lake Associations across Ontario, the Lake Stewards are volunteers with some environmental knowledge. Water quality testing is standardized in provincial labs, so Lake Stewards and their helpers follow protocols to ensure this form of 'citizen science' is making a reliable and valuable contribution to lake health by developing a long term database.

Q. Why did you take on the role of Lake Steward for Wollaston?

A. I'm motivated to help preserve Wollaston's natural environment. Our kids are grown up now, so I have a little more time. I finished my career as a software engineer and started a Master's degree in Environmental Monitoring and Assessment at Trent University. This has been a great way to combine learning with practical applications and connections that help the stewardship work in Wollaston.

Q. When did water quality testing on Wollaston begin?

A. In the 1970's and 80's there was growing concern across Ontario about excess nutrients in lakes, and algae growth.



Volunteer Lake Stewards starting measuring water quality and nutrient levels. In 1996 these efforts were formalized into the Lake Partner Program, and Wollaston has participated in this program every year since.



Q. What types of testing do we do, and who pays for it?

A. Under the Lake Partner Program, we conduct the sample collection and provide the samples to the Dorset Labs for standardized analysis. The funding of the program is by FOCA and the Provincial Government. Invasive Species has in the past been funded by the Federation of Anglers and Hunters. Trent U is funded by NORKLA through membership fees. The remainder of the testing is funded by the WLHCA through your membership fees.



Test	May	June	July	August	September	October
Lake Partner Program Water Clarity & nutrient level (total phosphorus)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Invasive Species			✓			
Trent U. Water Chemistry Clarity & dissolved oxygen				✓		
WLHCA water chemistry & E. coli	✓		✓			✓

Q. Besides water quality testing what other things is the Lake Association doing to promote lake health?

A. Lots of stuff as follows:

In late 2017 a Consultant was hired by Federation of Ontario Cottage Associations (FOCA) to map significant milfoil beds (see report on our website).

The news wasn't great – he identified a number of significant beds and in 2019 we started marking milfoil beds with 3 in high traffic areas, hoping to reduce boat traffic that spreads the plant. In July 2018 we got funding for The Land Between conservation organization to present their popular Shoreline Gardening workshop, to which we added a presentation on Eurasian Millfoil, held at the Coe Hill school with about 50 local property owners attending. During 2018, we did a lot of

research on ways to stop/remove milfoil, and in 2019 we submitted applications to the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry for permits to cover beds with benthic barriers that smother plant growth. We also applied for – and got – a grant from FOCA to buy specialized milfoil rakes and materials to make a boom to catch fragments so they don't float away and attach to the shoreline somewhere else on the lake. In 2019 we were fortunate to be selected for the Blue Lakes program, funded by the Ontario Trillium Foundation and run by The Land Between and Watersheds Canada. This program aims to raise awareness of good practices for lake and shoreline management, and through it we hosted a community BBQ and information session

held at the Coe Hill Legion in August 2019. This event was a big success, bringing together about 150 cottagers and others in our community to share a meal and learn about what we can all do to promote lake health.

In 2020 we marked an additional two milfoil beds in high traffic areas.

We've also partnered with the North Kawartha Lake Associations (NORKLA), which helps us to access other Lake Associations to share experiences and provides access to the Trent University labs and their expertise in Lake Health testing. In addition our relationships with FOCA, Watersheds Canada and The Land Between have provided access to Environmental experts and best practices that can be used as models to develop



programs and identify / realize potential sources of funding.

Q. What type of equipment is needed for the testing? What kind of boat do you use?

A. Some of the equipment is pretty basic, for example, a black-and-white patterned disk call a



Secchi disk is used to measure water clarity;



at the other end of the spectrum is YSI EXO meter and Sonde a much more sophisticated instrument we

rent annually for measuring dissolved oxygen, and water temperature across the entire water column in the deepest part of Wollaston Lake. Between those two extremes, there are many sterilized sample bottles we fill, using sterilized filters, and have to drive to the testing lab in Ottawa within 48 hours of sample collection.

In terms of boats, it doesn't matter much but it's helpful to have a flat surface at the edge of the water for the sample bottles and filter nets. The swim platform on our boat works well for this. But it's great when others with pontoon boats come to help out, especially for setting out and pulling up the yellow

milfoil bed markers and cement blocks. Earlier this month one of our member families offered to help bring in markers and blocks, using their small aluminum boat because they had put their larger boat away. That worked too!

Q. In terms of Wollaston Lake health, what are the highlights of 2020?

A. The COVID-19 pandemic changed so many things in our world this summer. Being accepted for the Love Your Lakes program – and the fact that it was still possible to run it was a highlight!

Other highlights include: We have a new member of the executive to help with water quality testing. Increased awareness of the milfoil threat, and ways to help reduce it. A new website started by Natalie Baker was really helpful for promoting awareness and enthusiasm for property owners doing their part to remove milfoil in front of their properties.

Q. And what are the challenges we faced this year?

A. Due to COVID, the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry was not reviewing permit applications for work in the water such as benthic mats for milfoil management. It's frustrating that we have to wait, while milfoil continues to grow.

Funding for Lake Partner Program was cancelled by the Ford government for 2019, but the WLHCA was able to cover costs for this year. Funding for the Invasive Species program was cancelled by the Ford government in 2018, covered by a network of lake associations in 2019, but we couldn't manage it this year with COVID. (It involved a lot of driving the specialized equipment from one lake to another, and sanitization, in addition to costs.)

Q. What do you hope we can do better next year?

A. We need to get the word out about the effectiveness of our milfoil rakes, and a better system of loaning them out to WLHCA members. The rakes are more effective than hand-pulling, or cutting milfoil. People who borrow them always say how great they are, yet sometimes they were sitting unused.

My hope for 2021 is we will have funding from the provincial government for the Lake Partner Program, Invasive Species testing, permits from MNRF for benthic mats, funds to deploy mats, healthy shoreline initiatives, and the ability to hold public events, free of COVID.



Love Your Lake Program

Wollaston Lake was honoured to

be one of a select group of lakes across Canada to receive funding for the Love Your Lake program delivered by Watersheds Canada. All lakefront property owners (whether WLHCA members or not) received a letter in July 2020 explaining the program, along with a survey. Maintaining healthy shorelines is one of the most important things we can all do to protect the health of the lake. Love Your Lakes, which took place over six days in early August, brought a trained technician to Wollaston who performed assessments of each property using surveying equipment along with photographs and observations. Following analysis by the team at Watersheds Canada, each lakefront property owner will receive secure and confidential access to a report and recommendations for their shoreline. If you did not receive a letter, contact us at wlhca.membership@gmail.com to update your mailing address, so Watersheds Canada knows where to send your confidential report.

In this time of climate change uncertainty, it is more important than ever that we protect the first 100 feet (called the Riparian zone) of shoreline around Wollaston Lake and the Deer River. This zone is critical to lake health as it functions to prevent erosion, reduce excess nutrients (phosphorus and others) from entering the lake, and provide



habitat for a number of plant and animal species important for lake health.

Maggie Stevenson is the shoreline consultant from Watersheds Canada who toured Wollaston lake for six days with the help of a number of volunteer boat drivers. Maggie remarked daily about the friendliness and engagement of the Wollaston community, and the many property owners who came out to their docks to chat and ask lots of questions. A special thank you to the volunteers – Wendy Mortimer, Spencer Bush, Rick Fox, Myles Baker, Luke Mellor, Michael Rogers, Zach Vernon and Matthew McConnell for providing COVID-safe accommodations for Maggie, boat driving and taking pictures.

The WLHCA will receive a summary report of the overall health of the Wollaston Lake

shoreline. This information will be included in a “State of the Lake” review which we are undertaking to create a lake management plan for the future health of Wollaston. This review has commenced, and you’ll be hearing more about in the months ahead. For further information about the Love Your Lake program consult <http://loveyourlake.ca/>

Watch for upcoming details of a contest to recognize the property owners who make the most improvement to their shoreline starting in the spring of 2021. It’s never too early to start planning so look for your confidential report in the winter of 2021, stay tuned for contest details and watch for suggestions on native plants that are best for planting on your shoreline to protect water quality in Wollaston.