

Annual Newsletter



Muskrat Watershed Council

2026 Edition



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Letter from the Chair



Stewardship in Action: Protecting Our Watershed Together

As we reflect on another productive year, the Muskrat Watershed Council is proud to share the progress made throughout 2026. Thanks to the continued support of volunteers, residents, landowners, municipalities, and community partners, important strides have been taken to protect and improve the health of the Muskrat Watershed.

This year demonstrated the strength of collaboration and the growing commitment across our communities to environmental stewardship and watershed resilience.

Restoration and Stewardship Projects

Expanding Habitat and Shoreline Protection

Building on the success of previous years, restoration efforts in 2026 focused on improving shoreline stability, enhancing wildlife habitat, and supporting long-term ecosystem health.

Key initiatives included:

- Additional native tree and shrub planting projects
- Riparian buffer restoration along sensitive waterways
- Erosion control and shoreline stabilization activities
- Pollinator habitat enhancement efforts
- Stewardship support for participating landowners

These projects continue to improve water quality, strengthen biodiversity, and increase climate resilience across the watershed.

Water Quality Monitoring and Environmental Data

Monitoring programs remained a vital component of watershed management efforts this year. Volunteers and Council members continued collecting data throughout the watershed to track environmental conditions and identify emerging concerns.

Monitoring activities included:

- Seasonal water sampling
- Temperature and turbidity monitoring
- Observation of aquatic habitat conditions
- Ongoing assessment of watershed health indicators

The information gathered supports future planning, restoration priorities, and informed environmental decision-making.

Letter from the Chair



Community Engagement & Education: Building Awareness Through Outreach

Community outreach and education activities expanded throughout 2026, helping residents better understand the importance of watershed stewardship and environmental sustainability.

Highlights from this year included:

- Participation in local environmental events and fairs
- Educational presentations for schools and community groups
- Stewardship outreach to landowners and residents
- Promotion of sustainable land and water practices

Public interest and participation continue to grow, strengthening community connections to the watershed and its long-term protection.

Karen Coulas

Chair of the Muskrat Watershed Council

• Five townships span the Muskrat watershed: North Algona-Wilberforce, Laurentian Valley, Admaston/Bromley, Whitewater Region and the City of Pembroke.

• The total watershed area exceeds 500 km², covering lakes, rivers, creeks and wetlands—from Muskrat Lake to the Ottawa River.

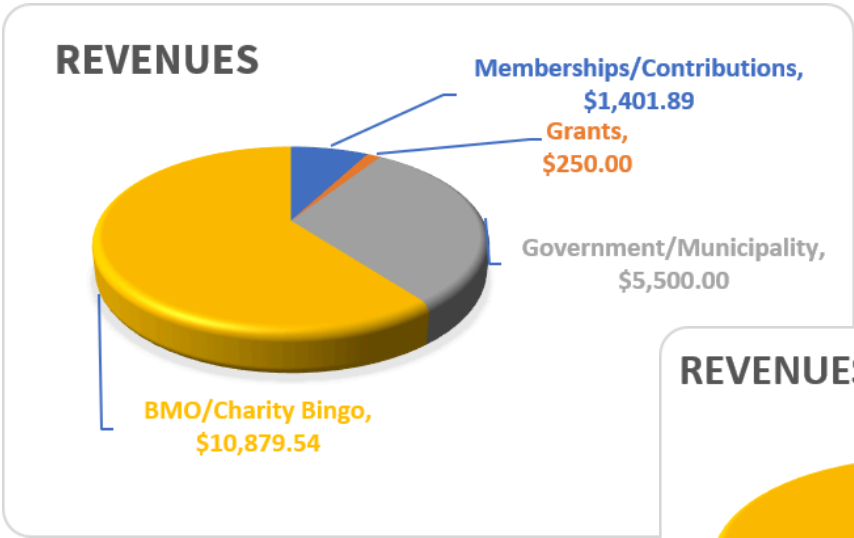
• Muskrat Lake, the largest waterbody here, provides all the drinking water for the village of Cobden.

• The lake supports a vibrant ecosystem—including bass, pike, trout, smelt, waterfowl and wildlife

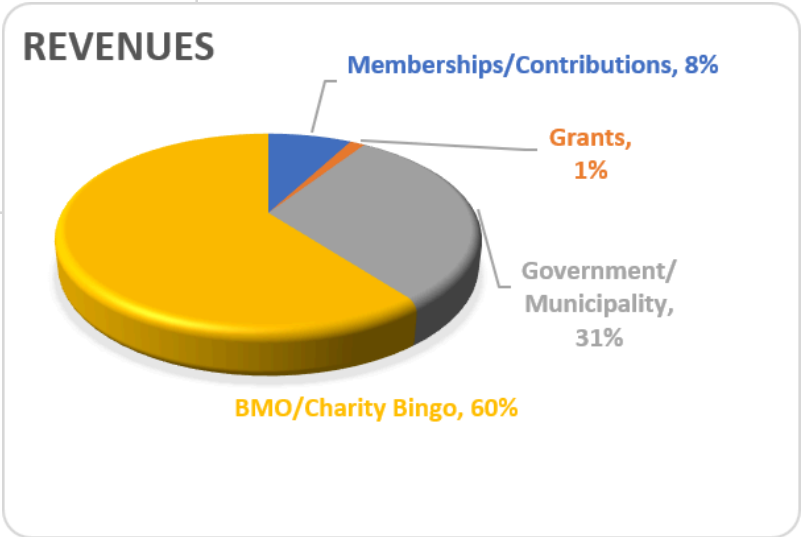
FINANCIALS - A Year in Review

April 2025 - March 2026

Revenues	\$	%
Memberships/Contributions	\$1,401.89	7.77%
Grants	\$250.00	1.39%
Government/Municipality	\$5,500.00	30.50%
BMO/Charity Bingo	\$10,879.54	60.34%
Total Revenues	\$18,031.43	100.00%



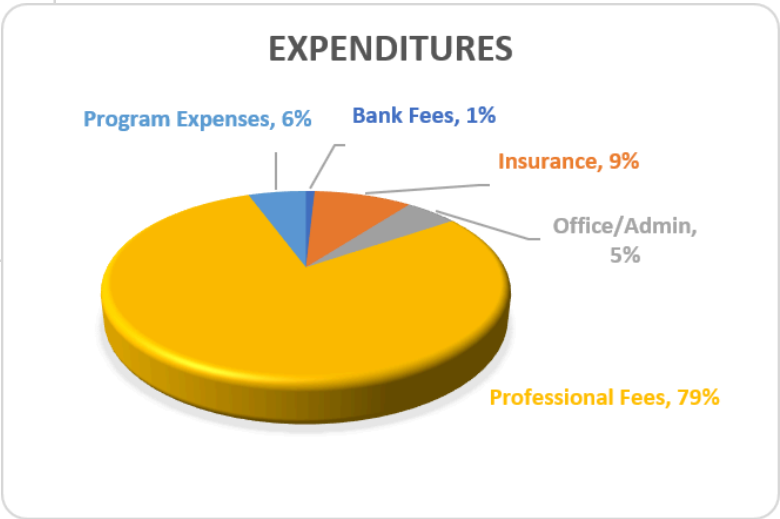
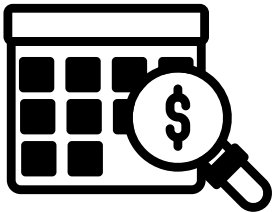
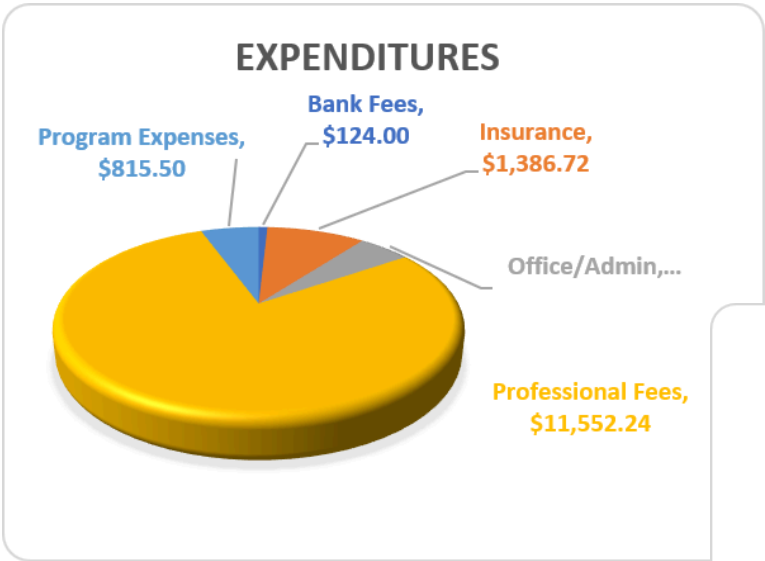
Net Result:
\$3,411.64



FINANCIALS - A Year in Review

April 2025 - March 2026

Expenditures	\$	%
Bank Fees	\$124.00	1%
Insurance	\$1,386.72	9%
Office/Admin	\$741.33	5%
Professional Fees	\$11,552.24	79%
Program Expenses	\$815.50	6%
Total Revenues	\$14,619.79	100.00%

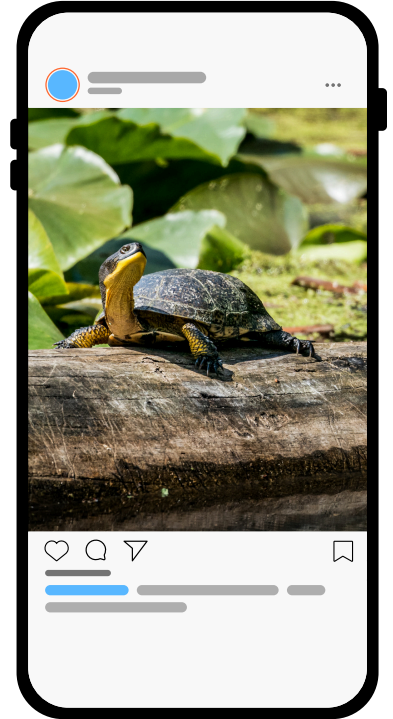


Media and Communications

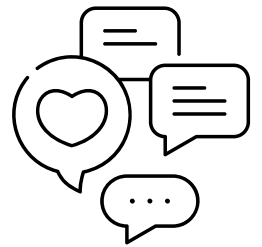
A Year in Review

This year was a quieter one for Media and Communications, with activity focused mainly on keeping the Muskrat Watershed Council visible and sharing key updates when needed. Communications during the year included notices and updates related to Council activities, volunteer opportunities, watershed stewardship, environmental awareness, and community events.

Posts and communications helped share information about the Council's ongoing work, including restoration and stewardship efforts, water quality and watershed health, volunteer involvement, local events, and opportunities for residents to stay informed or get involved. While this was not a year of major communications growth, these updates helped maintain an important connection with members, volunteers, partners, and the broader community.



The Council would also like to recognize Amanda Walt for her time and contributions as Director, Media and Communications. Amanda has moved on from the role, and we thank her for the support she provided during her time with the Council.



We are pleased to announce that Hannah Bartlette has taken over as Director, Media and Communications.

Looking ahead, Hannah will help guide communications for the Council and support efforts to keep the community informed about watershed news, Council activities, and opportunities to participate.



Media and Communications

Website Analytics

The website experienced a major growth phase during the summer, followed by stabilization. While total site sessions decreased slightly by 4.5% compared to the previous period, overall user engagement remains steady. The graph below compares the current period (solid blue line) against a previous period (dotted grey line) from April 1, 2025, to March 31, 2026. Data from March 1, 2026, shows 87 sessions and 75 unique visitors, which is closely aligned with March 1, 2025 (97 sessions and 76 unique visitors).

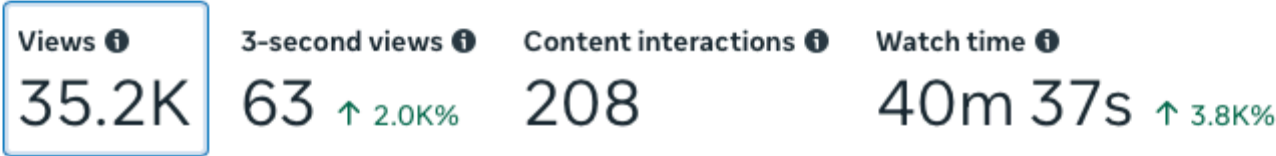


Traffic Overview & Key Metrics

- **Total Page Views:** 2,767 views (from 3,012).
- **Total Site Sessions:** 1,534 sessions (from 1,607).
- **Unique Visitors:** 1,236 users (from 1,353).
- **Bounce Rate:** 73% (an improvement from 75%).
- **Avg. Session Duration:** 2 minutes, 50 seconds (from 4 minutes, 40 seconds).

Social Media Analytics

Facebook:



Instagram:



Strengthening Partnerships

Partnerships continue to play an important role in achieving shared environmental goals. During 2026, the Council collaborated with:

- Municipal governments
- Conservation and environmental organizations
- Community groups
- Local landowners and agricultural producers
- Regional agencies and stakeholders
- Local businesses

These partnerships help expand the impact of restoration and stewardship efforts across the watershed. As always, MWC appreciates the monetary and in kind support shown by Whitewater Region Township in our pursuit of better water quality.



CottageLife



Volunteer Profile 2026: Jeff Reeves



The Muskrat Watershed Council would like to recognize the many volunteers who contributed their time and expertise throughout the year. Volunteers assisted with restoration projects, monitoring programs, educational initiatives, and event support.

Their dedication and hard work remain essential to the success of the Council's efforts. We sincerely thank all volunteers for their ongoing commitment to watershed stewardship.

Jeff Reeves became involved with Muskrat Watershed Council (MWC) around the time zebra mussels appeared in Muskrat Lake. "I wanted to see if I could help," he says.

As Director at Large, he's been quietly helping ever since. He attends monthly meetings, helps install and remove weed mats at the beach, assists Algonquin College students with water testing, and participates in tree planting projects.

Jeff's connection to nature began long before he arrived at Muskrat Lake. He grew up in Weston, Ontario, a suburb of Toronto near Pearson Airport. Back then, the area was far less developed than it is today. "Nature was always present," he says. Weekends were often spent at a family cottage in Muskoka, built by his father on a small river. Those early experiences shaped Jeff's lifelong appreciation for the outdoors, especially for forested areas near water. That's one reason he treasures his seasonal cottage on Muskrat Lake, where he has spent the past 25 years.

Jeff's working career involved solving problems. He was an engineering manager at Mitel in Kanata, where he and his team dealt with hardware failures in the field. "We got the phone call if it broke," he says. Jeff relied on his people skills, along with an understanding of science and engineering, to troubleshoot problems and guide teams calmly through difficult situations. "You can't panic when something breaks," he explains.

Those same qualities have made Jeff a valuable volunteer. He brings computer skills, good judgment, critical thinking, dedication, versatility and a friendly personality to MWC. More importantly, he values collaboration. "I listen to discussions and I like being able to add my opinions and to encourage others to talk," he says.

Continued on page 9...

Volunteer Profile 2026: Jeff Reeves

Jeff understands that environmental work requires patience. “It doesn’t bother me that progress can be slow,” he says. “Growing a tree takes time.” What gives him hope is the progress MWC has made in building relationships.



“MWC has created ongoing connections with local, county and provincial levels of government, as well as with the farming community and Algonquin College,” he says.

Looking ahead, Jeff hopes MWC will continue to grow, attract new volunteers and improve water quality in measurable ways. His advice to others is straightforward and welcoming. “Come out and attend a meeting. Listen and talk about your own concerns. Don’t feel you have to get more involved than you want to. Every little bit helps.”

“I live on the lake so I have a vested interest in the quality of the water,” says Jeff. “It affects the value of my property and the quality of my life.”

Looking Ahead to 2027

The Muskrat Watershed Council remains focused on advancing watershed health and community stewardship in the coming year. Priorities for 2027 include:

- Expanding shoreline restoration and tree planting initiatives
- Enhancing & improving the Cobden Marsh trail
- Continuing long-term environmental monitoring via partnership with Algonquin College Pembroke Environmental Technician program
- Increasing youth engagement and education opportunities
- Supporting climate resilience and adaptation efforts
- Building new partnerships and funding opportunities

Together, these efforts will help ensure the Muskrat Watershed remains healthy and resilient for future generations.

Challenges for the Muskrat Watershed Council

The **Muskrat Lake Watershed** faces environmental challenges primarily from high phosphorus levels and nutrient loading. The excess nutrients trigger annual blue-green algae blooms, impacting the primary drinking water source for the Village of Cobden. These toxic blooms threaten public health, force beach closures, and harm the local tourism economy.

Operating as a volunteer-driven, non-profit organization, the Muskrat Watershed Council (MWC) encounters steep administrative and financial barriers while tackling these systemic issues. The watershed spans five distinct municipalities, yet the rural region lacks a formal conservation authority to provide structural oversight or baseline funding.

Consequently, the council competes for limited provincial and federal grants while depending heavily on community donations and grassroots fundraising. Balancing the diverse interests of local agricultural producers, shoreline property owners, and environmental advocates requires a delicate collaborative approach.

Despite these constraints, the **Muskrat Watershed Council** actively implements nature-based restoration projects, manages an aeration systems, and organizes community outreach to mitigate pollution at its source.

Get Involved! Make a Difference!

Volunteer Opportunities:

Join us in field sampling, data analysis, planting, water sampling, social media support or hosting local workshops. Get updates through our website, Facebook and Instagram. No experience required! Training is provided!

Attend a Monthly Meeting:

Held on the third Thursday of each month (via Google Meet and in person). Email info@muskratwatershedcouncil.com for the link and agenda. Help shape policies, programs, and priorities for watershed health.

Donate or Sponsor:

MWC is a registered charity, so donations are tax-deductible and support our ongoing efforts. Visit our website to donate. Support the long-term health of our watershed—your contribution funds water improvement and outreach efforts.

Become a Board Member:

Make a strategic impact. We welcome diverse skills and perspectives. We are seeking three to five new board members—especially those with backgrounds in science and technology, farming, shoreline stewardship, youth engagement, fundraising, web site management or communications.



The Muskrat Watershed Council Thanks You for Your Support!



The continued success of the Muskrat Watershed Council is made possible through the **support and involvement of our community**. Every volunteer hour, stewardship project, partnership, and conversation contributes to protecting the watershed we all share.

Thank you for being part of this important work,
The Muskrat Watershed Council - Protecting Water, Habitat, and Community
Through Stewardship and Collaboration

Stay connected for upcoming events, volunteer opportunities, and watershed updates throughout the year:

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