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### Letter from the Chair



Hello Everyone,

It's that time of year again-our annual newsletter is here to reflect on how Muskrat Watershed Council (MWC) has been working to protect and improve our watershed.

"Review" is an especially fitting word this year. While we've continued our on-the-ground work and maintained existing projects, a major focus has been turning the lens inward-evaluating our own structure, capacity and direction.

Like any organization (or person!) sometimes you need to pause, reflect and ask tough questions: What's working well? What needs improvement? How can we grow? For MWC, this has meant taking on the challenging but rewarding work of restructuring and learning how to better support both our mission and our team. You could say we're doing some organizational "therapy." Yes, it's hard work but it's necessary and meaningful.

A big part of our growth involves building stronger connections within the community. We want to meet more of you, work alongside volunteers and discover new ways to make a positive impact on local water quality. Think of this as us taking our life coach's advice: "Put yourself out there, open up and make new friends."

So here we are, asking: "Hey... want to be friends? We could find projects to work on together, maybe get our hands dirty for a good cause and make a real difference-together."

Thanks for being part of the journey.

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

DID YOU KNOW ???

# HIGHLIGHTS OF 2025

Over the past year, Muskrat Watershed Council collaborated with Watersheds Canada and local lake residents to restore vital fish habitat. first on Mink Lake in October 2024 and again on Lake Dore in July 2025. Community volunteers built twenty brush-bundle structures from woody debris onshore. These bundles were then anchored in strategic areas of the lake-away from boat routes-providing essential underwater shelter and spawning habitat for species such as smallmouth bass, largemouth bass, northern pike, panfish and walleye. Volunteer efforts included anchoring the bundles with concrete blocks and mapping their locations via GPS, with data shared with the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources for ongoing monitoring. These natural structures recreate underwater complexity that was previously lost from "cleaned" shorelines, supporting fish populations and enhancing biodiversity long-term.





In February 2025, Muskrat Watershed Council partnered with the Ontario Soil and Crop Improvement Association (OSCIA) to promote a two-part Environmental Farm Plan (EFP) workshop tailored for local farm owners across the watershed. Held in mid-February, the workshop offered both in-person and virtual formats, guiding participants through a comprehensive self-assessment of their farm operations-highlighting environmental strengths, identifying risk areas and crafting actionable stewardship plans. representatives helped recruit local farmers, shared event details in our monthly newsletter and social media and emphasized how the EFP can connect landowners with cost-share and beneficial conservation programs practices. The workshop empowered farmers with tools and knowledge to enhance soil reduce runoff health. and strengthen watershed resilience.



## Media and Communications

### Website Analytics (Wix)

Over the past year, Muskrat Watershed Council's website has experienced mixed performance. Average session duration dropped by 25 per cent, while the average number of pages per session increased by seven per cent, suggesting more focused browsing behaviour. The bounce rate improved slightly, decreasing by three per cent. However, overall site sessions declined by 19 per cent, and the number of unique visitors fell by 18 per cent.



### Social Media Trends

Over the past year, Muskrat Watershed Council has seen remarkable growth on Facebook, with reach soaring by an impressive 610 per cent and content interactions increasing by 300 per cent. In contrast, while Instagram reach declined by 41 per cent, engagement on the platform still doubled—reflected in a 100 per cent increase in content interactions. We're also excited to share that we recently surpassed 500 followers on Facebook!



## Media and Communications

### How Do We Compare?

The following key statistics compare Muskrat Watershed Council with other nonprofit organizations across Canada, highlighting that MWC is performing well in comparison.

You're compared to Non Profit Org sites in Canada. Change Category		
Traffic	Your stats	Better than
2 Unique visitors	135	41%
Avg. session duration	3min 31sec	47%
Bounce rate	77%	9%
2. Returning visitors	7%	13%
7 Organic search	84%	91%
Social	3%	60%

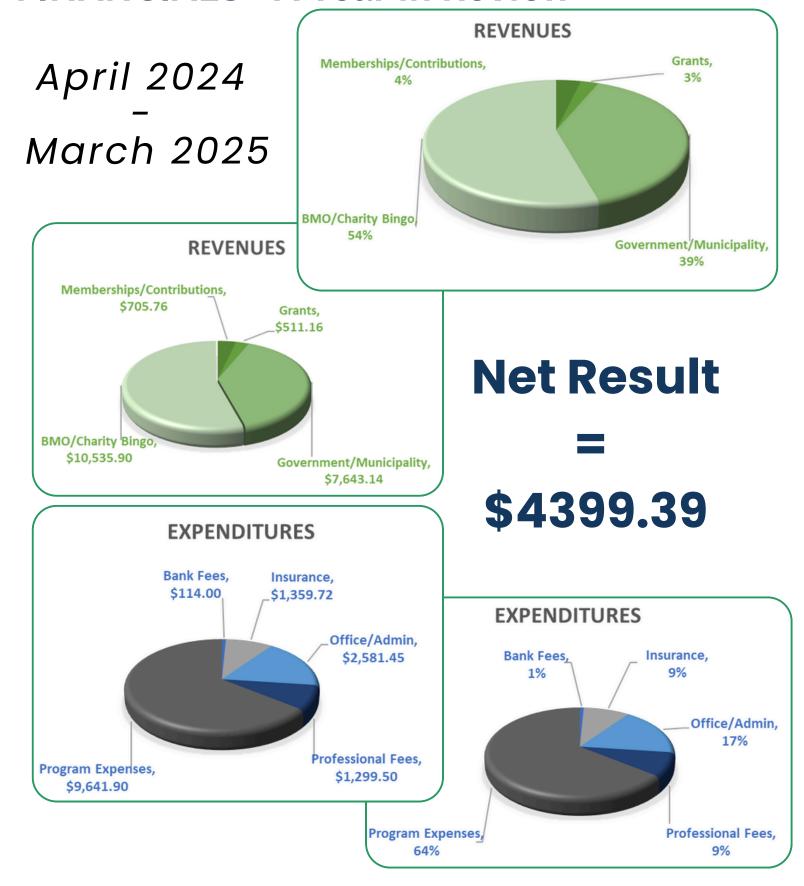
Strategic Media and Marketing Enhancements

We are currently working with **Anchor Marketing,** an award-winning agency based in Tsawwassen, British Columbia. Specializing in nonprofit and public-sector organizations, Anchor is guiding us through the development of a comprehensive marketing proposal and strategic communications improvement plan.

This includes refining our mission and vision to better align with our long-term goals as well as a case for support to strengthen donor engagement.



### **FINANCIALS - A Year in Review**



### Our Partners & Sponsors

We were supported this year by a passionate network of partners including Watersheds Canada, the Ontario Charitable Gaming Association, local municipalities and regional businesses—each crucial to our shared success. As always, MWC appreciates the monetary and in kind support shown by Whitewater Region Township in our pursuit of better water quality.

To help boost membership, Muskrat Watershed Council partnered with Cottage Life magazine to offer a special incentive. New members who signed up in the spring received a complimentary three-issue subscription to Cottage Life. This popular Canadian lifestyle magazine celebrates the joys of cottage living, with expert advice on DIY projects, nature and wildlife, décor, entertaining and environmental issues that affect lakes and rural communities.







## Cottage Life

Plus many more...



## Volunteer Profile 2025:

### **Amanda Walt**

Meet Amanda Walt, MWC's director of media and communications.

Back in the summer of 2001, Amanda and her husband, Michael, bought a year-round renovated log house at the east end of Muskrat Lake as a recreational property. Soon after, they found a flyer from Muskrat Watershed Council in their mailbox, asking for volunteers. They attended their first meeting that October. They were used to having a lake association when they owned several previous cottages in Quebec so it seemed natural to join MWC. "We had heard about some of the concerns with water quality and we wanted to get involved to help improve that," she says. They threw themselves into the work, attending meetings, helping to source, install and maintain an aeration system and weed mats at Cobden Beach and cleaning up the Cobden Trail. Before long Amanda took over the media and communications role. She's been busy ever since updating MWC's website, posting information there and on Facebook, writing blogs, sending out press releases and writing and editing our annual newsletters. Along the way she found time to volunteer at the SBCNA charity bingo and to initiate a meeting format improvement plan that has streamlined our monthly meetings. Now she's working with a committee to revise MWC's policies and improve its marketing reach.



As well as balancing a full-time job in Ottawa as a principal security compliance analyst at Entrust with her volunteer work for MWC, Amanda has a busy family life with two grown daughters and two young granddaughters. She also occasionally mentors young women starting their careers in STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics).

Amanda brings many skills to her work with MWC. As well as wonderful organizational and people skills, she is enthusiastic, professional, versatile, dedicated, computer savvy, friendly and skilled in running meetings. She is full of initiative and always willing to help out.

"MWC is doing important work," says
Amanda. "It's not always glamorous or fun or
rewarding but I believe it's important. And at
the moment, if we're not doing something to
improve water quality, no one else is. That
kind of frightens me so that's why I'm so
passionate to get other levels of community
and government involved to ensure that it's
not just us."

Going forward, Amanda would like to see MWC refreshed with a larger base. It worries her that not enough people are getting involved. "We need new blood, new ideas, new passion and commitment to the greater cause."

## Looking Ahead to 2026 and Beyond

### Strategic Media and Marketing Enhancements

We will continue our collaboration with Anchor Marketing to implement recommended improvements across our website, social media platforms and overall communications strategy to ensure our messaging remains engaging, consistent and accessible.

### Policy Review in Partnership with Renfrew County

A comprehensive policy review and revision cycle is scheduled for 2027. We will work in close partnership with Renfrew County to ensure all policies remain current, effective and aligned with regional priorities and regulatory standards.

### **Mission and Vision Alignment**

As part of our ongoing strategic planning process, we will refine our mission and vision statements. This work will help ensure our organizational direction remains in step with county policies and serves as a clear framework for project planning and decision making.

### **Water Quality Improvement Planning**

We are committed to developing actionable strategies to improve water quality throughout the watershed. This effort will include identifying the specific supports and partnerships—local, regional and provincial—required to implement and sustain meaningful long-term improvements.



### Spotlight on Challenges for Muskrat Watershed Council

The Muskrat watershed continues to face serious environmental pressures, particularly from persistent nutrient loading. Phosphorus levels are nearly double the provincial guidelines. This excess nutrient fuels harmful blue-green algae blooms—detected in three of the past six years—which have triggered multiple public health advisories and raised concerns among residents and stakeholders.

Compounding these challenges is the absence of a provincial conservation authority in our region. As a result, coordinated watershed-wide action falls largely to our volunteer-led council, which works tirelessly to protect water quality, raise awareness and drive local stewardship efforts.





### **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 taxdeductible 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.

As we reflect on 2025, we are proud of the tangible progress achieved—and grateful for the community that fuels it. Together, we've strengthened our watershed's resilience. Let's carry that momentum into 2026!

Thanks to your passion, we're making measurable progress in safeguarding our watershed.



But challenges like algal blooms, nutrient loading, and ecological degradation persist—and they call for collaboration among all parts of the watershed and all levels of government.

Be part of the solution: join us and share our mission. Together, we can ensure safe drinking water, vibrant ecosystems and thriving communities.

Thank you for being part of a cleaner, healthier watershed!

- Muskrat Watershed Council Board and Volunteers

### Stay Connected

If you are interested in knowing more about what we are doing in the local community or wish to volunteer your time, our regular monthly meetings happen every third Thursday of the month at 6:30pm.

All are welcome!

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