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**MUSKRAT WATERSHED COUNCIL (MWC)**

Meeting of the Board of Directors

**Meeting Minutes**

**Thursday, August 17, 2023 6:30 p.m.**

**In person: Basement of the Whitewater Township Building, 44 Main Street, Cobden ON**

**Online through Google Meet**

meet.google.com/ezd-qitc-btk

**+1 587-978-1050 (PIN 460326449)**

1. **Call to Order and Record of Attendance**

The meeting of the Muskrat Watershed Council was called to order at 6:38 p.m.

**Attendance:**

**Present:** Allyssa Bucholtz, Karen Coulas, Barbara Green, Jeff Reeves, Gerry Rook, Wes Gerrish, Rhonda Marshall, Peter Russell, Fatema Shaikh

**Regrets:**  Rick Adamson, Anna-Maria Blum, Rene Coulas, Andy Laird, Debbie MacDonald, Evelyn St. Amour, Greg Stasyna, Dave Thomassin, Claus Trost, Amanda Walt, Michael Walt

**Council Representative Regrets:**

Chris Olmstead, Township of Whitewater Region

1. **Adoption of Agenda**

Jeff approved the agenda, Gerry seconded it.

**Approval of minutes from June 15, 2023 meeting:**

Gerry approved the minutes, Jeff seconded.

1. **Treasurer’s Report** - Dave (for Debbie)

See attached treasurer’s report.

1. **Directors’ Reports**

**Agricultural Committee** - Karen

We are looking for more properties for planting next spring. We have a few properties along the Snake River that we are considering. We looked at two sites this week, of which one is suitable. We are hoping to also find properties on Mink Lake and Lake Dore.

**Science Committee** - Dave, Fatema, Megan

ArcGIS

Algonquin College student, Fatema Shaikh spoke about a project she has done for MWC under the supervision of MWC Science Director, Dave Thomassin, who teaches at Algonquin. She shared her computer screen to show how all data about water testing in the Muskrat watershed could be displayed on maps using ArcGIS online, a cloud-based software to create and share interactive web maps. ArcGIS online is a paid service that requires a subscription.

Wastewater effluent

We learned from township that there have been some adverse water measurements done at the water treatment plant. When a local brewery uses their cleaning system it has been overwhelming the water treatment facility. No overflow has gone into Muskrat Lake but it’s getting close. Karen attended a meeting where someone suggested trucking the waste to a liquid waste-holding storage tank and then using it on fields as fertilizer. Some farms no longer milk cows but still have storage facilities. Dave and Karen will set up a meeting with Whitewater Brewery to discuss the problem. Megan suggested we might partner with Econse https://econse.com/ to look for solutions to suggest to the brewery that they might use to safely dispose of their wastewater.

Muskoka Watershed Council

Dave has spoken with Alex Benzie, Planner/EDO at the township. She mentioned the Muskoka Watershed Council works with a full-time grant writer hired by the District of Muskoka. This person also works with other townships. Dave will send us the information in case we are interested in establishing a system like this for MWC.

Cobden Marsh

The township is working on finding a group to act as lead for the project restoring the marsh. They are looking at the current engineering to see if the old wall of the storage lagoon can be rebuilt. There will be an update by the end of the month. MWC will write a letter of support for this project.

Cobden Beach

The new mats and buoys have been installed. We pulled out the old mats and discarded them. The new mats will be removed in the fall. Michael Walt noticed birds on the beach while he was checking on the aerators. He suggested we might try scarecrows. The township already has a bird plan. They are hiring an employee for Parks and Recreation. This person will check to see if scarecrows might be a good idea. The township has someone on contract to maintain the bird deterrents on the roof of the water treatment plant. At the moment the beach is closed due to e-coli. The township has pulled out the swimming rafts. The beach area was the only spot tested for e-coli, not the rest of the lake. The health unit will retest for e-coli every week or two. You can call them and ask if they have retested.

Turtle boxes

Dave will send out information to MWC Directors so they can vote on whether or not to allocate funds so MWC can go ahead with a project to build protective frames to cover turtles’ eggs.

Community Services Recovery Fund (CSRF) - Megan

MWC applied for and received funding through this federal government program. It’s part of a $400 million investment from the Government of Canada to support community service organizations as they adapt and recover from the COVID-19 pandemic. We used this funding to hire Megan in June. So far she has worked on the following projects:

**Stewardship Strategic Plan**

Outlines the value**s** of the MWC and the proposed events and stewardship projects for this year

Available in the shared drive if any members of the council are interested in reading it

**Social Media Strategy**

Done in collaboration with Amanda to help her visualize social media posts for the year

**Events**

A township tour where representatives from all townships within our watershed travel with the MWC to visit different past MWC project sites. Sites to visit could include controlled tile drainage, cattle fencing and out-of-stream watering systems, Cobden Beach, water monitoring, Natural Edge.

A watershed lake association meeting where representatives from the main lakes within our region meet to discuss issues they are facing and investigate the possibility of collaboration in future projects

Physical event materials commonly displayed at public events such as Taste of the Valley and the Cobden Fair have been redesigned and reprinted. All of the materials have been sent to Karen.

**Revised Bylaws**

Megan, Karen and Debbie met with Julie Truelove at the end of July to look over the bylaws originally written in 2017. (Julie had been on the 2017 bylaw-writing team.) They updated and/or removed some directors’ roles and positions.

**Stewardship Projects**

Partnering with Cobden Public School and Opeongo High School to present in the fall on subjects relating to the MWC. These include subjects such as water quality/history of the Muskrat watershed, benthic invertebrates, hosting Ray’s Reptiles and having them present on native wildlife species and some of the challenges they face today.

**Grant Writing Training**

Megan has enrolled in a course through McMaster University’s Continuing Education department on non-profit management and grant writing. Courses include: Marketing your non-profit, Introduction to non-profit management, Writing effective grant proposals and Advanced grant writing. Megan’s goal is to take what she learns through the grant writing course and adapt it to present to the council and volunteers of MWC to aid them in their future endeavours.

**Volunteer/Membership Survey**

Survey created to be sent out via MWC email list in the next couple of weeks

Feedback survey to help the council better understand how the public views our organization and help to identify potential areas of improvement

**Media Equipment**

Megan has obtained a quote for video conference AV equipment to facilitate presentations and hybrid meetings. Total cost would be about $5,500. This is more than we estimated in our grant application. But we have extra money in the grant and are hopeful the funder will approve reallocation of funds for this. The price would include a training session. The company said they would would choose a system that is easy to use.

**Communications & Media** - Megan (for Amanda)

Annual Newsletter

MWC’s annual newsletter was completed and released just before the 2023 AGM in July. Some physical copies were printed to hand out at the AGM. The digital version is now available on the MWC website under “Publications.”

Call to Action - Cottagers Wanted

A call to action was posted on the MWC social media channels as well as our email list looking for cottage owners residing within the Muskrat watershed interested in having their shorelines planted with native plants. The registration page is available on the MWC website under “Events.” So far we have had six cottage owners register.

Blog post about Bees

An article covering the study being done in Renfrew County on a native ground-nesting bee species was the subject of this month’s blog post.

**Fundraising Committee** - Karen

No report

1. **Old Business** - Karen

Fall Plantings

See Agricultural Committee above

Fish Bundles

Karen and Rick Adamson went around Mink Lake to see if the lake is a good location for installing fish bundles. They discovered that it is a suitable location. The bundles, which are created as fish habitat, consist of two-foot by two-foot bundles of sticks tied together and weighted down. Each stick is about the thickness of your little finger. We are hoping to enlist the help of students, possibly from Algonquin College, to make from 12 to 18 fish bundles. Dave and Megan will speak to their contacts at Algonquin to find volunteer students. Karen will also ask her contacts for helpers. Lake Dore is also interested in this project for another year.but Billboard signs

This item was deferred until our September 21, 2023 meeting.

1. **Other/New Business**

Cobden Fair

Andy will set up and Debbie will man the MWC booth at the Cobden Fair, August 25 to 27, 2023. MWC members interested in helping at the display booth should contact Karen or Debbie.

Muskrat Lake Association

The MLA is holding a meeting Saturday, August 19, 2023, from 10 am at the Cobden Legion Hall, 43A Main Street, Cobden. Anyone from the watershed may attend.

RESTCo

Peter Russell and Wes Gerrish, representatives of RESTCo (Remote Energy Security Technologies Collaborative) attended our meeting tonight and spoke about a technology for gathering algae. They are interested in allying themselves with people who have a practical interest in removing algae from bodies of water. Peter and Wes will meet with Dave to discuss their technology and its possible interest to the MWC. For more information about RESTCo please visit their website at http://www.restco.ca

A Couple of Good Questions:

We were asked if we feel MWC’s efforts to reduce nutrients in the lake are showing results. Karen replied some newer farm techniques now eliminate excess nutrient. The biggest problem now is that climate change is creating water events that are washing everything into the lake. Megan said total phosphorus and nitrogen in the lake are slowly going down - it could be due to our efforts, we can’t be sure. There’s a 200-year study about the sediments at the bottom of Muskrat Lake on our website. It’s no longer a question of just nutrient overloading but also heavy metals coming in. It will take time for our efforts to show results, but we are going in the right direction.

We were also asked about cattle in waterways. Karen explained we have already installed three alternative watering systems in collaboration with local farmers. MWC will will go out and talk to any farmer we hear about whose cattle are in the watercourse. We will offer to partner with them to install cattle fencing and set up an alternate cattle watering system.

1. **Next Meeting**

Thursday, September 21, 2023, 6:30 p.m.

**In person: Basement of the Whitewater Township Building, 44 Main Street, Cobden**

**Online: Through Google Meet**

meet.google.com/ezd-qitc-btk

**+1 587-978-1050 (PIN 460326449)**

1. Adjournment: 8:20 p.m.

**Minutes recorded and submitted by:** \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Barbara Green, Secretary, Muskrat Watershed Council

**Approved by:** \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Karen Coulas, Chair, Muskrat Watershed Council

DON’T FORGET TO RENEW YOUR MWC MEMBERSHIP FOR 2023!

COST IS $20 PER MEMBERSHIP

IT’S EASY TO RENEW - JUST SEND AN E-TRANSFER TO:

treasurer@muskratwatershedcouncil.com

(Please put your name and email address in the message box so we can email your tax receipt.)

