

2013 Watershed Report Card

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1. What is a Watershed Report Card?

Watershed report cards are a management and evaluation tool that allow Conservation Authorities (CAs) and their partners to communicate information on watershed health and to measure environmental change.

The science in these report cards is shared with local decision-makers, non-government agencies and other stakeholders across Ontario, in a way that is easy to read and understand. The results help us determine where to target our efforts for the greatest impact.

Conservation Authority watershed report cards will be produced every five years. Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority (LSRCA) will also publish watershed updates in between the report cards.

2. Why do we need to monitor our local environment and how do Conservation Authorities use the results?

Watershed monitoring helps us to identify issues, project future conditions, focus our natural resource management actions and track progress over time.

Healthy land and water resources contribute to safe drinking water, resilient forests, wetlands and wildlife, enabling us to better adapt to climate change and other stressors on our environment.

Ontario's 36 Conservation Authorities monitor the health of natural resources in Ontario's watersheds as part of their integrated watershed management approach.

An integrated watershed management approach is a cycle of identifying the issues (e.g. protection of drinking water sources), plan development, implementation, monitoring, and updating the plan.

3. What are Watershed Report Cards reporting on?

In 2013, Ontario Conservation Authorities launched a new series of standardized watershed report cards.

The three resource categories measured and reported on by Ontario Conservation Authorities are Surface Water Quality, Forest Conditions, and Groundwater Quality. It was left up to each Conservation Authority to select an optional fourth category to represent the unique character of that watershed. LSRCA reports on Lake Phosphorus Concentrations in this optional fourth category.

The standardized components that make up the 2013 Conservation Authority Watershed Report Card include:

- Reporting on a subwatershed scale.
- Using three resource indicators: Surface Water Quality, Forest Conditions, and Groundwater Quality.
- Using consistent grading: A–Excellent; B–Good; C–Fair; D– Poor; and F – Very Poor.
- Using consistent criteria within each resource category and indicator.
- Reporting once every five years starting in 2013. A five-year block of data minimizes seasonal variation and provides sufficient data for reliable summary statistics.

4. How have Conservation Authorities changed the way they are reporting on Ontario watersheds?

Conservation Authorities have been monitoring and reporting on the state of Ontario's watersheds for many years. In response to the public's need for greater information the Provincial government sponsored a pilot project in 2003 that enabled Conservation Authorities to establish guidelines for report cards. As a result, many Conservation Authorities began to produce local watershed report cards.

A 2009 review of the Conservation Authority watershed report cards revealed some inconsistencies in the way that the data was being collected, analyzed, and reported. While still providing valuable information, the difference in methods prevented broader use of the results.

As a result, from 2009-2011, Conservation Authorities and Conservation Ontario worked together to update the guidelines and employ a standardized set of indicators.

The watershed report cards released in 2013 represent the outcome of this collaboration.

5. How does the health of our environment affect our own health?

Healthy green spaces provide us with enjoyment and exercise. We rely on clean air, safe drinking water, protection from flooding, and an environment able to adapt to the growing impacts of climate change. The important ecological and economic services that our natural world provides plays a significant role in promoting healthy bodies and minds.

For example, trees help to reduce smog and pollution in our cities by filtering out many airborne pollutants that have negative impacts on our health. Many of these pollutants have been linked to heart disease, respiratory illnesses, diabetes, and cancer.

Numerous studies have shown that there is a direct correlation between the presence of trees and a decline in stress levels. Contact with nature can have a powerful therapeutic effect by reducing the stress response of the body and the mind, thereby helping to improve both physical and mental abilities.

6. How do Conservation Authorities contribute to healthy watersheds?

Conservation Authority integrated watershed management programs and services help to improve the health of local ecosystems by ensuring safe and sustainable water resources, improved air quality, healthy wetlands and agricultural lands, important urban and rural forests, protection from flooding and erosion, as well as enjoyable recreational lands such as conservation areas.

Conservation Authorities ensure the conservation, restoration and responsible management of Ontario's water, land and natural habitats through programs that balance human, environmental, and economic interests. Conservation Authorities:

- Plan and deliver programs and initiatives that protect, manage, and restore ecological features and functions.
- Offer technical expertise in watershed management planning and implementation, watershed stewardship, and source protection planning.
- Collect data on local watershed conditions and analyze data.
- Map local watershed water sources and threats.
- Facilitate local partnerships to collectively address issues and conditions.
- Deliver fun and informative environmental education and outdoor recreation programs to over 485,000 students in 4,000 schools.

7. How is the environment connected to Ontario's economy?

Ontario's water and land resources provide important ecological, economic and societal benefits and should be protected. Forests, water resources, wetlands, soils, plants and animals are all necessary to produce goods and services such as clean sustainable water supplies, clean air, food, fuel, energy and healthy green spaces.



Economically, our environment helps to produce energy, supplies water to industry and individual households, contributes to tourism, timber, fisheries and recreational industries, provides food, fuel and much, much more. Clearly, our environment plays a direct and important role in rural and urban economies.

Threats to Ontario's water and land resources such as urbanization and climate change are significant and this affects the resiliency of our natural environment. Managing impacts on natural ecosystems is key to ensuring sustainable resources for drinking water, agricultural production, municipal needs, and industrial uses.

8. How are Ontario's watersheds impacted by climate change?

Climate change has been identified as the leading threat to healthy ecosystems around the world. The relationship between climate change and our environment is closely interconnected.

The effect of climate change can be seen in increased flooding and erosion which threatens local infrastructure, reduced flow in rivers, lakes, streams and groundwater, diminished cold water fisheries, wetlands and marshes, poorer water quality and greater costs required to treat water and increased competition for water supplies.

We see these effects through more watering bans, boil water advisories, increased property damage from flooding and erosion, higher insurance costs, damage to driveways, shorter winter season, more beach closings due to poor water quality, and basement flooding.

The Conservation Authority watershed report cards enable us to monitor local conditions in Ontario's watersheds and then work with others to plan and deliver programs to adapt to the increasing impacts of climate change. Programs such as stormwater management, low impact development, habitat restoration and protection, tree and shrub planting help us adapt to changing conditions in order to protect the health of our natural systems and ourselves.

9. How can we build local watershed resiliency with stewardship programs?

Stewardship initiatives such as tree and shrub planting, agricultural best management practices, green infrastructure, backyard improvements, and wildlife habitat protection and restoration are often simple and cost effective ways to help build resiliency in our watersheds. Through stewardship, we can:

- Protect and restore important wetlands and forests **to prevent flooding and erosion, store excess water during intense rainfalls and capture carbon emissions.**
- Rehabilitate and restore vegetation along river courses and lakeshores **in order to help manage flooding, reduce the flow of contaminated sediment, and improve water quality.**
- Conserve water and keep water flowing through the water cycle **by using best management practices in both urban and rural watersheds.**
- Protect urban and rural green spaces **for residents to enjoy and to help cool our air.**
- Prevent or reduce the impacts of drought and improve soil **supporting healthy farms and agriculturally related industries.**
- Maintain important green corridors, and natural habitats **for birds, fish, and animals.**
- Prevent invasive species **from impacting native plants, insects, birds, fish, and other wildlife.**
- Prevent the loss of important native plant and animal species **by providing healthy habitats.**

10. How do Conservation Authorities get this work done in local Ontario watersheds?

Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority and other Conservation Authorities work closely with community groups, government, other agencies, and landowners to plant trees, rehabilitate and restore ecosystems, and improve water quality. Through many local, provincial and federal initiatives such as the Canada-Ontario agreement, Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement, and Species at Risk programs, we also identify and track Ontario's biodiversity in a wide range of monitoring and reporting programs.

Important non-government and government partners include: Trees Ontario, Ontario Soil and Crop Improvement Association, Carolinian Canada, Ministries of Natural Resources, Environment, and Agriculture and Rural Affairs, Fisheries and Oceans Canada, Ducks Unlimited Canada, Trout Unlimited Canada, Oak Ridges Moraine Foundation, Greenbelt Foundation, Ontario Land Trusts, Hiking and Trail associations, Ontario Federation of Agriculture, local municipalities across the province, landowners, and many, many more.