

Water Guardians Network

Source Protection for Cottagers



What is Source Protection?

Source protection means protecting the streams, rivers, lakes and aquifers that we ultimately depend on for our drinking water. In Ontario, this protection will be carried out at the level of the watershed – the area within which all surface water drains into the same outlet, such as a lake or river.

Why is Source Protection Important?

Water connects us. It travels great distances and recognizes no political boundaries. The waters we use and depend on are inevitably affected by activities occurring tens or even hundreds of kilometers away – overuse, wasteful practices, toxic pollution and the destruction of natural areas. This makes source protection at the watershed level the best way of taking a “big picture” approach to safeguarding our water.

We have put a lot of trust in water treatment as a way of keeping our drinking water safe. But we cannot rely on treatment alone. Putting too much pressure on a water source can overwhelm the treatment system, or make it too costly to use. Alternatively, we can take a multi-barrier approach and protect the quality and quantity of water from its source all the way to the tap. This is the only way to ensure it stays safe and healthy in the long-term for the people and environments that depend on it.

What are Threats to Water Sources?

Water moves in a continuous cycle above, on and below the surface of the earth. This means there are many points at which water can become threatened. In some circumstances, practices such as pesticide or manure spraying can also be a significant threat to surface water.

For surface water – the water found in lakes and rivers, for example - common threats include polluted surface runoff, industrial discharge and some agricultural practices. Storm water sewer systems can discharge large amounts of untreated runoff containing excess nutrients, sediment, oil and road salt.

Overuse is a significant problem for groundwater, the water found below the earth’s surface. In areas under intense pressure from housing developments, large infrastructure projects such as sewer system construction, or mining and aggregate operations, it is not uncommon to hear of dropping water tables leading to dry wells and streams.

In areas relying on wells for drinking water, common threats to groundwater resources include aging septic systems and abandoned wells. If not sealed properly, abandoned wells provide a direct pathway between ground level contamination and underground aquifers. Some extractive uses, like water bottling for instance, can move large volumes of water out of a watershed.

What is Ontario Doing?

The Ontario government has introduced a source protection law as part of its commitment to implement the recommendations of the Walkerton Inquiry. The Clean Water Act, 2006 legislation provides the framework for source water protection in this province. It was passed in October 2006 and came into force in July 2007.

The new source protection law requires every watershed under the jurisdiction of a Conservation Authority to have a source protection plan. This includes all of southern Ontario, and parts of central and northern Ontario. The source protection plans will outline what measures should be taken within the watershed to reduce threats to sources of drinking water.

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Federation of Ontario Cottagers' Associations

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How Will it Affect Cottagers?

Cottagers instinctively know why we have to watch our water supply. Everything that flows from our taps and runs down our drains originates in streams and rivers and lakes, mostly right next to our cottages.

The water we use at our waterfront properties is also habitat for fish and other wildlife. Protecting source water means supporting the animals that make Ontario cottage country unique and exciting.

The Clean Water Act primarily focuses on protecting municipal water intakes and wellheads. However, clusters of water intakes or wellheads receive protection under the Act if requested by a municipality, the Minister of the Environment or a First Nations government to be included in the source protection plan.



Take Action

Stay informed by visiting www.TheWaterHole.ca for the latest updates on the progress of the source protection law.

Learn more about the stewardship of your lake through your local lake association and through FOCA's Docktalk information kits.

Find out more at: www.foca.on.ca.

Contact your local Conservation Authority to make sure your drinking water is protected and for information on how to be involved in the development of your local Source Protection Plan.

Visit www.conservation-ontario.ca to find your local Conservation Authority and Source Protection Region or Area.

Contact, support and become involved with your local Water Guardians Network group and learn how you can make a difference.

Prevent Pollution

- Keep shorelines and land natural. Limit pavement and encourage native Ontario plants. Paved and manicured surfaces help carry chemicals and sediment into water sources and cause erosion, but native plants and naturalized areas absorb rainwater and strengthen the soil.
- Do not use fertilizers. Nutrients end up in lakes and rivers and contribute to unnatural increase in algae and aquatic plant growth.
- Avoid pesticides. Wind and rain carry pesticides into water where they have toxic effects on water quality, plants and animals. Children are particularly susceptible to pesticide poisoning.
- Avoid and control spills and leaks. Gasoline and oil are hazardous materials that spill and leak from homes and boats. Regularly make repairs, check for leaks and properly clean up spills of even small amounts.

Conserve Water

- If we take more from aquifers than naturally recharges, the water table drops, wells have to be dug deeper and quantity and availability of clean good quality water is reduced.
- Using more efficient toilets and showerheads help reduce waste.
- Do not over water turf areas, keep landscapes natural and plant native species that do not require as much watering.
- Septic system performance is enhanced with lower water input.

Septic Systems

- Take care of your septic system. Regular inspections (every three to five years) can help ensure a system is working properly.
- Avoid overloading your system and watch for problems such as slow drainpipes or wet areas near leaching beds.
- Do not use cleaning supplies that are antibacterial, non-biodegradable, chlorine-based or other toxic materials that will not be digested properly in the septic system.
- Do not put garbage or any non-biodegradable items in the septic system
- Keep heavy equipment and deep-rooted plants off your leaching bed.