



# Watershed Checkup

Surface Water Quality Forest Conditions Groundwater Quality

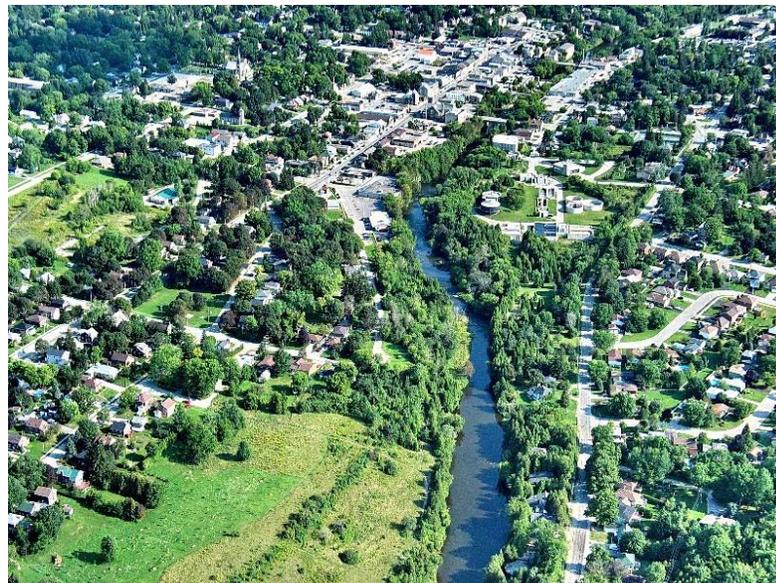


## Conservation Authorities Start to Release New Series of Watershed Report Cards

To celebrate **Canada Water Week** March 18-24, 2013, Ontario's 36 Conservation Authorities started to release a series of Watershed Report Cards and they provide a sobering picture of some of the areas where we live.



### What are we finding in Ontario's Watersheds?



#### Let's Chat!



#### Impacts of Climate Change affect water quality and forest conditions

Climate change is introducing new stresses on our lands and waters. Extended periods of drought and flash flooding have an impact on water quality, as well as the larger socio-economic impacts. Heat waves and milder winters with minimal snowfall and fewer days with below freezing temperatures can aid in the

A number of Conservation Authorities have started to release 2013 Watershed Report Cards. While there are some As and Bs in the early report cards, there are also a lot of Ds and Cs, primarily in areas of intensive land use such as the Greater Toronto Area or in areas with extensive agriculture. This is to be expected since we know that land use has a significant impact on our rivers and natural areas. What this means is that a lot of our watersheds need either enhanced or significant

introduction and spread of disease and invasive insects. Enhancing and maintaining forest cover slows climate warming, prevents flooding and erosion, and assists with climate change adaptation by preventing the release and improving the capture of CO2 from the atmosphere.

### Benefits of Healthy Watersheds

Healthy watersheds provide human, ecological and economic benefits. Improve your own health by stepping into nature and visiting a Conservation Area. You might be surprised to know all the benefits you'll enjoy.



**READ MORE** about the benefits of a healthy environment.

### Be Part of the Solution

improvements.

The good news is- we know what to do about it.

### Our Actions Can Improve Conditions in Watersheds Across Ontario

Conservation Authorities, all levels of government, agencies, citizen groups, landowners and others often work together to plan and deliver important watershed management and stewardship programs and services. Activities that specifically address and can improve conditions in local watersheds include:

- Watershed Planning to identify, track, and report on issues and concerns
- Expanded monitoring and regular reporting to inform watershed plans and activities, track and report on progress
- Stewardship programs
- Tree planting partnerships
- Naturalization projects and wetland protection
- Conservation bylaws and regulations,
- Natural heritage, Great Lakes & climate change strategies
- Low impact development practices and green infrastructure activities to address storm water runoff
- Protection and restoration of natural areas

Conservation Authorities need to continue to build on their knowledge and understanding of our watersheds and how they are changing by sustaining and expanding our monitoring programs. Watershed monitoring will help us better understand problem areas, target natural resource management actions where they are needed most and track progress over time.

### What do the Grades Mean?

The grades used in this report card are based on the Conservation Ontario provincial grading system.

- A** = very healthy watershed conditions
- B** = healthy watershed conditions
- C** = watershed conditions require some enhancement
- D** = poor watershed conditions that require improvement
- F** = watershed significantly degraded requiring much improvement

**Low grades** show us the need to pay attention to local land use practices that impact the larger watershed. What we do upstream impacts conditions downstream.

**High grades** indicate that we need to continue to protect these important natural resources.

### Tackling rural problems in partnership with farmers and other landowners

On a watershed scale, agriculture contributes to the local food supply providing economic, recreational, environmental, educational, and heritage opportunities in



**Top 10 Things you can do to protect your Watershed**

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our local communities. Many farmers and other rural landowners across Ontario have voluntarily implemented beneficial best management practices or developed comprehensive Environmental Farm Plans, approved by their peers and implemented in partnership with Conservation Authorities and the Ontario Soil and Crop Improvement Association. These programs provide technical assistance and funding to help farmers

- improve crop production,
- plant shelterbelts to reduce wind erosion,
- prevent soil erosion,
- protect water quality,
- promote soil viability,
- protect and restore fish and wildlife habitat,
- ensure proper livestock manure handling and storage, and
- prevent nutrient loading into waterways.

This willingness of the agriculture community to implement beneficial management practices on their lands results in real improvements across Ontario's watersheds.

**Targeting and Tracking Improvements in the Upper Thames River Subwatershed**

The Upper Thames River watershed is located in the agricultural heartland of southwestern Ontario. Major urban centres include London, Woodstock and Stratford. Downstream of London, the Thames river flows through the Lower Thames Valley watershed, past Chatham, and empties into Lake St. Clair.

Every five years the Upper Thames River Conservation Authority (UTRCA) produces 28 subwatershed report cards to assess local environmental conditions in the **28 watersheds** within the upper Thames River watershed.

Each report card grades surface water quality and forest conditions, summarizes watershed features, provides recommended actions for improvement, and highlights progress made over five years. New information has been included on groundwater, connections to the Great Lakes and extreme weather.



**Surface water quality** grades in the 28 watersheds range from C to D. The UTRCA watershed target is a B grade. Water quality has improved in 12 watersheds since 2007, and has remained steady in 16 watersheds. No watersheds have declined in the past five years.



**Forest conditions** grades in the 28 watersheds range from C to F, with D being the most common grade. The target is a B grade. There has been a slight decline in the urbanizing watersheds of Stoney and Pottersburg in London.

UTRCA has also set targets to improve forest conditions:

- 11% forest cover now - 30% is the target

- 1.4% forest interior now - 10% is the target
- 31% riparian zone forested now - 50% is the target

The UTRCA works with many partners and "Friends of" groups to improve the health of local watersheds.

[READ MORE](#) about the Friends Groups working to improve conditions in the Upper Thames River watershed.

## Ausable Bayfield sees Improvements in Water Quality Scores



This is the second report card for the Ausable Bayfield Conservation Authority (ABCA) who first began reporting in 2007. The ABCA's watershed is located on the shores of Lake Huron. Ausable Bayfield Conservation encompasses the drainage basins of the Ausable River, Bayfield River, Parkhill Creek and the gullies between Bayfield and Grand Bend draining directly to Lake Huron and is largely made up of a rural population of 45,000.

Water quality has remained steady for most watersheds in the Ausable Bayfield region. Grades range from A to D, with the majority of watersheds receiving C grades. Compared with the Watershed Report Card 2007, in which only one watershed met the recreational guideline for E. coli, eight watersheds now meet this guideline. Furthermore, two watersheds (Bannockburn and Main Bayfield) have had measurable improvement in the concentrations of total phosphorus and E. coli.

The Conservation Authority points out that protecting and improving watershed health will require different approaches. These include actions individuals can take on their properties, community actions, and actions by agencies.

[READ MORE](#) in Ausable Bayfield Conservation Authority's full watershed report card.

To view more Watershed Report Cards visit  
[www.watershedcheckup.ca](http://www.watershedcheckup.ca)



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