GEORGIAN BAY FOREVER

NEWSLETTER

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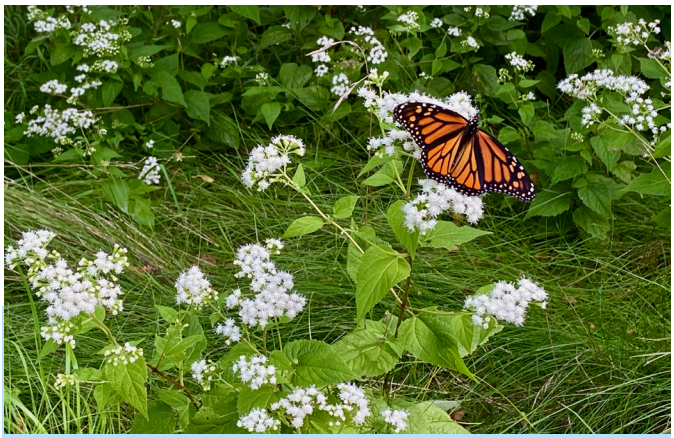
Featured in this Issue

CONSERVATION

Humans cannot exist without a healthy ecosystem. As the destruction of the natural world continues, so too will humans experience the decline of sustainable living. While global heating steadily increases year after year, correlating with flood, wildfires, and the loss of life as well as damage to public and private property, we are seeing the urgent need for everyone to do their part in reducing pollution and prioritizing the protection of nature.

At the heart of these matters is environmental conservation, the practice of protecting a healthy natural environment and sustaining natural resources, and the work that Georgian Bay Forever does to conserve the aquatic ecosystem of Georgian Bay extends far beyond the marine bioregion. When we protect the water, we protect land, livelihood, and life. We protect what matters to all people regardless of politics, religion, lifestyle, or personal resources. We look forward to continuing this work for generations to come.



A MESSAGE FROM TERRY CLARK,

Chair of Georgian Bay Forever

Everything that we do at Georgian Bay Forever is about conservation. From cleaning thousands of pounds of trash off local shorelines, to detailed data-mapping and scientific research using our advanced technologies, to creating curriculum materials for school-age children to learn about environmental stewardship – the work that we do is for the purpose of conserving the unique and life-giving aquatic ecosystem of Georgian Bay.

For decades, Georgian Bay has been changing, due to challenges brought on by unnatural climate shifts, increasing tourism and population growth resulting in increased pollution, and rapid unchecked industrial development. The consequences have included erratic swings in water levels, the reduction of native species' population, and the alteration of natural and biodiverse coastal landscapes. These changes affect us all, often in ways that are not always so obvious.

This newsletter features articles meant to illuminate some of the ways in which environmental conservation, on even a small level, can have a far-reaching impact. Each of us has a role to play in supporting the many ways conservation can be advanced and Georgian Bay protected and preserved. We hope you can draw inspiration for your own personal role from these articles.

Georgian Bay Forever is a community response to the growing need for major research and education to sustain the Georgian Bay aquatic ecosystem and the quality of life its communities and visitors enjoy.

We help monitor Georgian Bay's well-being, throughout the seasons, year after year.

We fund the research needed to protect the environmental health of Georgian Bay and the surrounding bodies of water. Using our research findings, we inform and educate the general public and governments about threats to environmental health, and propose possible solutions.

Through workshops, seminars, and online communication, we are educating the Georgian Bay community. By teaming up with reputable institutions, we enhance the credibility of our research and strengthen our ability to protect what's at stake.

Georgian Bay Forever is a registered Canadian charity (**#89531 1066 RR0001**). We work with the Great Lakes Basin Conservancy in the United States, as well as other stakeholder groups all around the Great Lakes.

Georgian Bay Forever is steered by our esteemed board of directors, a group of dedicated individuals who are committed to ensuring the functionality and purpose of our organization. They bring their experience and expertise to all aspects of operation, with the common goal of protecting and conserving Georgian Bay.

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You can reach David Sweetnam, our Executive Director at ed@gbf.org or at 905-880-4945, ext 1.

Canadian citizens may send their donations to the address above.
U.S. citizens wishing to make a donation to support our work can do so by giving to: Great Lakes Basin Conservancy
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This newsletter is just a snapshot of our work. For the most up-to-date information on our projects, longer versions of newsletter articles, and breaking news about Georgian Bay, please become a regular visitor to our Facebook page and website:

GBF.ORG

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Cover Photos by Nadine Perron

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By Laura Thipphawong

Depoliticizing the *Greenbelt*

Environmental conservation is in everyone's best interest, regardless of wealth, politics, lifestyle, religion, or any other socio-economic distinction. Whether you love nature or not, the facts are the facts: people need natural resources in order to live.

Ontario's Greenbelt is one of Canada's most proliferate bastions of healthy natural resources. With over 2 million acres of protected land, Ontario's is the largest Greenbelt in the world, and accounts for 22% of the Golden Horseshoe, the area of southern Ontario that extends from Lake Erie to Georgian Bay and across half of Lake Ontario. This region forms a cap around the Greater Toronto Area, the most densely populated and industrialized area in Canada, the fourth largest city in North America, and one of the top ten global financial centres. Needless to say, political leaders and developers are often looking to the Greenbelt with dollar signs in their eyes – the prospect of using all that empty space is understandably tempting, especially in light of Canada's housing crisis. However, urban sprawl often results in a higher cost of living and adverse environmental outcomes, so frustrated environmentalists react with protests and push-back, which seemingly widens the political divide, and fortifies the misconception that protecting nature comes at the cost of economic advancement. With all this noise, among all this discourse, between the strawmen and the ad hominem arguments, it's becoming harder and harder to see the forest for the trees (no pun intended).

So, let's simplify the matter. A Greenbelt is a land-use designation of wild or agricultural space surrounding or adjacent to an urban area. The Ontario Greenbelt is comprised of lakes, rivers, farmlands, forests, and wetlands surrounding Toronto and extending out through the Bruce Peninsula as far north as Tobermory.

When it comes to Ontario's Greenbelt, location is key. It includes the Niagara escarpment, which works to filter and replenish groundwater that supplies drinking water for Ontario's most developed region. The vast fields and river valleys surrounding the Greater Toronto Area help to offset heatwaves in the city through natural cooling effects and the absorption of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. The preservation of forests and farmland provide easy access to outdoor spaces for city-dwellers, and ensures the viability of local agriculture, which supports the need for food security, especially in congested urban areas. But whether or not you care about beautiful green spaces and outdoor recreation, or are effected by clean tap water and the price of produce, there are a few even more universal benefits attributed to the Greenbelt, benefits that add up to $3.2 billion in ecosystem services annually. These services, identified by a report using the National Ecosystem Services Classification method, include roughly $224 million annually in flood protection, helping to stabilize a delicate economy at a time when the monetary impact of natural disasters is on the rise. According to the City of Toronto's official website, "the costs of climate change are high and climbing," due in large part to extreme weather and flooding.

A healthy economy and a healthy environment are not mutually exclusive – quite the opposite. The issue of Ontario's Greenbelt isn't a divisive one, it's universal, and it's in everyone's best interest to protect it.

ADDITION BY SUBTRACTION:

GEORGIAN BAY FOREVER'S HISTORY WITH INVASIVE PHRAGMITES MANAGEMENT

BY LAURA THIPPHAWONG

Georgian Bay Forever has been the pioneering force behind invasive *Phragmites* management in Georgian Bay since 2012. We remove this harmful reed so that the ecosystem can thrive. When it comes to direct operational action, we are the most prolific organization for eradicating invasive *Phragmites* in the Georgian Bay area – but it didn't happen all at once, and it doesn't end here.

The Problem with Invasive *Phragmites*

Invasive *Phragmites* (*Phragmites australis subsp. Australi*), otherwise known as the European common reed, is a perennial wetland grass that was introduced to North America during the 19th century. Though there is no definitive evidence of how the plant was brought to North America, the widely accepted theory is that they were introduced via ship ballasts through ports in Philadelphia, and then spread throughout the northeast region of the continent via subsequent trade voyages. Unlike the native North American version of *Phragmites* (*Phragmites australis subsp. Americanus*), which are characterized by sparse growth and 1–2-meter stalks, invasive *Phragmites* grow in dense monocultures with up to 200 stems per square meter that can stand up to 5 metres tall. The density of both the stands and the individual stalks makes them harder to cut – it also extends their lifespan and slows the natural degradation process after they die. These characteristics along with an ability to release toxins in the soil that prevent other plant species from nearby growth, create an environment where invasive *Phragmites* are easily able to outcompete other plants for nutrients, thereby allowing them to spread rapidly. This heartiness makes for a deadly combination when considering biodiversity. The stands are packed too tightly for animals or other organisms to live within them, and the wall-like structure blocks sunlight from both the shore and the shallow waters, further depriving the areas of life. The density of invasive *Phragmites* root system also degrades the shores and banks where they grow, and absorbs a disproportionate amout of water as compared to native wetland grasses, which can contribute to flood risk and even wildfire as the stalks dry out.

The History of GBF and Invasive *Phragmites* Management

Though invasive *Phragmites* has likely been in North America for over 200 years, studies have shown an exponential rise in growth throughout the Great Lakes wetlands during the late 1990s. This growth correlates with a prolonged period of declining water levels, culminating in 2009 after a protracted low level that exposed broad coastal mudflats, providing invasive Phragmites with ideal germinating conditions. Despite the ongoing rise and fall of water levels, the protracted low level was enough to establish an abundance of invasive *Phragmites* stands – and once established, with roots that can grow up to three meters deep, the energy storage capabilities and sturdiness of mature stalks allow for them to adapt to changing conditions.

Georgian Bay Forever recognized at the time that without immediate and ongoing intervention, invasive Phragmites was likely to overrun the area. With consideration for long-term effectiveness and minimal disruption of the native wetland habitat, the newly appointed executive director, David Sweetnam, identified that Georgian Bay Forever could make a significant impact on the conservation of Georgian Bay ecosystems by working to eradicate invasive Phragmites, and began researching non-chemical control methods. In 2012, he wrote a proposal for the Lake Simcoe Eastern Georgian Bay Cleanup Fund entitled Coastal Wetland Invasive Species Removal in South-Eastern Georgian Bay. The application was approved, and in 2013 Georgian Bay Forever began a multi-year project involving community partnerships in local townships for the organizing and administration of volunteer-based Phragmites cutting in public areas, along with public education events and strategy planning. Georgian Bay Forever was soon working with the Nottawasaga Valley Conservation

Authority, the Blue Mountain Watershed Trust, and the Town of Collingwood, and later received funding from The Township of Georgian Bay for our Community-based *Phragmites* Eradication Program, allowing for the continuation of these efforts.

The scope of this work was expanded in 2019, when Georgian Bay Forever integrated an eradication plan into the regular programming, involving mapping and systematically cutting individual invasive *Phragmites* stands along a large portion of the eastern Georgian Bay shoreline. Identifying and mapping stands is an ambitious undertaking, and cutting those stands involves laborious work in the field, with a commitment to re-cut annually over the course of several years. However, this work is necessary in order to achieve significant results. Mapping individual stands provides crucial information, due to the variables in each stand's unique environmental features, and administering long-term seasonal cutting without the use of chemicals or other potentially harmful methods is the most effective system for eradication with the least amount of environmental disruption.

What the Future Holds

In the last twelve years, Georgian Bay Forever have eradicated nearly 500 stands of invasive *Phragmites* from Georgian Bay shorelines, educated thousands of people at community events, clocked thousands of hours with volunteers, and mapped thousands of stands. Our goal is to someday put down the spades and cutters, when the extreme threat of this invasive plant has been diminished to the point where the natural ecosystem can manage on its own, but until then, we plan to stay on this course.

Myths About Invasive Phragmites Management

Myth: Since *Phragmites* are natural, you shouldn't cut them down or alter the natural environment.

Truth: *Phragmites* are natural, but they are native to Europe, where they pose little to no threat to the natural ecosystem there, where they have 140 different species that function to keep *Phragmites* from overrunning the landscape. That ecosystem is complex and doesn't exist here in North America. The human-made consequences of bringing European *Phragmites* to North America requires human intervention, as these plants are severely disrupting the native wildlife and ecosystem.

Myth: You're only cutting *Phragmites* so that cottagers can have better views of the water!

Truth: While it's true that *Phragmites* can obstruct the beauty of Georgian Bay, and that many cottagers support our work, our only priority is to protect and maintain a healthy and natural ecosystem. We only cut stands in public spaces – in water and wetlands or coastal habitat – we do not map and cut invasive *Phragmites* on private property.

Myth: An arduous, hands-on, multi-year cutting methodology is a waste of time. Wouldn't it be easier to spray the stands with herbicides and be done with it? Or maybe plow or burn stands in one go?

Truth: Our natural methods are definitely not easy, but cutting (or spading) the *Phragmites* at their base either by hand or with the use of small machinery ensures that the surrounding environment is disrupted as little as possible, and that harmful chemicals or non-native biological additions with many unknown variables are not introduced to the ecosystem.

RECONNECTING WITH WATER

By Nadine Perron
Environmental Management Biologist
Department of Lands, Resources and the Environment
Magnetawan First Nation

"Niibii has been speaking to us, but are we listening?"

Anishinaabek have strong place-based knowledge that is shared through lived experiences that are passed from generation to generation. The Community of Magnetawan First Nation has been restricted from its lifestyle that included canoe routes of teachings and knowledge shared with the younger generations during migratory movement inland during the fall and back towards the Great Lakes during the spring months. Fixed to the allotted space of Magnetawan No.1 Indian Reserve on the southern shore of the Magnetawan River, the community has been watching unprecedented changes happening at alarming rates.

Could Reconciliation and Reconnection with water be a way to heal our community's connection to the water, to the land and the knowledge of the importance of its connection? McGregor states, "If you don't have healthy water, you won't have a healthy community" (2022, 2).

Anishinabek giikendaaswin' (translation, Ojibway knowledge) use by Dr. Sue Chiblow (2019) references the water as a source of life and of its spirit. Reminding our community of the connections to this River and our need for healthy Niibii.

Changes in the way we've been able to show up as Guardians of the Lands and Waters have changed

in many ways. Currently, one way Mag has been building guardianship is through funds provided by the Department of Fisheries and Oceans. Magnetawan First Nation procured environmental DNA equipment to take annual samples from the Magnetawan River. How is this demonstrating Guardianship? Environmental DNA will be annually sampled from the Magnetawan River. This sampling method pumps water through a very fine filter to capture any DNA that has been shed into the water. We are interested in the presence/absence of Asian carp DNA. This annual sampling effort supports early detection; this is an important management strategy, as the establishment of a population of Asian carp is near impossible to eradicate. This type of early detection effort could protect the river and therefore the Georgian Bay from a population of Asian carp becoming established.

Chiblow (Ogamauh annag qwe), Susan. "Anishinabek Women's Nibi Giikendaaswin (Water Knowledge)." Water 11, no. 2 (January 26, 2019): 209. https://doi.org/10.3390/w11020209.

McGregor, Lorrilee. "Drawing on Anishinaabek Knowledge to Protect Water." Journal of Great Lakes Research 49 (June 2023): S84–86. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jglr.2022.03.009.

Fish communities are sensitive and important ecosystems. Elders have taught us that Niibii is Life and thus a priority to preserve and protect: "Aboriginal people have a responsibility to ensure that traditional knowledge is shared within the community and passed on to youth" McGregor (2022). These are the same messages we receive from our Mag Elders who are forever encouraging youth to spend more time out on the land and water. So, a goal was set, to use funds to protect Niibii by reconnecting our community to its life source. A dozen canoes and gear later, we had enough training and equipment to guide families and youth down the Mag River to the Old Settlement. For some it was a beautiful day on the water at best, but for others it had a much larger significance. Many have never had the opportunity to visit the secluded spot where the community once stood. Some took their young children on their first canoe ride, which was an experience filled with magic and laughter as the kids got to feel the water on their toes as their parents paddled them along.

Annually reminding ourselves of our connection to water, to the river, to our history and our future is a mighty powerful way to build resilience for a better future together.

There are still many questions being asked by our Elders and Knowledge Keepers. Where did Nme (Lake Sturgeon) go? The stranger spring smelt runs, the odd Ogaa (walley) spawning patterns.

Niibii has been speaking to us, but are we listening?

Interview with Mackenzie Jones

Winner of the Peter Hatcher Family Bursary

By Laura Thipphawong

What is your field of studies, what got you interested in environmental work in the first place, and why did you choose a career in it?

As a grad student at the University of Waterloo I study wildlife ecohydrology however I have an extensive background in various different fields including marine and freshwater biology, oceanography, wetland ecology, and conservation biology. Growing up I always showed an interest in the outdoors so my parents weren't surprised when I eventually decided to pursue an education and career in the environmental sciences. At a young age I already had such a strong love for animals and nature that it seemed only natural for me to follow this path. After graduating from high school I went on to do a Bachelor of Science honours degree at the University of Guelph where my admiration for wildlife and water was met with my passion for knowledge, and from there the rest is history!

Why is nature and wildlife conservation so important right now and how do you think it affects us all?

I think nature and wildlife conservation is important ***because*** it affects us all! From outdoor recreational activities such as camping or hiking, to ecosystem services like pollination and photosynthesis, we rely on the environment for so much. Our world would look and function very differently without healthy ecosystems and thriving wildlife populations. Therefore, if we don't prioritize conservation now, we risk losing not only the beautiful natural spaces we all love to enjoy, but also the essential services that sustain life on Earth. Next time you're outside, perhaps swimming in one of our many beautiful natural freshwater lakes or admiring the stunning fall colours of the forest trees, I encourage you to take a moment to appreciate what it took to make that experience possible. And remember that every action we take, no matter how small, is significant. Nature has given us so much, so it is our turn to give back.

ABOUT THE PETER HATCHER FAMILY BURSARY

Peter Hatcher was one of Georgian Bay Forever's most ardent supporters, and his love of Georgian Bay remains part of his legacy and his lasting impact. Mackenzie Jones, Masters candidate of Environmental Studies, Wildlife Ecohydrology at the University of Waterloo is the bursary's first recipient.

Why is Georgian Bay unique among wetlands and lakes, from a scientific perspective but also from your own perspective and experience?

My research has a strong focus on Blanding's turtles and ephemeral wetlands (seasonally flooded pools), of which there are plenty in Georgian Bay! Within my study area alone we have mapped over 100 of these unique aquatic habitats and continue to discover more with every day that we spend out in the field. Ephemeral wetlands themselves are not uncommon, but the hydrological dynamics of these systems in Georgian Bay is quite unique. Due to position on the Canadian Shield, many wetlands within the area experience frequent changes in water availability. Furthermore, ground water influences are limited or entirely absent because of the underlying impermeable bedrock (eg. granite). This means, water processes/characteristics are completely dependent on precipitation, making Georgian Bay a rare and ideal study system. From a more personal perspective however, ephemeral wetlands and most other aquatic environments in this region are special because of how pristine and untouched they are. Georgian Bay truly is home to some of the most beautiful water bodies this country has to offer. The serenity and blissfulness is unmatched. It is never lost on me just how lucky I am to be able to study these wonderful habitats.

What do you hope that your work and the work of others like you will accomplish in terms of the health and integrity of freshwater, wildlife, and wetlands?

The health and integrity of freshwater ecosystems truly is more important now than ever before, therefore if we are to keep Georgian Bay thriving forever we must prioritize effective nature-based solutions which aim to protect and restore its unique aquatic environments. Our ability to identify key areas of protection, particularly in dynamic landscapes such as Georgian Bay which have so many highly-variable and ever-changing aquatic systems, will be instrumental in developing successful conservation strategies, guiding management decisions and informing policy. Hopefully my research and the work of others like me can assist with this process and ensure a bright and promising future for water, wildlife and wetlands alike!

What do you see for the future?

At the end of the day I like to think that protecting nature is ultimately about protecting our own future. Sometimes when I am out in the field I like to stop and take a look at everything around me. The clear blue waters, fresh clean air, lush green forests, the mother bear and her adorable baby cubs… nature is so wonderful and I will do everything in my power to protect it. My hope for the future is that more people learn to respect and appreciate nature just as much as I do. Help the turtle cross the road, reduce your plastic waste, participate in conservation efforts. Let's work together to ensure future generations can experience the same beautiful planet as us.

"...protecting nature is ultimately about protecting our own future."

Summer Is About To End...

By David Sweetnam

Summer is about to end, and we can all feel the damp, crisp chill in the air that signals fall's arrival. We sense the changing light with the sun no longer loitering in the evening sky as it dips below the horizon earlier each day. We respond to these changes in specific ways. We start to think of getting cozy sweaters out of the drawers, cleaning out the gutters and other fall chores, and gathering with family for Thanksgiving feasts.

Other organisms also respond. The leaves change from the luscious greens of summer to the fiery yellows, oranges, and reds of fall, and the plants begin to store up sugars in their stems to feed new leaves that will emerge in the next growing season.

Fish also sense the intersection of environmental queues like water temperature and daily sunlight levels to initiate their spawning behaviours. Some fish, such as lake trout and whitefish, spawn in the fall. They return to specific habitats with detectable triggers – just like we know to go to the kitchen when the cookies are baking. They return to their shoals to lay and fertilize their eggs. They have chosen these exact spots because of the success they have had historically through millennia of trials. These habitats have had the right structure to allow the eggs to fall into protective crevasses and interstitial spaces between the boulders, cobble, or pebbles. They are in locations that have historically been protected from winter storms and waves by ice cover. They are in the places where the water flows enough to provide refreshing oxygen but are not strong enough to dislodge the eggs from their hiding places. Here, the developing eggs settle until the spring, when light levels and temperatures again meet the correct preprogrammed trigger points for hatching.

Imagine how a fish will react to human-made climate change. The fish do not control their environment like humans do, with our complex clothing, heating, and cooling systems; so, they are at the mercy of the environment. A lack of seasonal ice cover has resulted in winter storms churning the waters and damaging eggs or dislodging them to be eaten by other predators – in some cases leaving no young fish for that year. The warmer temperature of the water is now out of synch with the annual sunlight cycle. Changing conditions disrupt spring signals to the fish and other organisms. Their ordered harmony, which provided sequential energy sources for the development of healthy thriving ecosystems, is instead a cacophony.

Conservation of habitat is of the utmost importance, because we do not yet know exactly where the appropriate confluence of conditions will occur. Protecting and conserving our aquatic habitats provides the most variable choices possible for our fellow creatures. This protection is critical in the face of increasing impacts of human-made climate change.

Protecting Georgian Bay, forever, is a shared conservation responsibility.

Donor Profile

Rotary Club of Wasaga Beach

By Amber Gordon

Home – one of the key words that members of the Rotary Club of Wasaga Beach use to describe Georgian Bay and what it means to their friends, neighbors, and to themselves. Home is a place that connects you to family and to your community. In the words of club members, "There is no Planet B. We need this to be a long-term HOME for everybody in this community and worldwide, including the next generation". This is one of the main reasons why the Rotary Club of Wasaga Beach is so active and involved in projects that focus on protecting our planet.

The motto of Rotary International is Service Above Self, and for 40 years, the Wasaga Beach club has been a shining example of this adage. They particularly like charities where members can provide sweat-equity on top of delivering financial support, and GBF has amazing opportunities to help individuals get out into the community and get their hands dirty by cleaning the beaches and local shorelines. Another charity that allows members to get their boots-on-the-ground time is the local foodbank where they work tirelessly to prepare and supply hundreds of food hampers at Easter.

As a non-profit, the Rotary Club of Wasaga Beach raises funds to support their charitable interests and further their philanthropic goals through Rotary International, with events such as community walks, and Pints and Plaid, as well as their biggest revenue-generator, the Corvette Lottery. The Lottery started 24 years ago and has raised hundreds of thousands of dollars for local charities and their critical projects. Last year, the Club raised $200,000 which was distributed to 26 local charities.

Given that Wasaga Beach is the longest freshwater beach in the world, it is paramount that it stays clean, which is the main reason why members have partnered with Georgian Bay Forever and the shoreline cleanup and waste characterization initiatives. Members actively work together to protect this precious tourist destination and help to add critical value to GBF's conservation initiatives.

It's a powerful partnership, and one that both organizations will work to foster into the future, by safeguarding our only planet and the beach and community that the members of the Rotary Club of Wasaga Beach call home. Thank you to all members for funding and participating in water-protection work!

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"The Baykeeper" indicates that Georgian Bay Forever is a member of the Waterkeeper Alliance, a global movement of on-the-water advocates who patrol and protect over 100,000 miles of rivers, streams and coastlines in North And South America, Europe, Australia, Asia and Africa. For more information go to waterkeeper.org

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