**Attention Environment/Lifestyle Editors:**

## New Divert & Capture project aims to stop the dumping of microplastics into Georgian Bay from machine-washing our clothes

**Georgian Bay, ON – January 24, 2019**: Environmental charity Georgian Bay Forever is launching a new "Divert and Capture" project to prove installing filter devices to washing machines can divert millions of tiny pieces of microplastic pollution from entering waterways and the aquatic food chain.

Microplastics are commonly defined as plastic pieces less than 5 mm in size, and they are being found in alarming numbers in our oceans and the Great Lakes. The most common form of microplastics in our water is synthetic strands called microfibres, and we know washing clothing is one source of microfibres getting into the environment. Up to 700,000 microfibres can be released from your clothes in one machine wash.

While wastewater treatment plants typically remove most microplastics, millions of these tiny fibres escape with the final effluent and flow into waterways every day. The microplastics that remain in the effluent are emitted directly into the environment. A recent study showed that a single wastewater treatment plant can discharge up to five million microplastic particles per day for a catchment area of around 100,000 people. Also, the sludge is often spread on agricultural land and can then enter local waterways via runoff.

Georgian Bay Forever plans to install filters on more than 100 washing machines in volunteer households in Parry Sound, to demonstrate that microfibre pollution can be dramatically diminished.

"We conducted experiments that prove these simple filters capture microfibres in a lab environment," said Dr. Chelsea Rochman of the University of Toronto and a partner in the Georgian Bay Forever study. "The benefit of this field study is that through the cooperation of the Town of Parry Sound and the wastewater treatment plant, we can accurately evaluate the potential scale of plastic pollution that can be diverted from effluent in the real world when many households are involved."

Georgian Bay Forever plans to share the conclusive study results with the appliance and textile industries, policy makers and consumers to expand and accelerate the adoption of filter use to protect our water quality and ecosystems.

"We're looking forward to working with everyone on this project to protect water quality and ecosystems from our own plastic garbage," said Georgian Bay Forever's Executive Director David Sweetnam. "While impacts to human health and animal health are just beginning to be researched and understood, studies have found microplastics in tap water, Great Lakes beer, salt, and in about a quarter of market fish," says Sweetnam. "It is critical that we accelerate studies and solutions like our Divert and Capture program that work to significantly decrease plastic in the environment."

Georgian Bay Forever's *Divert and Capture* program will take three years to complete and is expected to cost $350,000. Georgian Bay Forever has raised about 65 per cent of the support needed for this project thanks to funding partners Environment and Climate Change Canada, the RBC Foundation, Patagonia, the

Helen McCrea Peacock Foundation and our local partners. Further donations will help extend this program to more households and increase education outreach.

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**About Georgian Bay Forever**

Georgian Bay Forever is a registered Canadian charity founded in 1995 that funds and supports scientific research, restoration projects and education that protects and enhances the waters of Georgian Bay, as part of the Great Lakes. To learn more about Georgian Bay Forever, visit www.gbf.org

**About the Rochman Lab**

The Rochman Lab at the University of Toronto is part of the EBB Conservation Group. Motivated by basic and applied questions, their research seeks to understand the sources, fate and ecological implications of anthropogenic pollutants in freshwater and marine ecosystems. Modern aquatic ecosystems are infiltrated with diverse mixtures of pollutants that can act together as a multiple stressor to alter biotic systems at all levels of biological organization, including individuals, populations and communities.

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