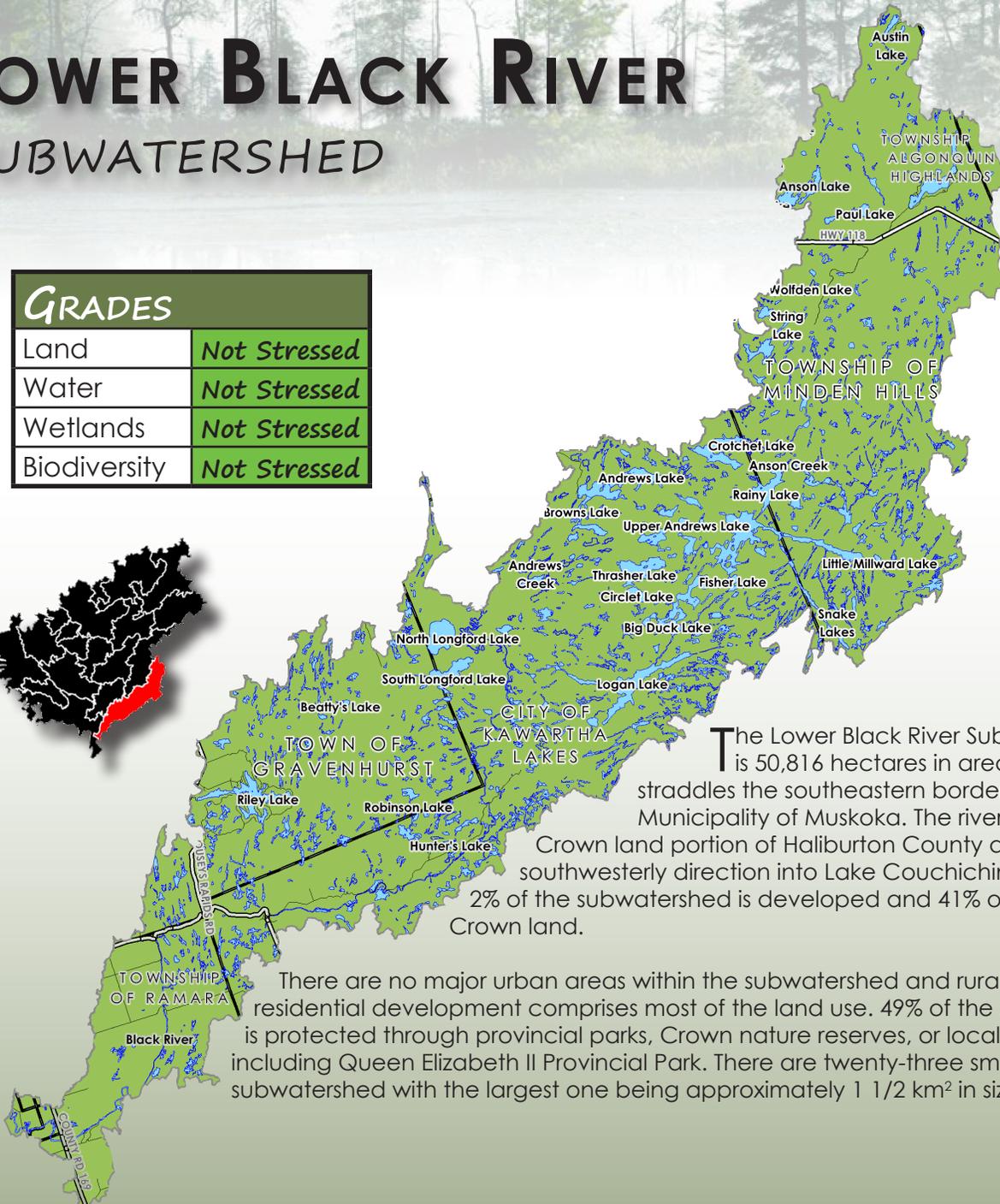


# 2014 MUSKOKA WATERSHED

# REPORT CARD

## LOWER BLACK RIVER SUBWATERSHED

GRADES	
Land	<i>Not Stressed</i>
Water	<i>Not Stressed</i>
Wetlands	<i>Not Stressed</i>
Biodiversity	<i>Not Stressed</i>



The Lower Black River Subwatershed is 50,816 hectares in area and straddles the southeastern border of The District Municipality of Muskoka. The river starts in the Crown land portion of Haliburton County and flows in a southwesterly direction into Lake Couchiching. Less than 2% of the subwatershed is developed and 41% of the land is Crown land.

There are no major urban areas within the subwatershed and rural and shoreline residential development comprises most of the land use. 49% of the subwatershed is protected through provincial parks, Crown nature reserves, or local land trusts, including Queen Elizabeth II Provincial Park. There are twenty-three small lakes in the subwatershed with the largest one being approximately 1 1/2 km<sup>2</sup> in size.

This report card describes the health of the land, water, wetlands and biodiversity of the Lower Black River Subwatershed and is part of the **2014 Muskoka Watershed Report Card** available at [www.muskokawatershed.org](http://www.muskokawatershed.org).

# Stewardship Works!

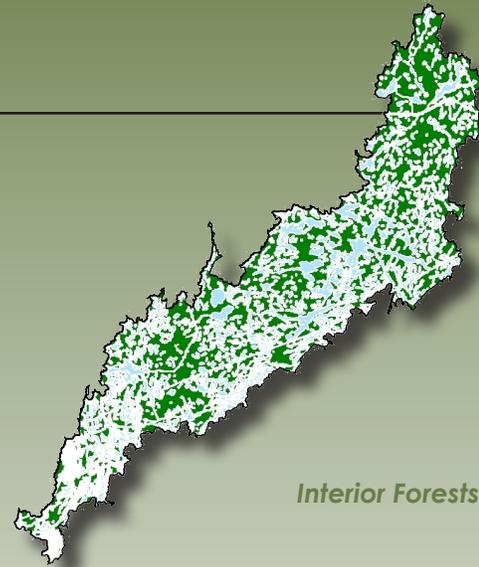
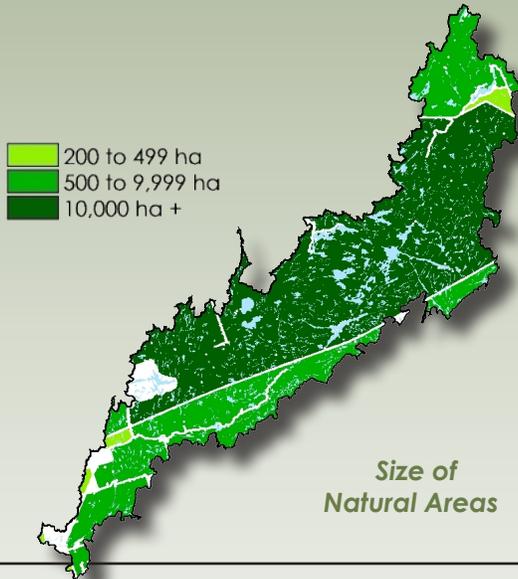


*Muskoka*  
WATERSHED COUNCIL

# Land:

- Not Stressed
- Vulnerable
- Stressed

99% of the Lower Black River Subwatershed is in natural habitat. The subwatershed is of a moderate size and dominated by the river itself. It has mixed forest vegetation with little development, which has resulted in a large undisturbed area that supports many of the large mammals native to the southern Canadian shield region. These natural areas are important to help maintain local biodiversity, purify the air, maintain good water quality and provide a carbon sink.



Only 10% of the subwatershed is privately owned and strong private land stewardship programs are important to compliment the Crown land management in the area. Although only 1% of the land is under active private land stewardship, such as participation in MFTIP, CLTIP, and land trusts activities many less formal stewardship activities occur.

Both healthy riparian areas and interior forests are important to support local wildlife and maintain good water quality. Planting native species and renaturalizing shorelines are important stewardship activities in the subwatershed.

Indicator	Lower Black River Subwatershed		Muskoka Watershed		Description
	Value	Grade	Value	Grade	
Size of Natural Areas	91%	<b>Not Stressed</b>	79%	<b>Vulnerable</b>	Areas of natural cover that are 200 ha or greater. Natural cover includes forest, lakes, rock barrens and wetlands.
200 - 499 ha	2%		7%		
500 - 9,999 ha	29%		52%		
10,000 ha +	60%		20%		
Interior Forest	39%	<b>Vulnerable</b>	58%	<b>Not Stressed</b>	Interior forest is a forested area with a 100-metre forested buffer surrounding it.
Road Density	0.06 km/km <sup>2</sup>	<b>Not Stressed</b>	0.51 km/km <sup>2</sup>	<b>Vulnerable</b>	Road density is a measure of the degree of fragmentation of the landscape. Roads are a primary cause of death of many species, especially turtles and snakes.
Level of Development	2%	<b>Not Stressed</b>	5.4%	<b>Vulnerable</b>	Level of development is the percent of the watershed in urban or rural development. When more than 10% of a watershed is developed, lake and stream health may be impacted.
Shoreline Density	<13 lots/km	<b>Not Stressed</b>	N/A	N/A	Shoreline density is an indicator of the human stress on a water body. This stress includes nutrient loading, crowding, aesthetic appeal, and habitat impacts.
Shoreline Buffer	>85%	<b>Not Stressed</b>	75%	<b>Vulnerable</b>	Shoreline buffer is the percent of unaltered lot area from the water's edge 20 metres inland. The shoreline buffer is the last line of defense against the forces that may otherwise damage a healthy lake.

# Water:

- Not Stressed
- Vulnerable
- Stressed

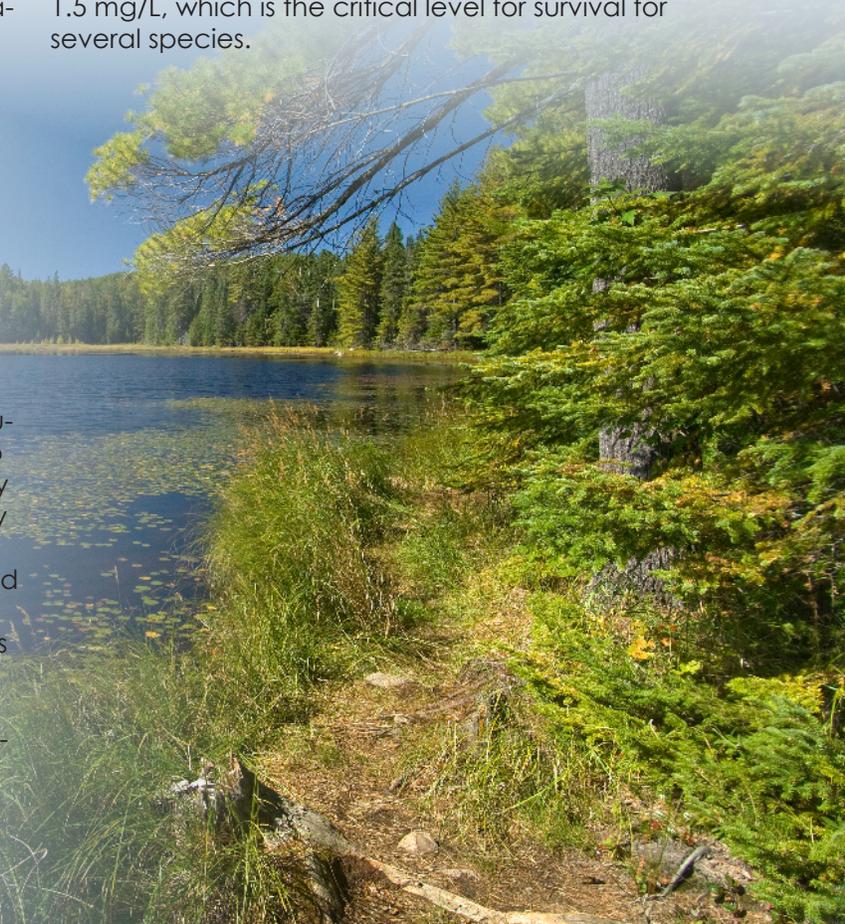
Indicator	Lower Black River Subwatershed		Muskoka Watershed		Description
	# Lakes	Grade	# Lakes	Grade	
Total Phosphorus Concentration	1	Not Stressed	129	Vulnerable	The amount of total phosphorus in a lake is a measure of recreational water quality as phosphorus is generally the limiting nutrient in algae production.
< BG + 30%	1		73		
BG + 30% to BG + 50%	0		27		
> BG + 50%	0		29		
Algae		Not Stressed		Not Stressed	The propensity for algal blooms is the percentage of lakes with TP greater than 15 µg/L and are over threshold.
Fish Habitat (% Unaltered)	>90%	Not Stressed	91	Not Stressed	This is a measure of fish habitat. Many fish species require the overhanging vegetation, rock shoals, and aquatic vegetation generally found in undisturbed sites.
Calcium Levels	1	Not Stressed	377	Vulnerable	Calcium is an important nutrient for the development of bones and exoskeletons. As a result of acid precipitation, calcium has been leached out of the forest soils and is now also in decline in many of the lakes in the watershed threatening the continued presence of important lake species.
< 1.5 mg/L	0		161		
1.5 - 2.0 mg/L	0		138		
> 2.0 mg/L	1		78		

The Lower Black River Subwatershed flows through the less populated southeastern region of Muskoka, Haliburton and Simcoe County. It is a popular recreational river supporting both seasonal and permanent development along with canoeing and other water sports.

Total phosphorus concentration is an indicator of the amount of nutrient in a water body. A background or undeveloped level of total phosphorus has been determined for each lake. Where the phosphorus level has increased by more than 50% above the background level the lake may show signs of stress. No lakes are Over Threshold in the Lower Black River Subwatershed.

Shoreline vegetation protects water bodies from nutrients and toxic chemicals that can be carried into the lake and contribute to water quality issues. They also protect the lake edges from erosion caused by waves and ice. The shoreline zone provides critical habitat for aquatic insects, microorganisms, fish, and other animals, thereby helping to maintain a balance in sensitive aquatic ecosystems. Municipalities recommend that no more than 25% of a shoreline be developed. On average, less than 10% of the shoreline of lakes in the Lower Black River Subwatershed have been altered.

As a result of acid deposition, calcium has leached out of many lakes across Muskoka. In the Lower Black River Subwatershed, no lakes have less than 1.5 mg/L, which is the critical level for survival for several species.



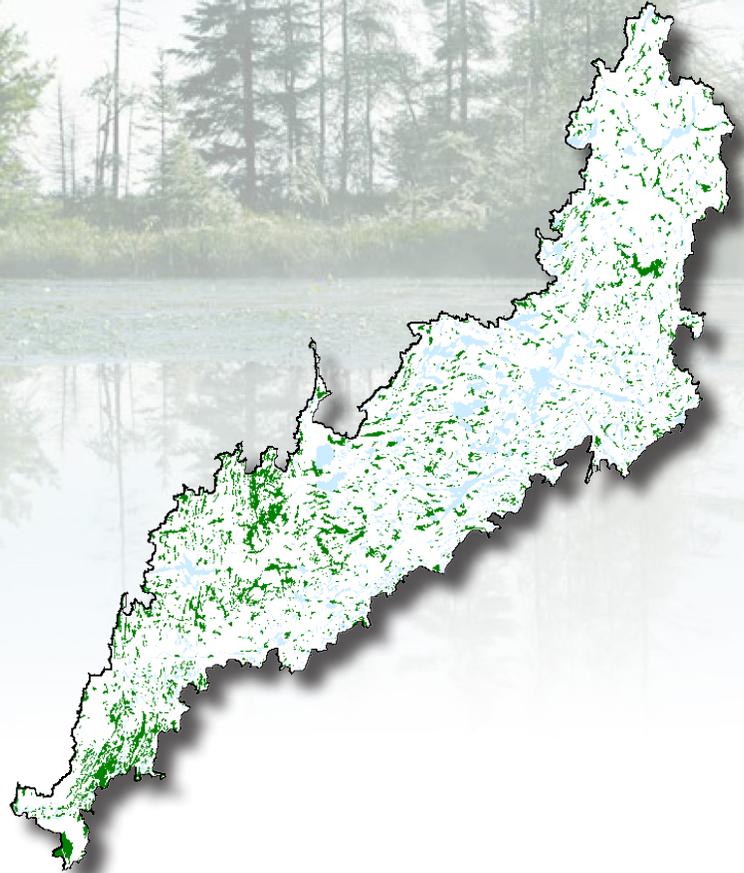
# Wetlands:

- Not Stressed
- Vulnerable
- Stressed

The Lower Black River Subwatershed comprises over 10% wetland area. Wetlands are recognized by all levels of government as important components of a healthy environment. Wetlands and the area that surrounds them provide continuous, sustainable environmental, economic and social benefits that contribute to the high quality of life in Muskoka. Most "species at risk" native to Muskoka rely on wetlands for all or a portion of their life cycles.

## Wetland Values

- Control and storage of surface water and recharge groundwater;
- Maintain and improve water quality, aid in flood control, and protect shorelines from erosion;
- Trap sediments which would otherwise fill watercourses;
- Support and initiate complex food chains;
- Provide important habitat;
- Support species at risk;
- Provide fish populations; and
- Provide active and passive recreational opportunities, including canoeing, bird watching, hunting and fishing



Subwatershed Name	% Wetlands	Comment	Grade
Lower Black River	10.26	The Lower Black River watershed is approximately 90% Crown and protected lands with less than 2% development. It is not close to a developing community and significant development is not planned for the area. Wetlands in this watershed are in good condition.	<i>Not Stressed</i>

# Biodiversity:

- Not Stressed
- Vulnerable
- Stressed



Biodiversity refers to the richness of life in the environment – the number of different species, their genetic variability, and the extent to which different groups of species occur from one place to another within the region.

Muskoka is blessed with a rich biodiversity primarily because of the extensiveness of its natural ecosystems. This biodiversity provides the resilience necessary to withstand environmental change and to continue to function

normally and provide the environmental goods and services on which we and other species depend.

Indicator	Lower Black River Subwatershed		Muskoka Watershed		Description
	# Species	Grade	# Species	Grade	
Species at Risk Habitat	18	<i>Not Stressed</i>	22	<i>Vulnerable</i>	The number of different types of species at risk habitat in the subwatershed. Subwatersheds with habitat for more types of species at risk are more vulnerable to development or other stressors.
<i>Endangered</i>	3		5		
<i>Threatened</i>	6		7		
<i>Species Concern</i>	9		10		
Alien Invasive Species*	No Observations	<i>Not Stressed</i>	10	<i>Stressed</i>	Maintaining the diversity of native species is important to a healthy watershed. Invasive species often out-compete native species and significantly reduce the biodiversity of an area.

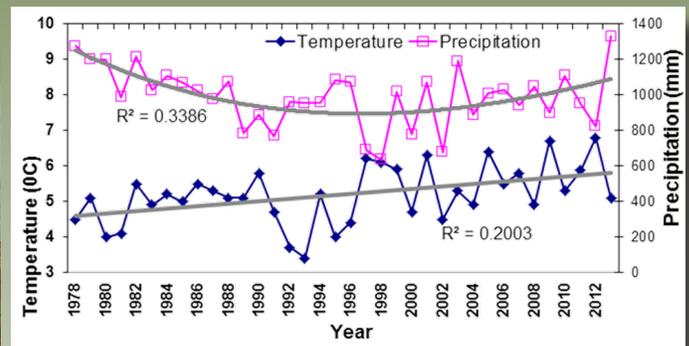
\* Includes the Spiny Water Flea in the large recreational lakes. Spiny Water Flea will collapse the biodiversity of a lake.



# Changing climate: temperatures continue to rise

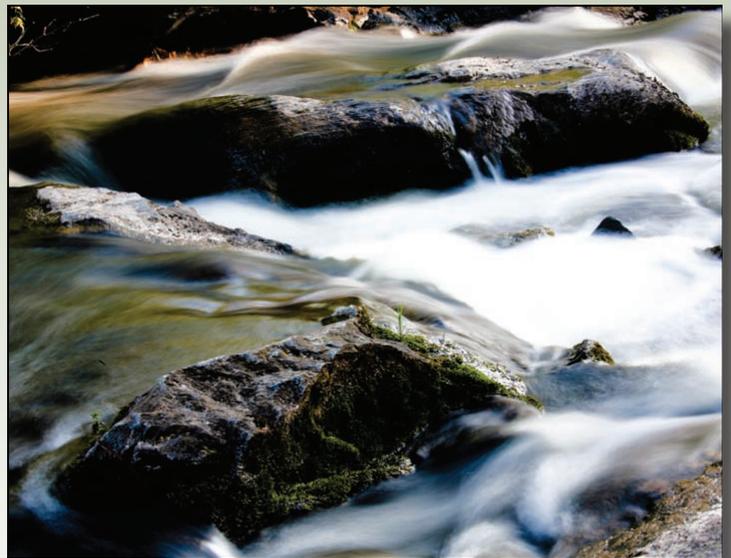
The mean temperature showed a clear and moderate increase or warming over 1978 to 2013, about 0.35 degree increase per 10 years, or a warming of 1 degree within 30 years. The annual precipitation had a significant decrease during 1978-1998 and then a weak increase during 1999-2013.

(Dorset Environmental Science Centre)



## Stewardship Works: help protect the watershed

When all is said and done, the fate of sustainable management of Muskoka's watersheds lies in large part in the hands of local residents as they go about their day-to-day lives. It is the citizens of Muskoka who must generate the interest and enthusiasm to create, continue and expand local projects which lead to positive actions and results.



### Stop the spread of invasive species

- Purchase non-invasive or native plants from a reputable dealer.
- Never dispose of domestic plants or animals into the wild.
- Inspect and wash your boat, ATV and other equipment and let dry for at least 6 hours before moving to a new lake or area.
- Do not move species from one area to another.

### Retain buffers and leave shorelines in a natural state

- Maintain a wide buffer of native plants and trees around shorelines of lakes and rivers.
- Minimize boat speed (eliminate wake) in all near-shore areas and particularly in areas with known loon nests.
- Avoid grassed lawns in the waterfront area and minimize use of fertilizers.

### Protect wetlands

- Leave wetlands alone.
- Keep recreational vehicles out of wetlands. Explore by kayak or canoe instead.

### Maintain natural areas

- Limit cleared areas in the rural and waterfront area.
- Do not create new roads.

### Reduce your personal impact

- Reduce your use of electricity and fossil fuels.
- Maintain your septic system.
- Improve the energy efficiency of your home and vehicle. Treat electricity as a luxury.
- Reduce waste by reusing, reducing, composting and refusing to buy items with excess packaging.