

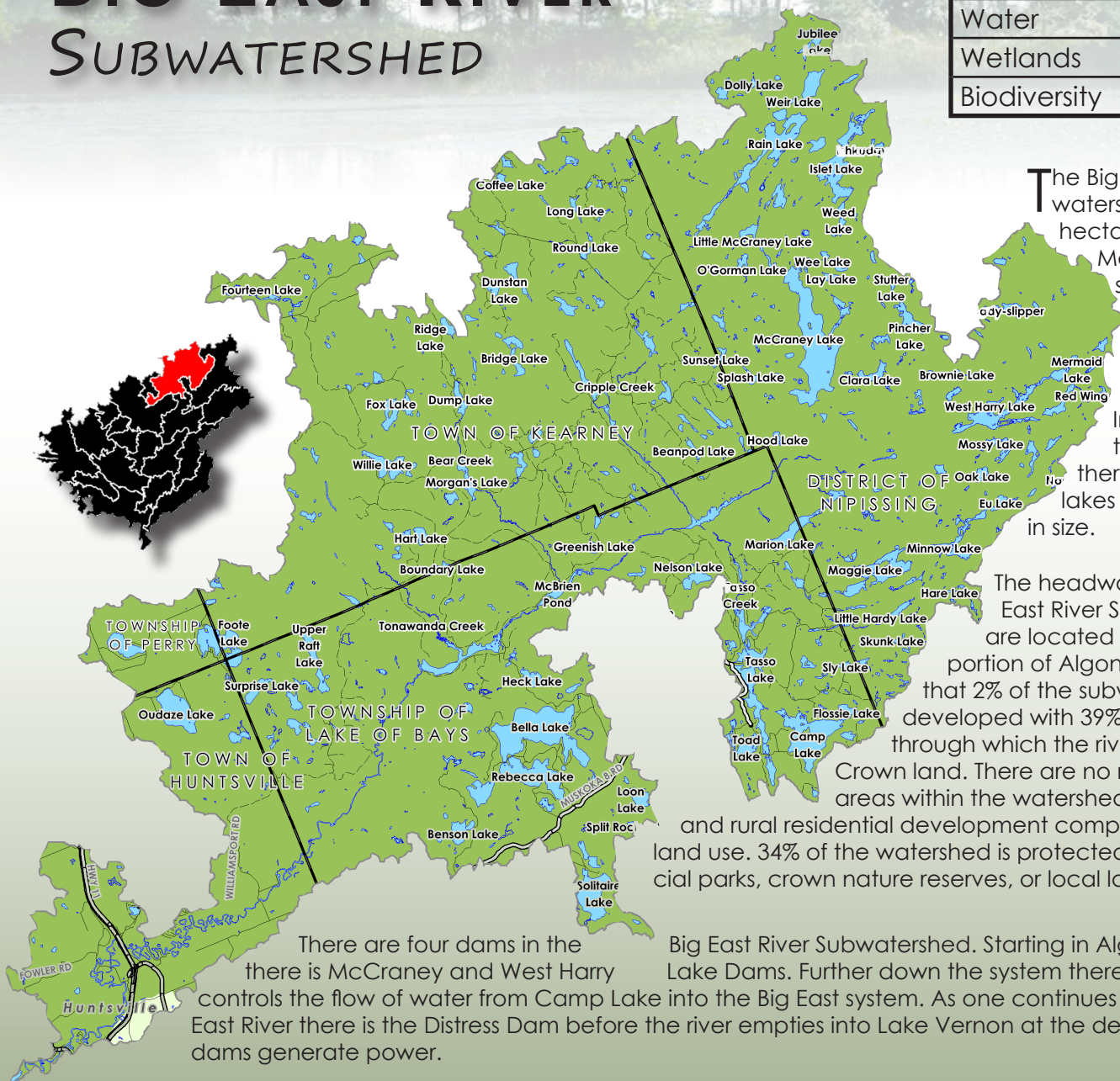
2014 MUSKOKA WATERSHED

REPORT CARD

BIG EAST RIVER SUBWATERSHED

GRADES

| | |
|--------------|--------------|
| Land | Not Stressed |
| Water | Not Stressed |
| Wetlands | Not Stressed |
| Biodiversity | Vulnerable |



The Big East River Subwatershed is 64,699 hectares in area. Major lakes in the subwatershed include Bella Lake (3.45 km²) and Rebecca Lake (2.15 km²). In addition to these larger lakes there are 47 other lakes over 8 hectares in size.

The headwaters of the Big East River Subwatershed are located in the western portion of Algonquin Park. Less than 2% of the subwatershed is developed with 39% of the land through which the river flows being Crown land. There are no major urban areas within the watershed and shoreline and rural residential development comprises most of the land use. 34% of the watershed is protected through provincial parks, crown nature reserves, or local land trusts.

There are four dams in the Big East River Subwatershed. Starting in Algonquin Park there is McCraney and West Harry Lake Dams. Further down the system there is a dam that controls the flow of water from Camp Lake into the Big East system. As one continues along the Big East River there is the Distress Dam before the river empties into Lake Vernon at the delta. None of the dams generate power.

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This report card describes the health of the land, water, wetlands and biodiversity of the Big East River Subwatershed and is part of the **2014 Muskoka Watershed Report Card** available at www.muskokawatershed.org.

Stewardship Works!



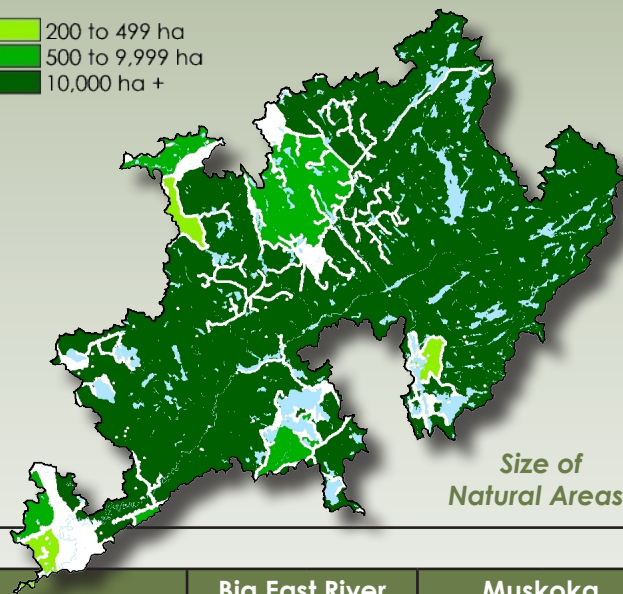
Muskoka
WATERSHED COUNCIL

Land:

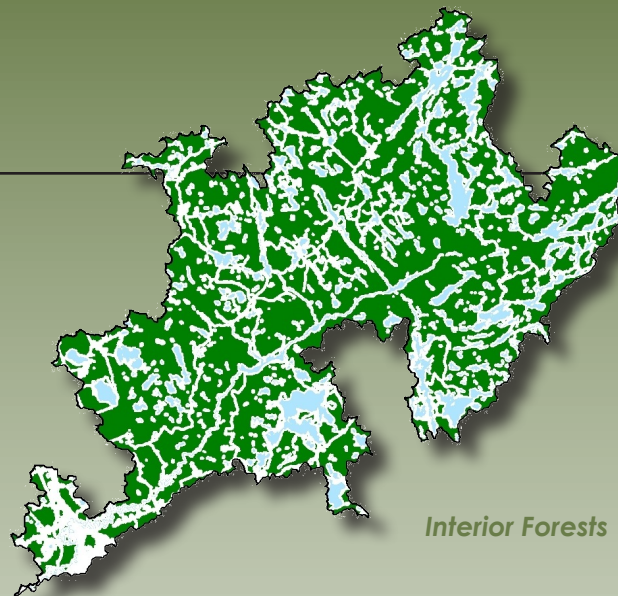
- ✓ Not Stressed
- Vulnerable
- Stressed

98% of the Big East River Subwatershed is natural habitat. The subwatershed is relatively large and is dominated by the river itself with several small lakes distributed throughout. Lakes are surrounded by mixed forest vegetation with scattered rural and waterfront development. The development pattern has resulted in a large undisturbed area that supports many of the large mammals native to Muskoka, such as bear and moose. These natural areas are also important to help purify the air, maintain good water quality and provide a carbon sink.

- 200 to 499 ha
- 500 to 9,999 ha
- 10,000 ha +



Size of Natural Areas



Interior Forests

60% of the subwatershed is privately owned and it will be important to maintain a strong private land stewardship program to ensure that the long-term health of the subwatershed is maintained as development occurs. Although only 7% of the land is currently under active private land stewardship, there has been an increase in participation in MFTIP and CLTIP and donations to land trusts.

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 | Big East River Subwatershed | | Muskoka Watershed | | Description |
|-----------------------|-----------------------------|--------------|-------------------------|--------------|---|
| | Value | Grade | Value | Grade | |
| Size of Natural Areas | 87% | Not Stressed | 79% | Vulnerable | 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 | 8% | | 52% | | |
| 10,000 ha + | 77% | | 20% | | |
| Interior Forest | 62% | Not Stressed | 58% | Not Stressed | Interior forest is a forested area with a 100-metre forested buffer surrounding it. |
| Road Density | 0.19 km/km ² | Not Stressed | 0.51 km/km ² | Vulnerable | 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% | Not Stressed | 5.4% | Vulnerable | 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 | 1.8 lots/km | Not Stressed | 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 | >90% | Not Stressed | 75% | Vulnerable | 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 | Big East River Subwatershed | | Muskoka Watershed | | Description |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------|-------------------|--------------|--|
| | # Lakes | Grade | # Lakes | Grade | |
| Total Phosphorus Concentration | 8 | 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% | 6 | | 73 | | |
| BG + 30% to BG + 50% | 1 | | 27 | | |
| > BG + 50% | 1 | | 29 | | |
| Algae | 0 | 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) | 95% | 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 | 45 | Vulnerable | 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 | 20 | | 161 | | |
| 1.5 - 2.0 mg/L | 16 | | 138 | | |
| > 2.0 mg/L | 9 | | 78 | | |

The Big East River Subwatershed flows from McCraney Lake in Algonquin Park into Lake Vernon just west of the urban area of Huntsville.

Total phosphorus concentration is an indicator of the amount of nutrient in a water body. A background (BG) 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. There are no lakes that are Over Threshold in the Big East 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, only 5% of the shoreline of lakes in the Big East River Subwatershed has been altered.

As a result of acid deposition, calcium has leached out of many lakes across Muskoka. In the Big East River Subwatershed twenty (20) lakes have less than 1.5 mg/L, which is the critical level for survival for several species.



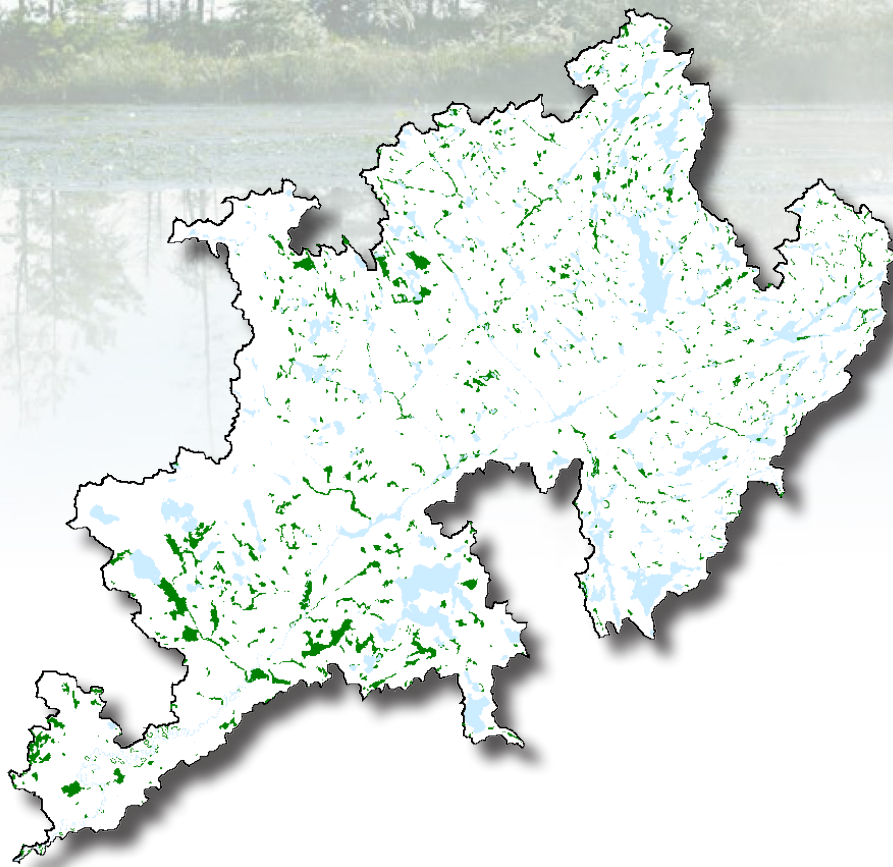
Wetlands:

- ☒ Not Stressed
- ☐ Vulnerable
- ☐ Stressed

The Big East River Subwatershed comprises almost 5% 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 |
|-------------------|------------|---|--------------|
| Big East River | 4.81 | The Big East River watershed is approximately 73% Crown and protected lands with less than 2% development. Development in the delta at the bottom of the subwatershed is impacting wetlands in that area, however, for most of the subwatershed wetlands are in good condition. | Not Stressed |

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 | Big East River Subwatershed | | Muskoka Watershed | | Description |
|-------------------------|-----------------------------|------------|-------------------|------------|---|
| | # Species | Grade | # Species | Grade | |
| Species at Risk Habitat | 19 | Vulnerable | 22 | Vulnerable | 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. |
| Endangered | 4 | | 5 | | |
| Threatened | 5 | | 7 | | |
| Species Concern | 10 | | 10 | | |
| Alien Invasive Species* | 3 | Stressed | 10 | Stressed | 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. |

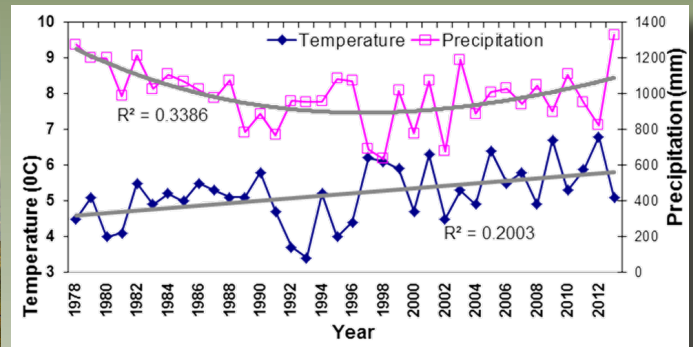
* Includes the Spiny Water Flea in the large recreational lakes. Spiny Water Flea will collapse the biodiversity of a lake.



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.