



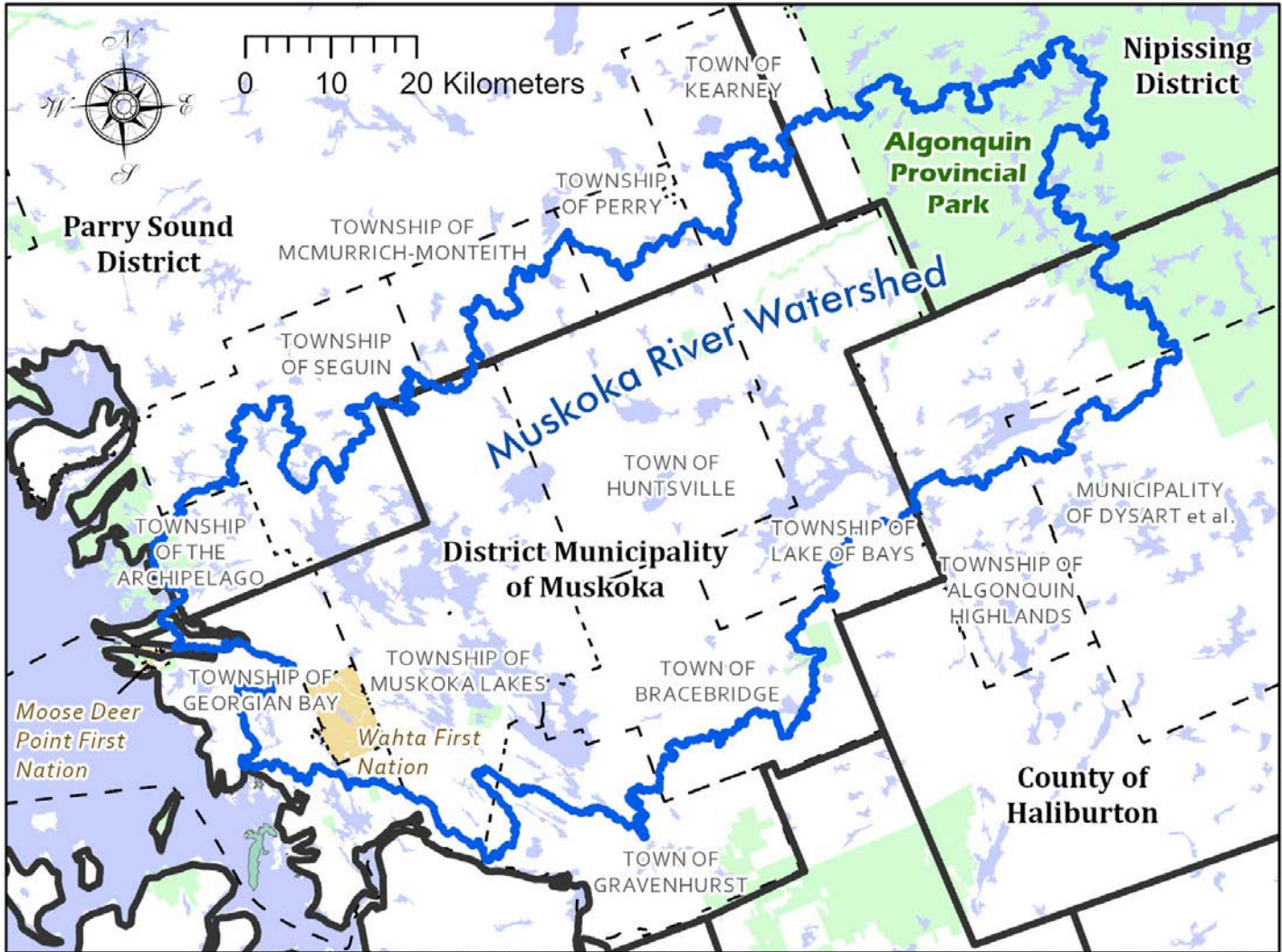
Muskoka

WATERSHED COUNCIL

Integrated Watershed Management

“We are embarking, with municipal, First Nations, and community partners, on a journey to bring IWM to Muskoka watersheds. IWM offers a substantially more effective form of environmental management at the watershed scale through an effective collaboration in planning and policy development.”

Integrated Watershed Management is an approach that requires us to manage human activities and natural resources, together, on a watershed basis taking into consideration the connected interests and needs of the environment, economy and society.



The Signs Are Clear
— Nature Is Sending Us a Message

Across the Muskoka watershed, troubling patterns are becoming impossible to ignore. Flood risk is becoming greater, water quality is declining, and land use pressures are increasing as our communities grow. At the same time, our climate is changing, adding new layers of uncertainty and stress to our environment.

These aren't separate problems— they interact as parts of a larger shift in how our watershed functions and how we live, build, and move across the land. Environmental changes are piling up, and they're starting to interact in ways we don't fully understand.

As they compound, so do the risks—to our homes, our economy, our health, and the ecosystems we depend on.

Nature is telling us something—the way we've been managing land and water no longer works. If we want to protect Muskoka's future, it's time to stop reacting and start taking action, together.

Our way of managing environment wasn't designed for this.

The environmental challenges we face today are more complex, connected, and urgent than ever before. Unfortunately, our current planning system wasn't built for this level of complexity—and it shows.

Decisions Are Made in Isolation: The Muskoka River watershed spans 17 municipalities and First Nations communities—meaning decisions in one area, even well-intentioned ones like developing a shoreline or altering a wetland, will create consequences for other regions in the watershed.

The Muskoka River Water Management Plan is Outdated: The Muskoka River Water Management Plan (**MRWMP**) is too narrow in scope. The **MRWMP** focuses on balancing flows and levels for power production with navigation and several fish species. It is not designed for flood management, water quality or watershed health.

A Missed Opportunity for Collaboration: There is no shared framework for managing the watershed. As a result, we face gaps, overlaps, and missed opportunities. When each community acts alone, we miss the chance to pool resources, share knowledge, and solve problems more effectively and economically.

What we need now is a new approach—one that reflects how nature actually works, integrated and connected.

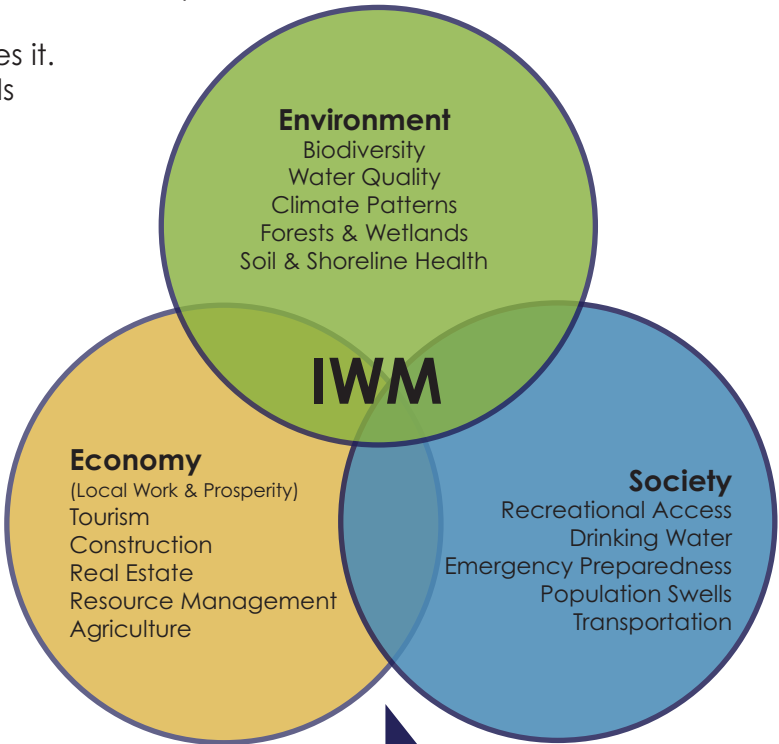
Integrated Watershed Management: Connecting Everyone is the Solution

Integrated Watershed Management (IWM) is a collaborative, community-based framework where everyone at the table—municipalities, NGOs, First Nations, residents, and businesses—work together on shared goals, including economic well-being.

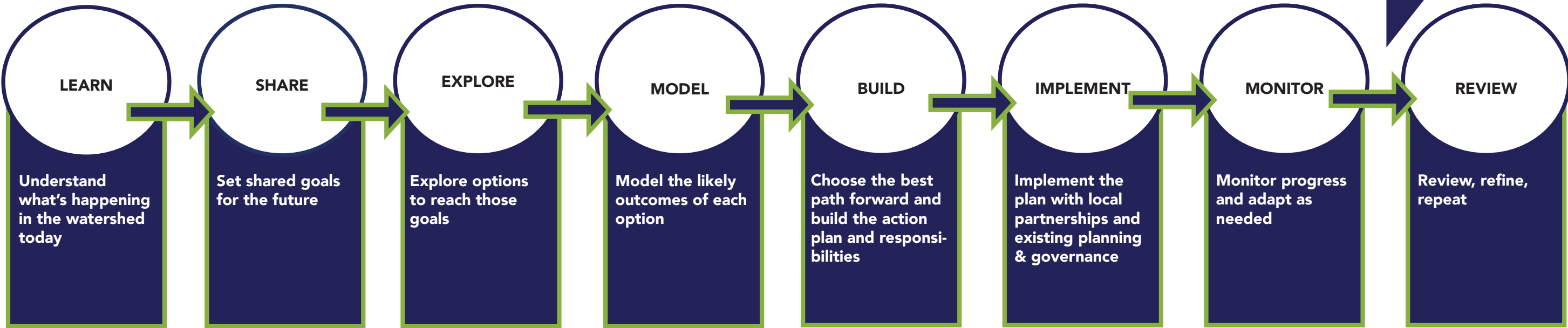
IWM connects the dots between **water, land, environment, economy and society**. It helps each group see how their piece of the puzzle fits into the whole picture.

It doesn't override local authority—it enhances it. Every action taken locally considers the needs of the entire watershed.

Everyone has a piece of the puzzle. Integrated Watershed Management is how we fit them together.



IWM Pathway: how the process works



What a Successful IWM Plan Looks Like: A Collaboration Encompassing the Entire Watershed

An Integrated Watershed Management (IWM) Plan provides more than local solutions—it becomes a shared roadmap that unites our efforts across the entire watershed.

- Establishes shared goals for clean water, resilient forests, and sustainable growth.
- Defines roles and responsibilities among municipalities, landowners, industries, and community organizations.
- Supports better, more coordinated decisions that consider long-term impacts and regional connections.
- Measures progress and adapts as conditions change.

It's not a new law or layer of bureaucracy. It's a planning framework that enables communities to work together for the health of the watershed.

How We'll Make Decisions Together

Collaborative Governance in Action: At the heart of Integrated Watershed Management is a shared decision-making model—one that respects local authority while inviting meaningful participation from all corners of the watershed.

Equal Voices, Shared Responsibility: Community members, government, business leaders, Indigenous governments, and technical specialists will come together as equals at a watershed roundtable. Notably, the roundtable does not carry regulatory power. Instead, it creates a trusted space for collaborative problem-solving grounded in local knowledge, technical insight, and lived experience.

Municipal Leadership with Autonomy: Each municipality will retain full decision-making authority and autonomy. Recommendations from the roundtable will be passed to a steering committee made up of municipal representatives, who will coordinate how to implement these ideas locally through their existing planning and governance tools.

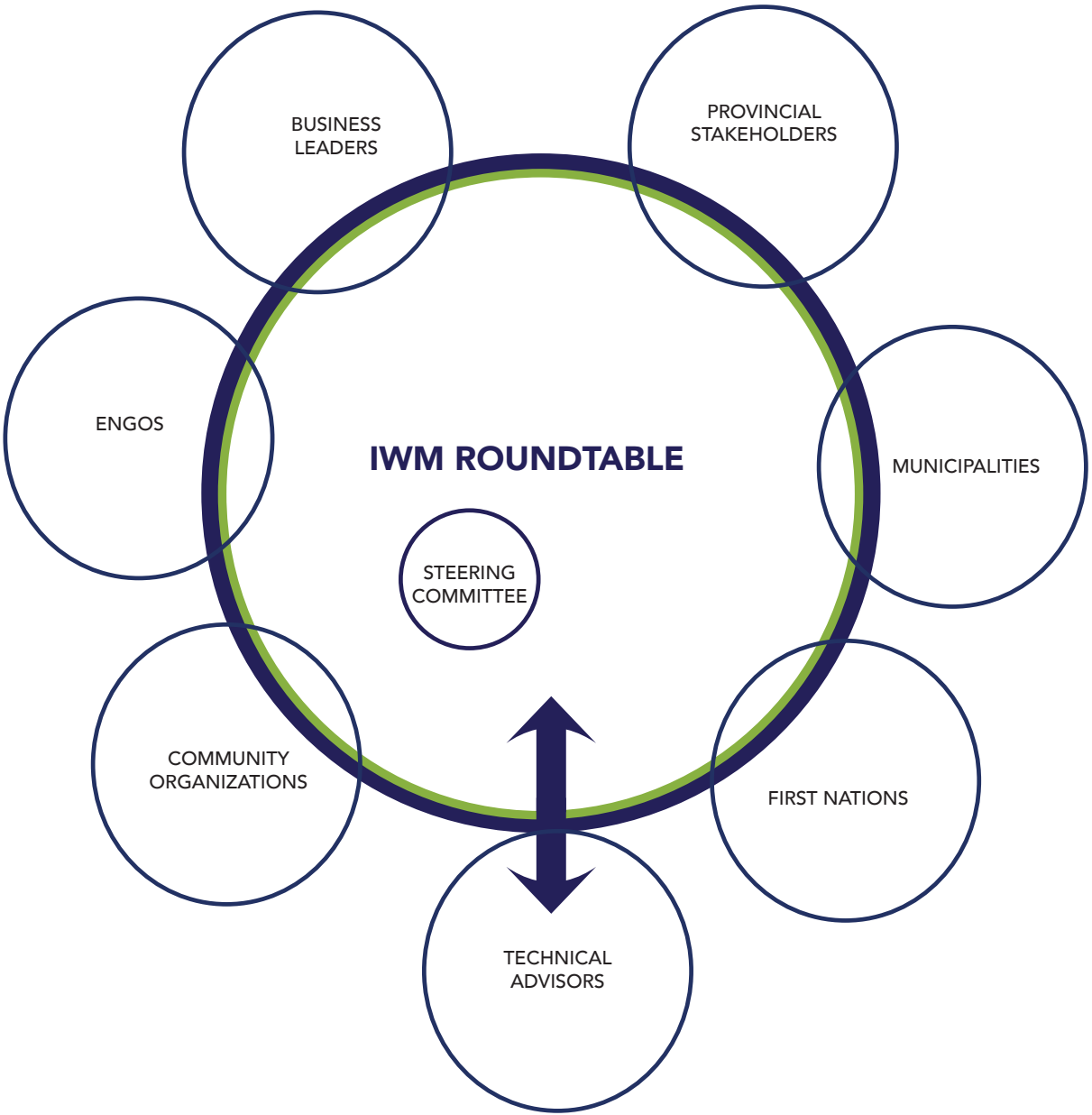
This approach ensures that IWM supports, rather than replaces, local government processes

A Network of Implementation: The success of IWM relies on shared implementation across sectors.

Beyond municipalities, a range of partners will play active roles:

- Business and industry groups will contribute to sustainable practices and economic development, integrating watershed goals.
- Scientific and technical organizations will provide data, models, and monitoring expertise.
- Environmental stewards and ENGOS will help deliver projects on the ground.
- Residents and landowners will contribute local knowledge and take direct actions in their communities.
- Municipalities will have new tools to integrate watershed goals and needs into official plans, asset management and climate adaptation.

By weaving together these diverse voices and strengths, IWM becomes not just a plan—but a living framework for collective action.



Key Benefits of IWM:

Adaptable and Flexible: IWM evolves with changing conditions, making it easier to respond to emerging challenges, including climate impacts.

Cost-Effective: By aligning efforts across the watershed, we create economies of scale, reduce duplication, and save money over the long term.

Vision-Driven, Not Crisis-Driven: IWM empowers us to set ambitious goals—like clean water, biodiversity, and sustainable land use—rather than constantly react to problems.

Climate-Ready: It supports proactive climate action by integrating environmental, social, and economic priorities into one coordinated approach.

Locally Rooted, Regionally Connected: Local decisions are made with a clear understanding of how they affect the broader watershed, ensuring we act in the best interests of the whole system.

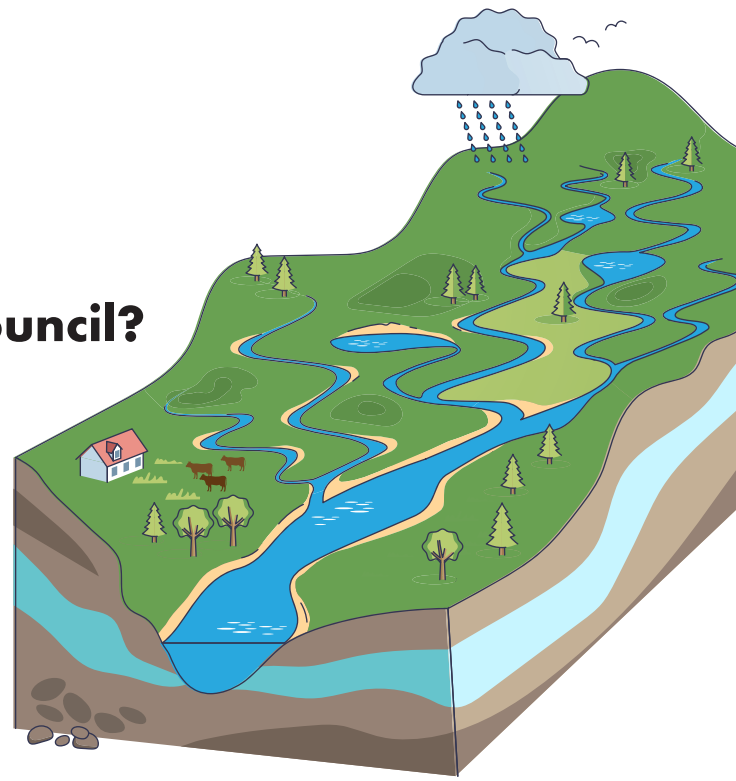


Muskoka

WATERSHED COUNCIL

What is the Muskoka Watershed Council?

Muskoka Watershed Council, an incorporated not-for-profit, is committed to the enhancement of the health and sustainability of the entire Muskoka River Watershed, from its headwaters in Algonquin Park to its outlets to Georgian Bay, as well as those parts of the Severn River-Lake Simcoe Watershed and the Georgian Bay shoreline and islands that lie within the District of Muskoka. MWC was formed to educate on environmental issues, provide science-based environmental policy advice, and help address watershed management issues.



**DID YOU
KNOW?**

More importantly, what is a watershed?

A watershed is a land area that channels rainfall and snow melt from its highest points to its lowest, guiding water toward an outlet, often a river or lake. But it's more than just a pathway for water—it's a vibrant ecosystem. Watersheds are complex living systems where plants and animals interact. Everything within a watershed collectively manages the flow of water, energy, and the nutrients essential to life.

The Muskoka Watershed Council:

- Develops informed position papers
- Advises on sustainable development standards
- Gives recommendations on sustainable use of natural resources
- Provides municipalities guidance on matters related to watershed health policy
- Hosts public lectures and presentations

FYI

MWC produces a **Muskoka Watershed Report Card** every five years that scientifically assesses Muskoka's watershed health. It educates residents and decision-makers about water and land conditions, enabling sustainable practices to bolster the health of our environment. Contact us to book a presentation for your group or organization.

MWC provides the tools and training for Lake Associations to monitor algae by taking water samples during the year as part of the **Algae Monitoring Program**. MWC creates an annual report using valuable data collected to assess and identify algal trends to ensure the health of Muskoka's waters. Encourage your lake association to participate!

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REPORT CARD



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PROGRAM

