



Muskoka

WATERSHED COUNCIL

Minutes

Friday, March 22, 2024

1:00 pm

Council Chambers (District of Muskoka) & Zoom

Present (In-person)

Aaron Rusak (Chair)

Neil Hutchinson (@1:55 pm)

Geoff Ross

Lance DeCaire

Peter Johnston

Peter Sale

Andrew Fyfe

Michael Peppard

Kevin Trimble

Present (Zoom)

Patricia Arney

John Cooper

Cathy Oakden

Brian Bochek

Ann Curley

David Parsons

Susan Boudreau

Joan Frain

MWC Staff

Rebecca Willison

DMM Staff

Glenn Cunnington

Lauren Valliere

Guests

Preston Nielsen *

Rupert Kindersley *

* Attended by Zoom

Welcome

MWC Chair Aaron Rusak called the meeting to order at 1:00 pm. MWC Director David Parsons provided an Indigenous Land Acknowledgement. Aaron introduced the new Board of Directors, including newly elected Vice-chair, Neil Hutchinson. He noted that the position of Secretary-Treasurer is still open.

Confirmation of Minutes

MOTION

Moved by Aaron Rusak, seconded by Peter Johnston

THAT the Minutes of the Muskoka Watershed Council meeting dated January 19, 2024 be approved.

CARRIED

MOTION

Moved by Peter Sale, seconded by Andrew Fyfe

THAT the Minutes of the Muskoka Watershed Council meeting dated February 23, 2024 be approved.

CARRIED

Business Arising from the Minutes

- None.

Presentation

[The Muskoka Big Year](#) – Aaron Rusak, MWC Chair

Aaron Rusak is an avid birder and he talked about the local Big Year competition, where birders attempt to identify as many species of birds as possible, by sight or sound, within a single calendar year and within a specific geographic area. Aaron has been able to increase his number of sightings each year, and in 2023 he found 230 species. May Big Day is the greatest number of species that can be found, and Aaron's team recorded 131 species in one day! The data is submitted to eBirds where it is analyzed for trends.

Aaron noted that there is a push north of boreal birds out of Muskoka but that there are small pockets of boreal habitat that have been protected through programs like the Muskoka Heritage Areas. Despite this, boreal birds are rapidly disappearing, while some populations of European birds are increasing and moving north into Muskoka. He also noted that migration routes are poorly understood.

There are around 170 birds species that breed in Muskoka. The main drivers of changing populations in Muskoka are likely due to habitat loss and climate change.

Aaron answered a number of questions following his presentation.

Climate change updates including the introduction of the Community Energy & Emissions Reduction Plan – Lauren Valliere, Climate Initiatives Coordinator, District of Muskoka

Lauren highlighted a couple of major District of Muskoka climate initiatives that have been brought forward recently, including the [fleet de-carbonization initiative](#) approved at the Finance and Corporate Services Committee on March 20th and the [Muskoka Community Energy and Emissions Reduction Plan](#) (CEERP) endorsed by the Community and Planning Services Committee on March 21st. Lauren touched on the role community groups have to play in the roll out of the CEERP, acting as a bridge between the government and the community. She noted three ways community groups can help support the implementation of the [CEERP](#):

1. Education – sharing resources, hosting events, encouraging community engagement.
2. Advocacy – continuing to advocate to local, provincial and federal government bodies, as well as businesses and institutions.
3. Action – facilitating the implementation of the 70 actions outlined in the CEERP to support the decarbonization of Muskoka.

Michael Peppard noted the linkages between climate change and other programs i.e. nature-based solutions and IWM.

There was some good discussion about how to get people to take action. The District is trying to implement actions internally so they can then encourage them to be undertaken by the community. The District wants to act as a role model.

Aaron thanked Lauren for her update on the District's climate change initiatives.

Committee Updates

- **IWM Community Roundtable** – Kevin Trimble reported that the CRT is resuming its monthly meetings. The municipal IWM conference was a success with many councillors and staff attending. Next steps for municipalities are being considered, including bringing municipalities together for a meeting. The CRT also needs to develop a work plan based on the funding request that has been approved by the majority of municipalities. A Terms of Reference continues to be developed.
- **Communications Committee** – Peter Sale reported that the State of the Watershed article series continues to be published on MuskokaRegion.com. The Communications Committee needs to meet to discuss what and how to best communicate. Communications to the community and the government should be a priority.
- **Fundraising Committee** – Peter Sale reported that two meetings are being held next week to discuss fundraising options with both private and foundation representatives. MWC needs help and guidance on how to get funding. We likely will need to develop a business plan.

Program Updates

- **Algae Monitoring Program** – Peter Sale reported that the annual report is being drafted and will be released soon. A small group met to discuss how to analyze and present the data. There is room for a couple of lake associations to join the program this year. Interested associations can contact algae@muskokawatershed.org for more information.
- **Love Your Lake Program** – Rebecca Willison reported that three lakes have been selected to participate this year, but there is room for more. Interested associations can contact info@muskokawatershed.org for more information.

Partner Updates

- **Township of Lake of Bays** – Councillor Michael Peppard reported that the Township tried to oppose the recent Ontario Energy Board decision regarding methane and received an unfavourable mail from Enbridge Gas.
- **Town of Gravenhurst** – Councillor Peter Johnston noted that the Town of Gravenhurst also passed a resolution and received some push back, as well. Peter has shared the [presentations from the Municipal IWM conference](#) (available under the 'Other Resources' tab) with some lake association contacts and has received positive feedback. He continues to give his presentations on climate change and will also be going in to high schools.

New Business

- Rebecca Willison noted that it is World Water Day and shared some information related to the awareness day and to Muskoka specifically.
- Rupert Kindersley highlighted a potential future conflict as the northwest suffers from droughts and look to the Great Lakes for water.
- Peter Sale suggested that MWC develop a social media campaign around Earth Day.
- MWC will be organizing a Summit in the fall and volunteers are needed to help.
- Earth Hour is tomorrow evening.
- Kevin Trimble noted that MWC is trying to increase its indigenous engagement. He suggested that MWC have a display at the 'See Muskoka Through Our Eyes' First Traditional Powwow in June.

Next MWC Meeting

MWC's next meeting is scheduled for Friday, April 19th at 1 pm in the Council Chamber of the District of Muskoka administration building in Bracebridge and on Zoom. The meeting will feature a presentation from Lynn DeCaro from the Muskoka Community Foundation on their recently released Vital Signs report.

Adjournment

Aaron Rusak adjourned the meeting at 2:50 pm.