



OUR LIVING WATERS

All waters in Canada in good health by 2030

2020-2021 ANNUAL REPORT



The Soul of a Network: Relationships

On March 16th, 2020 with the pandemic entering the ‘oh, this is for real’ phase, our collective nervous system was grappling with newly imposed lockdowns, the shock of global uncertainty, and the health implications for those we care for. At Our Living Waters, we had scheduled a collaborative meeting of 15 freshwater champions and were agonizing over whether to cancel given all of... that. Was this really important right now? Who would show up? We decided to continue, and to our pleasant surprise, almost everyone logged on to Zoom. We held space for a check in—the official agenda item was “Hellos (in a crazy world)”—and found that people were eager to talk. To connect. We heard worries about the economic impact on the nonprofit sector, reflections on how hard it was to stop checking the news, and honest admissions to feeling frazzled trying to balance work with parenting. We also heard how thankful this group was for each other. About how people were excited to collaborate and find the opportunity in the crisis, even if we weren’t quite sure what that looked like yet.

A good network is built on trust. Of course, our common goal is important, uniting us in service to the waters we love. But a crucial ingredient for our effectiveness emerges, like alchemy, through the magic of relationships—how we relate to each other and to the natural world. The collaborative ground that is the OLW Network won’t succeed without fostering an environment where at the beginning of a meeting, people are excited to really see each other, even if it is on Zoom. Yes, we’re taking collective action for our waters, but we’re also building relationships, which is too often missing in the nonprofit world where unfortunately many groups are incentivized to compete with each other (e.g. for the same pots of money). As one OLW Network member recently wrote in an evaluation survey, “Working together as a team made change feel possible. I am so pleased to be part of a group that shows up because they care so deeply. It is nice to feel like we’re all on the same team, rather than in competition! The sense of community has been remarkable.”

2020 has been a lot, it’s true. It happens to be the year my second daughter was born, so it’s hard for me to be too hard on 2020. It’s also a year that has highlighted how important our relationships are and how the soul of the OLW Network lies in the relationships we foster. I hope we capture some of that relationality in this annual report, and look forward to continuing this journey together into 2021 and beyond.

To all our members and to the entire freshwater community, thank you for all you do!



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Andrew Stegemann". The script is fluid and cursive.

Andrew Stegemann
Director, Our Living Waters (he/him)

The OLW Shared Measurement System

We were doing two things before the pandemic made them commonplace: using Zoom (we support a cross-Canada Network after all), and working to influence curves, although, at Our Living Waters, our goal is to turn the curve on our 24 impact measures, not to flatten them. Learn more about our innovative shared measurement system below (or take a look [here](#)).

Our Ambitious Goal

Our ambitious goal of **all waters in Canada in good health by 2030** unites the OLW Network towards an important future. But to measure our collective progress towards this goal, we need to have a clear understanding of what good water health means.

Four Results

These four results describe what our ambitious goal would look like if we could see it. They are conditions of well-being we all strive for when we protect and care for the fresh water near our homes. Water in Canada will be in good health when these results are achieved:



Canada's water is safe for swimming and drinking and safe from contaminants.



Fish are flourishing in Canada's waters and are healthy to eat.



The flow of water in Canada's rivers and lakes supports life, recreation and a healthy environment.



Aquatic bugs that form the base of the food chain are thriving in Canada's waterways.

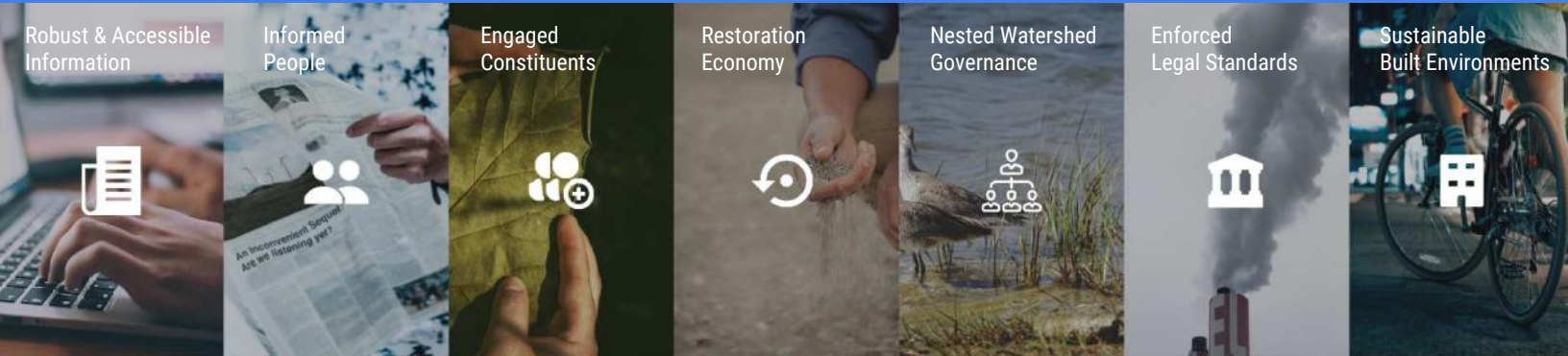
Six Water Health Indicators

Six water health indicators measure whether we are getting closer or further away from achieving the four results and, in turn, the ambitious goal. We've adopted the following six indicators from [WWF-Canada's Watershed Reports](#) that track the health of waters in Canada and signal if conditions are getting better or worse:



Seven Winning Conditions

The winning conditions are our theories on how we can work towards the results. We believe that the following winning conditions will make a large difference if we can collectively achieve them: Robust and Accessible Information; Informed People; Engaged Constituencies; Restoration Economy; Nested Watershed Governance; Enforced Legal Standards; Sustainable Built Environment.



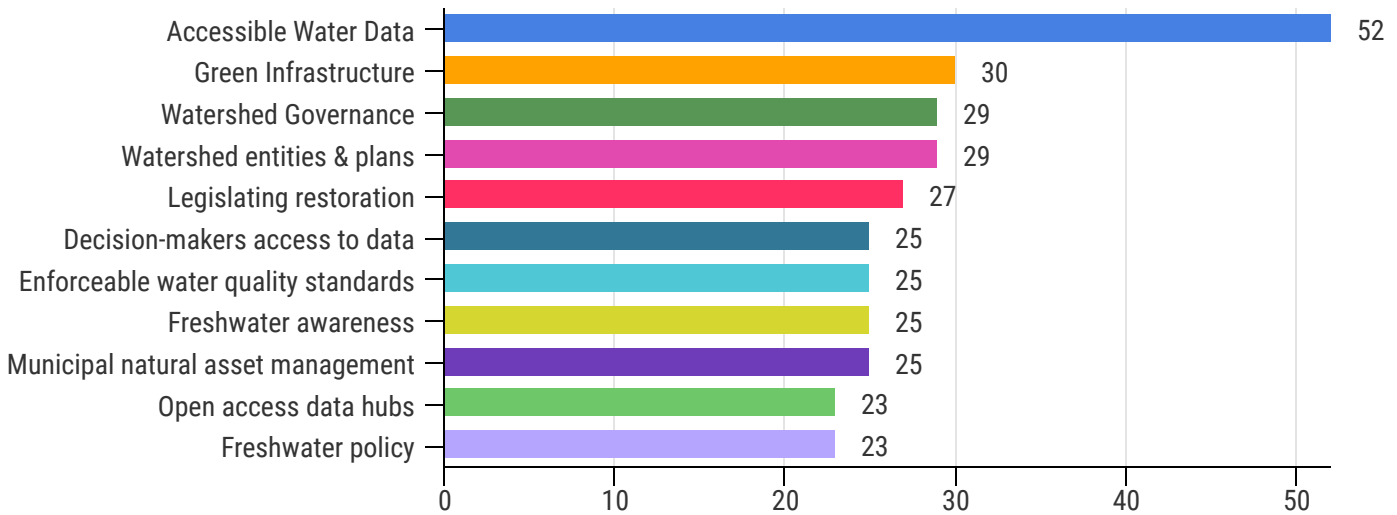
Twenty-four Impact Measures

Impact measures are metrics that measure and assess our progress on achieving these winning conditions. Impact measures are a key part of the shared measurement system because they are the measures that we want to 'turn the curve' on through collective action and because reporting on them regularly gives us an idea of how we are doing as a Network.

Accessible Data	Citizen Legal Action	Combined Sewer Overflow	Decision Makers	Drinking Water Advisories	Drinking Water Source Protection	Enforceable Water Quality Standards	Environmental Flow Standards
Freshwater Awareness	Freshwater Policy	Government Financing for	Green Infrastructure	Harmful Algae Blooms	Human Right to Water	Legislating Restoration	Media
Open Access Hubs	Pipeline Threats	Recreational Water Quality	Supporter Actions	Watershed Entities & Plans	Watershed Governance	Municipal Natural Asset Management	National Drinking Water Standards

2020-2021 Network Priorities

The OLV shared measurement system consists of 24 impact measures that drive our actions towards freshwater health across the country. However, with limited resources, it's important for us to prioritize which measures to focus on each year. To identify these priorities, we send a survey to all OLV Network members. With 79% of members responding to the survey, we're confident that these priorities truly reflect the work and collective priorities of OLV Network members. These were the top ten impact measures as ranked by the Network in the spring of 2020:



Results from this survey, alongside input from our OLV 2030 Fund Advisory Committee informed our five OLV Network priorities for the period between April 1, 2020 to March 31, 2021.

Top Priorities

Accessible Water Data



Green Infrastructure



Watershed Plans & Governance



Legislating Restoration



Freshwater Awareness

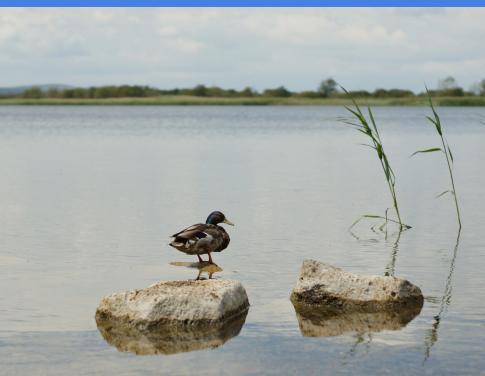


These priorities focused our resources to drive collaboration and support the Network in turning the curve on relevant impact measures. Practically, this meant:

- Channelling financial resources from the OLV 2030 Fund to these priorities;
- Prioritizing data updates to these impact measures where possible;
- Convening Network members and other groups to define collaborative opportunities to advance priorities; and
- Engaging Network members around priority issues.

However, the priorities came with a disclaimer this year: COVID-19 is changing all our priorities in real-time. We see each of these priorities as essential in efforts around economic recovery and specifically how such recovery can strengthen efforts around watershed health. We are committed to supporting our members in transcending these challenging times.

The OLV Network by the Numbers



121 Community and organizational members

An increase from 92 members since March 2020.

20 E-blasts sent to members and supporters

Garnering an impressive 48% open rate (industry average is 25%), 14% click rate (industry average is 2.5%) and generating 702 engagements. Significantly up from 2019, where we sent 20 e-blasts, had open rates of 44% and click rates of 11%, and drove 477 engagements.

2 Network-wide member convenings

This is the first year we've brought together members for network-wide convenings.

36 Participants to five Canada Water Agency forum meetings

These forums, hosted with the Forum on Water Leadership, were to coordinate joint action on the forthcoming Canada Water Agency, which correspond to the [freshwater policy](#) impact measure.

51 Organizational endorsers to Canada Water Agency joint submission

[The joint submission](#) was drafted based on the input of participants at the Canada Water Agency forum meetings, co-hosted with the Forum for Leadership on Water.

50 Registrants to *Funding Water Projects Across Canada* session.

The session was hosted to help turn the curve on impact measure, [government financing for protection](#). In 2020, OLV identified [over 300 shovel-ready watershed projects](#) across Canada that were ready for immediate COVID recovery stimulus funding.

23 Participants on Federal Water Strategy Team

These participants attended monthly meetings to strategize and collaborate on 'turning the curve' on impact measures: [accessible data](#), [decision-makers](#), and [open access hubs](#) (Led by OLV; funded by OLV 2030 Fund).

12 Organizations involved in Green Infrastructure Community of Practice

These organizations gathered for bi-monthly meetings to 'turn the curve' on [green infrastructure](#). This CoP has been active since 2017 (Led by Canadian Freshwater Alliance, funded by OLV 2030 Fund).

Data Development for Impact Measures

Impact Measures with New Baseline Data

Thanks to support from [Midsummer Analytics](#), we were able to gain new data for our Legislating Restoration impact measure:



Legislating Restoration

Number of Canadian jurisdictions in which environmental restoration is codified in environmental legislation through direct application of the polluter-pays-principle: **three**.

Impact Measures with Updated Data



Accessible Data

Based on the 2020 Watersheds Report from WWF-Canada, there are now 40% of the 167 sub-watersheds in Canada that have sufficient, accessible data allowing WWF-Canada's Watershed Reports to assess their overall health (up from 34% measured in 2017).



Human Right to Water

No progress has been made on this impact measure since the last update in 2017. Quebec remains as the only federal or provincial/territorial jurisdiction that formally recognized the human right to water.



Media

Data was added for both 2018 and 2019, with a continued downward trend in the percent change in traditional media stories on water impacts (down 18% from our baseline figure from 2017).



National Drinking Water Standards

Since the last update in 2017, no changes have been seen to national drinking water standards. There are still no enforceable national drinking water standards, despite the World Health Organization recommendation that all countries have national, legally binding drinking water quality standards.



Our Impact Stories

Collaborations driving results on our priority impact measures

Priority Area: Accessible Water Data

Filling knowledge gaps with more data on water health while making water data accessible for everyone, especially decision-makers.

Impact Story: Ground truthing water data gaps in Atlantic Canada

Atlantic DataStream now has over 2.5 million water monitoring observations available for use in watershed assessment and reporting. Yet, WWF-Canada's 2020 Watershed Report showed 6 out of 13 sub-watersheds in Atlantic Canada still lack sufficient data. This year, AWN's Laura Chandler analyzed the dataset to pinpoint where the greatest regional supports are needed to fill data gaps. Not surprisingly, watersheds in rural areas and those with inconsistent funding opportunities are in need of the most support. After ground-truthing the barriers at several regional discussions and a network-wide gathering, preliminary steps are in place to begin addressing data gaps.

(Led by the Atlantic Water Network and the Gordon Foundation)

Read full impact story:

https://www.ourlivingwaters.ca/groundtruthing_data_gaps_atlantic_canada

Impact Story: Community-based Water Monitoring & the Canada Water Agency

A coalition of Community-Based Water Monitoring (CBWM) leaders from across the country is working to raise the profile of CBWM in Canada and advocate for its credibility on the federal stage. With the development of the proposed Canada Water Agency and discussions about a national freshwater data strategy, they had multiple opportunities to voice their top-four priorities for federal commitment to CBWM. This Federal Water Strategy Team continues to drive collaborative action for CBWM and has more offerings to come.

(Led by Our Living Waters Network)

Read full impact stories:

https://www.ourlivingwaters.ca/driving_federal_action_cbwm

https://www.ourlivingwaters.ca/cbwm_canada_water_agency

Impact Story: Instructional webinars for the Columbia Basin Data Hub

In southeastern British Columbia, the recently launched Columbia Basin Data Hub acts as a central repository for water-related data in the region. In the absence of a province-wide approach to water monitoring, this Hub makes credible water data available for decision making about climate change and water scarcity risks. The challenge, as always, is supporting people in adopting a new technological platform. Living Lakes Canada, the facilitator of the Water Hub, developed and delivered a three-part webinar series in December 2020 that introduced the database and its capabilities to its users.

(Led by Living Lakes Canada)

Read full impact story: https://www.ourlivingwaters.ca/open_access_water_data

Our Impact Stories

Collaborations driving results on our priority impact measures

Priority Area: Green Infrastructure

Reducing our reliance on 'grey infrastructure' like pipes and treatment plants to manage rainfall by investing in nature-based solutions like wetlands, rain gardens, and permeable surfaces.

Impact Story: Groups Work Together to Bring About Living Cities

Green infrastructure has been an Our Living Waters Network priority issue for the past several years. In response, the Our Living Waters 2030 Fund has provided ongoing funding to a team that works to advance local action on green infrastructure. The Canadian Freshwater Alliance, with support from Green Communities Canada, has been facilitating team meetings as their work together evolves over the years. Their renewed focus for 2022 is a Living Cities campaign that will promote transformative green infrastructure programs in municipalities across Canada.

(Led by the Canadian Freshwater Alliance)

Read full impact story: https://www.ourlivingwaters.ca/gj_cop_living_cities

Priority Area: Combined Sewer Overflows

Increasing awareness about the threats poor stormwater management has on our waterways.

Impact Story: Training A Team of Sewage Investigators

Swim Drink Fish Canada has been engaging the public in education and advocacy, raising awareness about combined sewer overflows for almost 20 years. This year they set out to train a team of sewage investigators across the country. They hosted webinars in different cities to demonstrate how people can report pollution using Gassy, their AI photo submission tool. Attendees also learned how to access the government portal for Wastewater Systems Effluent Regulations Reported Data to learn more about their communities. More webinars are to come!

(Led by Swim Drink Fish)

Read full impact story: https://www.ourlivingwaters.ca/training_a_team_of_sewage_investigators



Priority Area: Watershed Plans & Entities

Supporting sub-watersheds in developing tools for water protection and governance.

Impact Story: Learning from failure: Our Project on watershed entities and plans

Sometimes projects don't go as planned. OLV, partnering with the Forum for Leadership on Water, worked on a project that aimed to understand the steps needed to develop criteria for assessing "viable and effective" watershed entities and plans. Knowing this was a complex topic area, the project's aim was merely to scope out a plan to get to this end! The ultimate goal was to use this definition to qualitatively evaluate the watershed entities and plans that exist in Canada. However, the project never fully took off due to a number of reasons, and as failures go, lessons were learned along the way.

(Led by Our Living Waters Network and Forum for Leadership on Water)

Read full impact stories: https://www.ourlivingwaters.ca/learning_from_failure_wep

Story Spotlight: Influencing Federal Water Policy

The more established the OLW Network becomes, the better able we are to act as a conduit for the freshwater community to promote water policy to the federal government.

Funding Water Projects

In March 2020, it became clear that OLW had a responsibility to support the freshwater community in preparation for the financial insecurity that would result from the pandemic. We chose to frame this chaotic, difficult moment as an opportunity, coupling economic recovery with water security and climate resilience. Think: 'blue economy'. At OLW, we were able to focus our Network members' attention on the urgent need for investing in water projects, identifying a critical gap in federal funding programs across the country.

In three weeks of canvassing, we compiled a list of over 300 'shovel-worthy' projects, then sent [a letter to PM Trudeau](#) highlighting the benefits of resourcing water projects. This process generated a groundswell of activity in late Spring, encouraging 30 new member organizations to join the OLW Network. Several months later, Network members are still enthusiastic about collectively calling on the federal government to better fund water projects across the country. While the federal advocacy continues, the BC Watershed Security Coalition was able to successfully advocate the British Columbian government to [invest \\$27 million dollars](#) in watershed initiatives and wetland projects across the province using a similar approach.



Canada Water Agency Forum

OLW supported collective advocacy during the public consultation period for the proposed Canada Water Agency (CWA). Mandated to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change Canada, ECCC released a [Discussion Paper](#) on the Agency in December 2020 based on their first phase of engagement and invited cross-country feedback. Freshwater organizations saw this activity as the most significant federal commitment to water in over 30 years (e.g., the Canada Water Act has not been updated since 1970; the Federal Water Policy since 1987). They wanted a strong collective voice in responding to the Discussion Paper to best ensure the CWA would be as effective as possible in protecting water health while also acting as a springboard to achieve other needed water policy and legislation changes.

Our Living Waters, in partnership with the Forum for Leadership on Water, convened 27 freshwater organizations over three months, to draft a collective response to ECCC's Discussion Paper. Informally called the "Canada Water Agency Forum", this group collaborated to create a response entitled "[Five Foundational Pillars for the Canada Water Agency](#)". Once created, the word went out to our collective networks and the document was ultimately endorsed by 51 organizations sending a strong message of unity to the federal government. For further details, see our impact story [here](#).

Looking to the Horizon

As a Network, we consistently work to understand the relational gaps within our membership. Our dream is to have a member base that represents the regional diversity of water coast-to-coast. One that holds space for the collective expertise and multiple worldviews involved in watershed protection.

As a Network, our relationships create space for marginalized voices often excluded from mainstream narratives. Partnerships continue to form as we develop our cross-cultural understandings at OLW.



Accessibility for Bilingual Collaboration

This past year, we had a sharp increase in Quebec freshwater groups join the OLW Network. New Quebec members expressed interest in connecting with francophone groups in other provinces, who may otherwise be isolated from regional water collaborations. Anglophone members expressed excitement about connecting with new regional partners in Quebec. Our Living Waters staff started learning how to offer translated materials and facilitate bilingual collaborations, making OLW services more accessible to francophone Canadians. This language barrier was a noted obstacle for water collaboration in Canada.

On the horizon this year, we have committed to a website overhaul, translating the OLW framework into French. We want all OLW Network members to be able to engage with the shared measurement system and strategic collaborations. In order to make that happen, OLW staff will also continue to improve our ability to facilitate water work with both French and English-speaking Network members.

Accountability to ‘Reconciliation in our Watersheds’

Last year, we committed to finding strategies that would hold ourselves accountable to another consistent OLW Network priority, ‘supporting our Indigenous neighbours and Indigenous water rights’. Then, 2020 marked an unprecedented surge in self-reflection for people identified as ‘white’ as society elevated its expectations for anti-colonial, anti-racist action. As such, our management team—five settlers with colonized, western worldviews—met twice a month throughout the year to think critically about our worldviews, our relationships and responsibilities. This internal commitment statement guides the work we are exploring together:

At OLW, we recognize that collaboration with Indigenous Peoples and perspectives is essential when working to protect waters. We are committed to learning about and practicing how to be in good relations with the land and Indigenous partners. We also strive to understand what it means to work with and across multiple knowledge systems. Wherever we are in this heart-led journey is the right place to take another step. As such, we commit to continued (un-)learning and expect to be humbled by mistakes along the way.

In the coming year, we commit to furthering our relationships and understanding in this conversation by:

- Critically considering the ways OLW’s services create space for (or impede) Indigenous water initiatives;
- Deepening our understanding about the field, its leaders, and what partnership opportunities might be welcomed
- Continuing to meet regularly for internal conversations that push us to be vulnerable in our unlearning, explore interconnectedness and spirituality, identify our responsibilities as treaty people, and update OLW’s theory of change with our shifting worldviews.

Look out for updates throughout the year and in next year’s annual report!

Our Living Waters Network Members

ACAP Saint John • Alberta Wilderness Society • Aqua Forum • Athabasca Watershed Council • Atlantic Water Network • Bighill Creek Preservation Society • Bird Studies Canada • Blue Lion Labs • Canadian Freshwater Alliance • Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society - Southern Alberta Chapter • Canadian Wildlife Federation • Carrot River Valley Watershed Association • Catalyst Internet Inc. • Centre d'écologie urbaine de Montréal • Centre d'interprétation de l'eau de Laval • Centre for Indigenous Resources • City of Coquitlam Watershed Roundtable • Coalition pour une navigation responsable et durable • Conservation Council of New Brunswick • Corporation du bassin de la Jacques-Cartier • David Suzuki Foundation • Delta N-90 Trappers • Dragonfly Ventures • Ecology Action Centre • EcoSuperior • Elbow River Watershed Partnership • Environmental Defence • EOS Eco-Energy • Evergreen Theatre • First Nations Fisheries Council • FLOW Canada • Fraser Basin Council • Freshwater Future • GPI Atlantic • Green Communities Canada • Green Infrastructure Foundation • Green Roofs for Healthy Cities • Groupe d'éducation et d'écosurveillance de l'eau • International Institute for Sustainable Development • Jijuktu'kwejk Watershed Alliance • KAIROS Canada • Kennebecasis Watershed Restoration Committee • Lake Ontario Waterkeeper • Lake Windermere Ambassadors • Lake Winnipeg Foundation • Land Based Learning • Lintner Law • Living Lakes Canada • LUSH Cosmetics • Mainstreams Environmental • MakeWay Charitable Society • Manitoba Eco-Network • Mountain Equipment Co-op • Muskoka Watershed Council • North American Youth Parliament for Water • Northern Confluence • Nova Scotia Nature Trust • Obabika Consultant Society • OVB Capitale • OBV Haute-Côte Nord • OBV du Saguenay • OBV Yamaska • OBV des Rivières Rouges, Petite Nation et Saumon • Okanagan Basin Water Board • Oldman Watershed Council • Olds College • Ottawa Riverkeeper • Petitcodiac Watershed Association • Pigeon Lake Watershed Association • POLIS Project on Ecological Governance • Re-Imagining Atlantic Harbours • Red Deer Watershed Association • Real Estate Foundation of BC • Regroupement des bassins versants du Québec • Sitka Foundation • Slave River Coalition • Souris and Area Branch of the PEI Wildlife Federation • Stewardship Centre for BC • Swim Drink Fish • T. Buck Suzuki Foundation • Teresa Systems Inc. • The Gordon Foundation • Toronto and Region Conservation Authority • U-Links Centre for Community-Based Research • Vancouver Aquarium • Water Rangers • Waterlution • Watershed Watch Salmon Society • Watersheds Canada • WWF-Canada

2020-21 Management Team

Andrew Stegemann, Project Director

Taylor Wilkes, Program Coordinator

Lindsay Telfer, Communications and Member Lead (April 2020-October 2021)

Christine Mettler, Communications and Member Lead (October 2020-March 2021)

Tim Morris, Funding Lead

Elizabeth Hendricks, in-kind support from WWF-Canada

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