



OUR LIVING WATERS

All waters in Canada in good health by 2030



2023-2024 **ANNUAL REPORT**



A project of

MakeWay

A Message from the National Director

Water is life: it is the vitality in our bodies, ecosystems and economies, and we are completely dependent on its abundance and health. However, water's abundance and health are not guaranteed and so we make commitments, locally and globally, toward its stewardship. These commitments demand that we look at water in a new way – not as an extractable resource, but as a relationship in our lives that is ever changing, requiring both investment and renewal.

Increasingly, water is under dire threat from human activities and climate change. Turning the curve on healthy and abundant waters requires deeply focused, collaborative action. We must also challenge ourselves to navigate away from the risk-based framing driven by flood, wildfire and drought events and consider the benefits provided by watersheds that sequester carbon, capture and clean rainwater, sustain our livelihoods, and protect our communities. By reframing our relationship with water, we can move closer to Right Relations with our Indigenous neighbours and realize our obligations to Reconciliation.

Canada is home to 20 percent of the world's freshwater and is the third largest jurisdiction for renewable freshwater from surface and groundwater sources, accounting for seven percent of the renewable supply globally.

Canada has set a number of milestones to guide our actions as we approach 2030. The goals are holistic and call for protecting critical biodiversity through the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, preparing for extreme weather and natural hazards via the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, and making progress on water-related targets outlined in the United Nations Water Agency's Water Action Agenda. At the national level, we've committed to localizing stewardship efforts through Canada's National Adaptation Strategy and contributing to the emerging Canada Water Agency (CWA) and its proposed Freshwater Action Plan. These pledges are all aligned with or nested in Canada's nearly decade-old commitment to the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals.

Canada's success in meeting these commitments is contingent on local action from the very members that make up the Our Living Waters Network. We are a multijurisdictional country with strong regionalism. OLW strives to create the conditions for successful collective action, putting power in multiple hands to generate better solutions.

The past year at OLW was defined by change: we engaged in deep listening and introspection while navigating personnel changes. Our inaugural national director, Andrew Stegemann, stepped down, and I arrived in the late fall to help OLW chart a path forward toward Network growth and renewal. Part of that work will involve the launch of a new Network Weaving Strategy, stakeholder mapping and preparations for an in-person gathering.

The heartbeat of this Network is its members and we're here to help amplify the work you do and help you engage in collective action. We're confident that our common agenda – [all waters in Canada in good health by 2030](#) – will allow us to paddle together on this journey.

~Julie Wright, National Director



The Year At-A-Glance

Our Living Waters' (OLW) 2023-24 year centered on [member engagement](#) in response to several years of Network [growth](#) and [change](#). It's been harder to get to know each other without in-person events like the old Living Waters Rallies, so this year we focused staff efforts on reconnecting. We now have a stronger sense of who makes up the Network, in what ways members already work together, and how we can foster new connections. Engaging with members also provided a focus while navigating two staff departures and onboarding a new National Director – what a year it's been!

This annual report provides an update on OLW membership and priorities as well as highlights from each of the key services OLW staff provide to amplify the Network's impact.

Snapshot of the Network

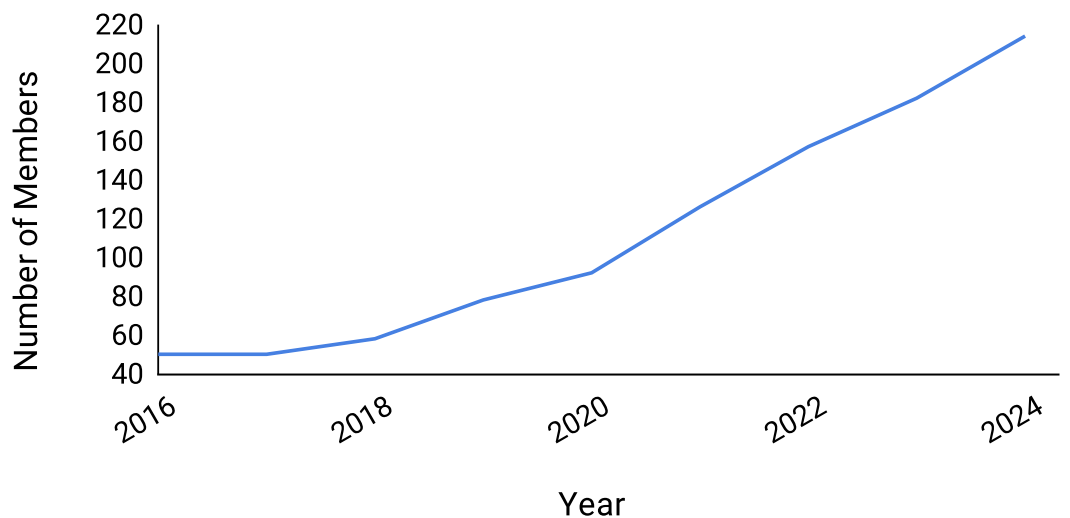
Our Living Waters was born in 2016 after 50 member organizations came together around a common agenda for change. We're very pleased to reflect on our eighth year supporting Network member collaboration and amplifying voices for healthy waters.

Growth in 2023-2024

Our Network continued to expand rapidly this year, and has more than quadrupled in our eight years of operations.

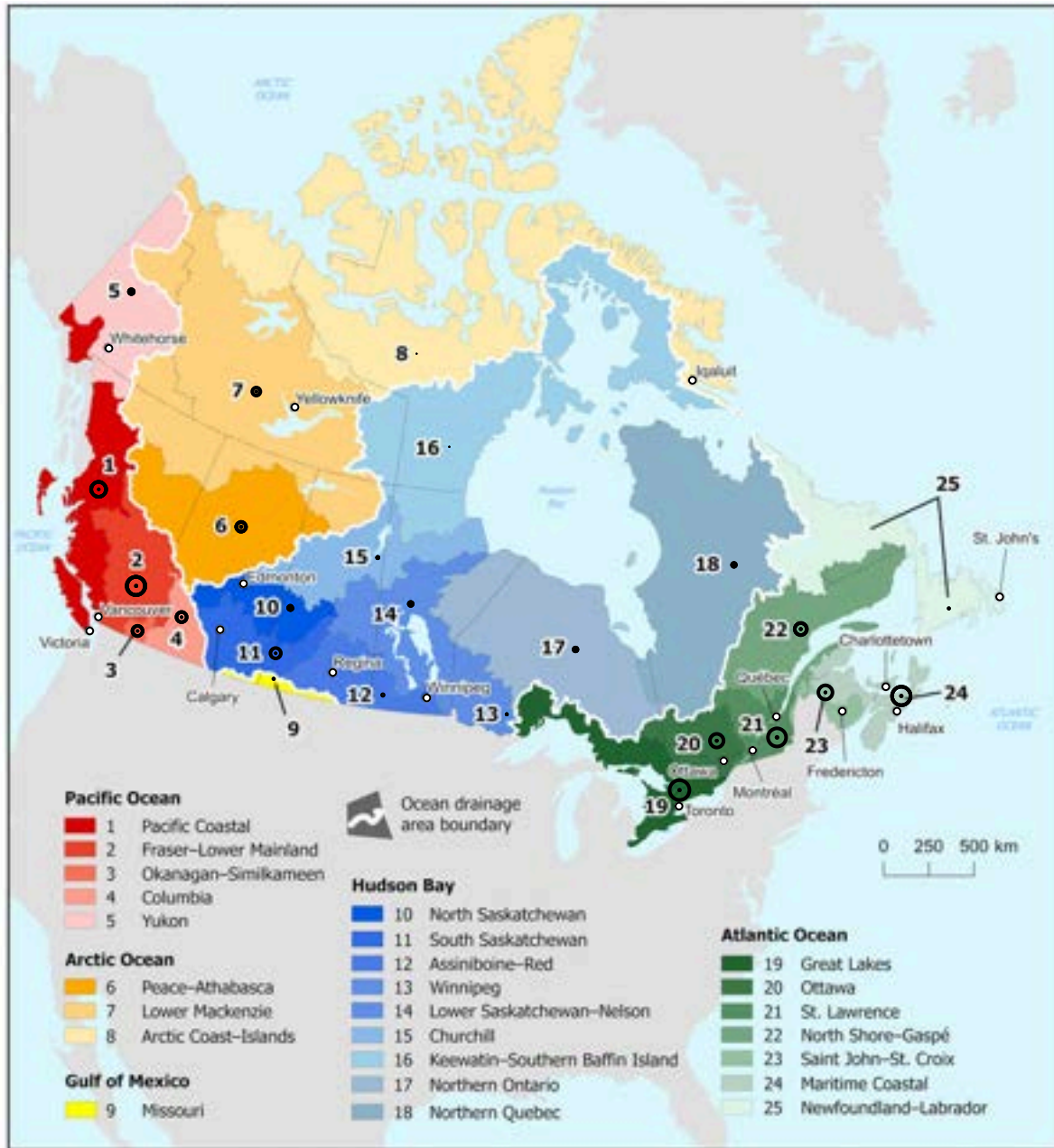
Growth in Membership Over Time

214 community & organizational members, up from 182 last year, representing an increase of nearly 18% in one year



The Waters that Network Members are Protecting

Network members work at different scales to protect the waters. Many organizations are pan-Canadian in scope, working across all 25 major watersheds (29 of 133 groups). On this map, the size of the black circles indicates the relative number of member organizations working in each watershed across the country.



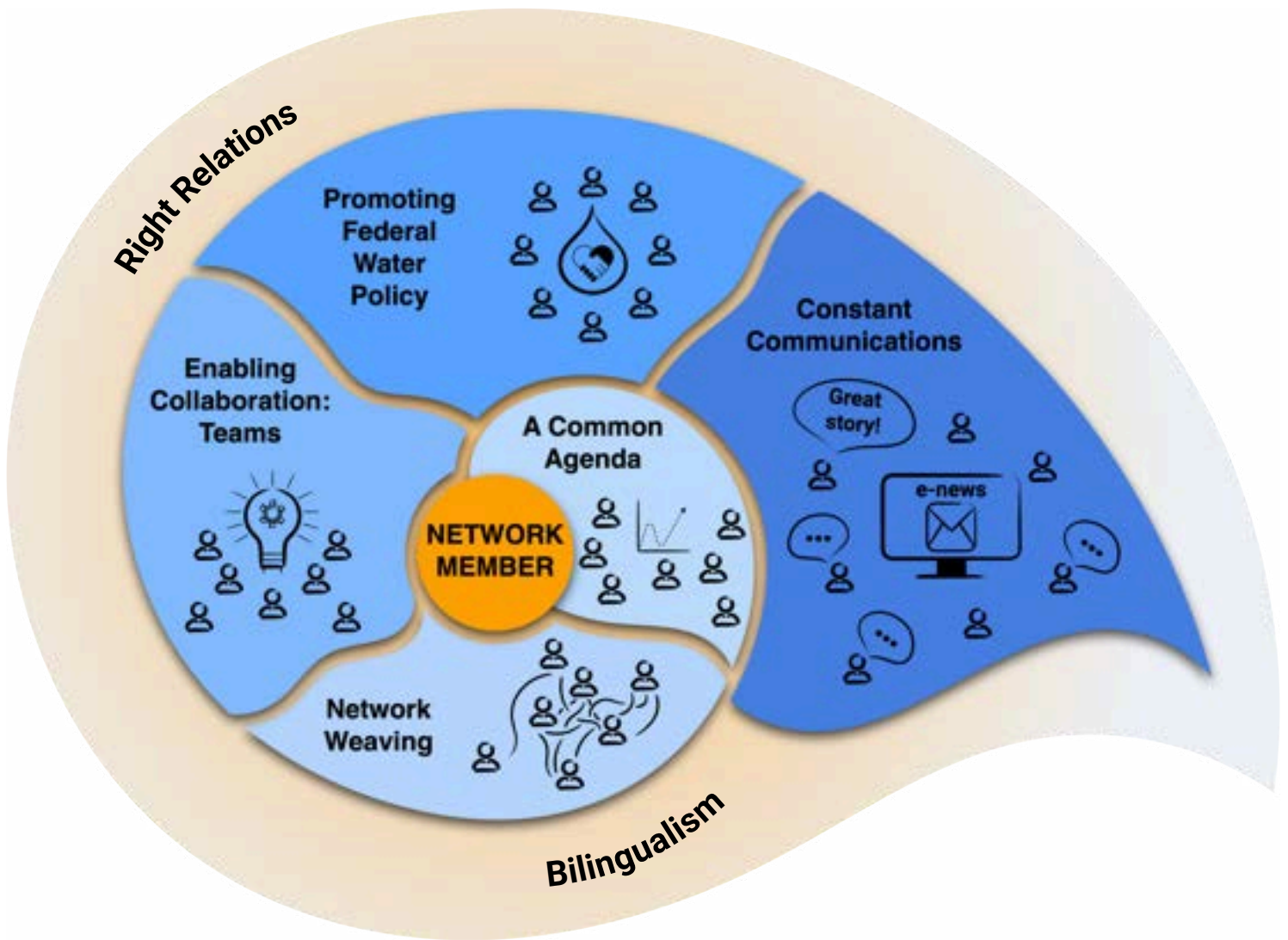
○ Pan-Canadian Organizations

Adapted from Statistics Canada, *Drainage Regions of Canada*, 2009.

This does not constitute an endorsement by Statistics Canada of this product.

OLW's Network Services

OLW provides five integrated key services to Network members, grounded in Right Relations and bilingual trust-building. Each service informs another, centered on Network members' needs, and enables us as a backbone organization to drive custom-designed collaborations.



The remainder of this annual report provides a snapshot of [How We Did](#), [What's New](#), and [What's Next](#) for each Network service.

The OLV Common Agenda

How We Did

19 of 24 impact measures populated with data

1,106 web users* for Shared Measurement System (SMS) pages, with the three most visited impact measures* being:



[human right to water](#),



[drinking water advisories](#), and



[national drinking water standards](#)

56 downloads of the SMS [Primer](#)*

**from June 15 2023 (date of Google Analytics 4 implementation) to March 31 2024*

What's New

24 of 24 impact measures translated into [French](#)

What's Next

Network members [Water Rangers and Aqua Action to adopt Watershed Reports in 2024](#)

[Refreshing and re-energizing our common agenda](#), including a new OLV digital mapping tool



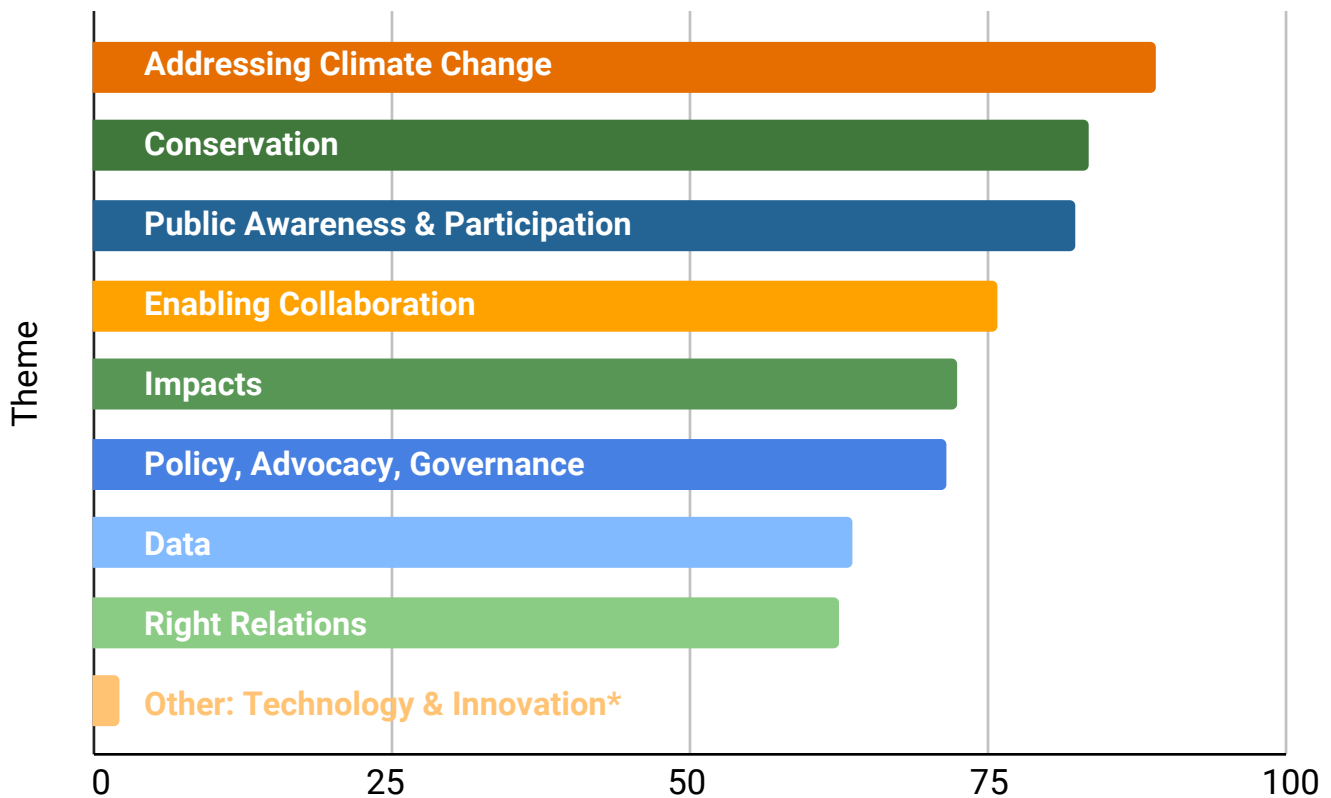
Our ambitious goal of [all waters in Canada in good health by 2030](#) unites the Our Living Waters Network towards a thriving future, while our 24 impact measures track our collective progress towards this ambitious goal. Overall, the [Shared Measurement System](#) (SMS) provides a common agenda to connect and align the Network so that each organization's work is reflected in the whole.

The foundation of our common agenda, the SMS, is built on six water health indicators, adopted from OLV Network member WWF-Canada's original Watershed Reports. In 2024, OLV Network members [Water Rangers and Aqua Action will be taking on the Watershed Reports](#), updating this national scale data for the 25 major watersheds across the country. While the Watershed Reports focus on water health, the SMS impact measures track actions towards improving water health.

[With an update to the Watershed Reports, there will be an opportunity to refresh the 24 impact measures and reenergize our common agenda.](#)

Although updating impact measures was not an OLV priority this year, we have continued to invest in the SMS. Last year, we released our new [Primer](#), and this year, we are happy to report that the [French SMS was published](#). Also, we have gathered baseline data through this year's annual survey for a digital tool that will overlay broad themes from our common agenda onto a Network map of member organizations and their connectivity. Over the next fiscal year and beyond, we will roll out this multilayer tool to allow OLV members to explore collaborative hotspots, themes, and opportunities across the country. Based on preliminary data, organizational themes are presented on the following page in rank order from most to least frequently cited as Network member priorities at the end of the 2023-24 fiscal year.

2024 Annual Survey Results



Percent of Respondents Prioritizing Each Theme

**Technology & Innovation was the only major category in 'Other' added by survey respondents*

Clarifying Examples for Each Theme

- **Addressing Climate Change:** climate crisis=water crisis, drought/fire, flooding, natural infrastructure
- **Conservation:** biodiversity, groundwater, restoration, shorelines, water quality, wetlands
- **Public Awareness & Participation:** community water monitoring, education, media relations, participatory science
- **Enabling Collaboration:** bilingualism, capacity building, improving funding, mobilizing knowledge, relationship building
- **Impacts:** agriculture, boating, dams, development, industry, plastic, salt, stormwater
- **Policy, Advocacy, Governance:** e.g. access to water, drinking water standards, legislation, provincial or federal scope
- **Data:** accessibility, geographical coverage, standards, water in the Sustainable Development Goals
- **Right Relations:** braiding knowledge, co-governance, commitments to UNDRIP/TRC/OCAP, giving water a voice, water rights

Network Weaving

How We Did

Reconnection meetings with **40** member organizations

100 participants at OLW convenings or events

68% of member organizations responding to the annual survey (**90** of 133 organizations, **96** total responses)

What's New

13 regional collaborations identified with **12** virtual meetings attended by OLW staff

A new draft [Stages of the Member Journey](#) model for member engagement

What's Next

Co-creating a [Network Weaving Strategy](#) with Network members

Hiring a [Network Engagement Lead](#)

Reporting on [regional hubs of collaboration](#) and offering ways to connect their leaders

We learned from [last year's survey](#) that about one third of OLW members collaborate frequently with each other, while others are less engaged, so it's important to allocate significantly more resources to network weaving. This year, staff connected one-on-one with around 30% of member organizations and began identifying regional hubs of collaboration that already exist amongst Network members. We experimented with new ways of convening, offering simultaneous translation at an [OLW-hosted webinar](#), hosting a virtual holiday party, and connecting a knowledge expert on Quebec's Blue Fund with steering committee members from the Canadian Coalition for Healthy Waters. We met up informally with diverse members in Victoria, Peterborough, and Toronto, so we have a better sense of the Network's priorities.



Stages of the Member Journey



OLW’s Network Weaving Strategy

We know that different members engage in OLW and use our services in different ways. We strategically communicate and work with members according to the [Stage of the Member Journey](#) they are at, accompanying them to ensure we can all drive impact more efficiently. Our draft Stages of the Member Journey model is a small part of a broader Network Weaving Strategy. We are in the process of hiring a new Network Engagement Lead to spearhead this work, co-creating and leading the strategy with OLW members. We’ll be asking for feedback on different aspects of the Strategy over the next year as we strategize to fill Network gaps and offer new opportunities to convene.

	Member Role	Network Role
Supporters	Contribute to & support national common agenda	OLW amplifies messages across Network & beyond
Partners	Largely external to Network collaborations, stay informed about OLW’s work & may amplify if relevant	OLW stays informed about member’s work, amplifies when relevant & aligns messaging when helpful
Co-Creators	Participate in impactful Network collaborations	OLW builds trust, monitors alignment & capacity, provides container for multiplying member’s impacts & mobilizing knowledge
Water Champions	Lead impactful Network collaborations, create birds-eye view of national waterscape	OLW multiplies member’s impacts & messaging by providing a national container to influence

OLW Teams & Their Evolving Nature

How We Did

2 member-led Teams:

The [Community-Based Water Monitoring \(CBWM\) Collaborative](#): semi-regular meetings with rotating member-led facilitation to strengthen and legitimize CBWM across Canada

- **OLW support for bilingual work**

The [Canadian Coalition for Healthy Waters](#): new co-chairs de Gaspé Beaubien Foundation & the Forum for Leadership on Water continuing federal advocacy for leadership and policy to support freshwater

- **Under new co-chair model, OLW admin, steering committee & sub-committee support**

What's New

1 [bi-regional bilingual webinar](#) with simultaneous translation conceived by the CBWM Collaborative to improve bridge-building between francophones and anglophones

What's Next

A new **Teams Strategy and Terms of Reference** document to guide Teams' sustainability

A **website update** to reflect the status of current and future Teams

Teams are collaborative forums where OLW Network members convene to drive action on a shared water goal

Teams evolve over time. This year, all three OLW Teams took their own directions according to the needs and capacities of each group.

- The Green Infrastructure Community of Practice is no longer associated with OLW, but continues as the highly successful [Living Cities Canada](#) Program of OLW Network member Green Communities Canada.
- The Community-Based Water Monitoring (CBWM) Collaborative experimented with rotational leadership at semi-regular meetings. OLW helped support a bi-regional bilingual webinar conceived by the Collaborative, [CollabEAUration: A Canada-wide Water Dialogue](#), which improved bridge-building between francophone and anglophone Network members and contributed to a national conversation on CBWM and participatory water science.
- The [Canadian Coalition for Healthy Waters](#) became self-governing, with co-chairs from de Gaspé Beaubien Foundation and the Forum for Leadership on Water, who took over from OLW's former National Director. Two sub-committees were struck to ensure the work of coalition-building and government relations continues. OLW still participates in all CCHW activities, working to ensure the Coalition is strong and enabled in its united voice.



Promoting Federal Water Policy

How We Did

The [Canadian Coalition for Healthy Waters](#) (CCHW) continued its federal advocacy work, with:

- 13 organizations on the Steering Committee, 50 members at large
- 4 meetings with MPs and federal officials
- 4 publications (1 [op ed in the Hill Times](#), 1 letter in support of Budget 2023 asks, 1 Submission to the 2024 Pre-Budget Consultations, & 1 [Submission](#) to the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development, or ENVI Committee)

What's New

[CCHW member testimony](#) on the topic of freshwater by 34 witnesses (27 CCHW members, 7 additional OLW members) providing 14 briefs at 11 meetings of the ENVI Committee

2 new CCHW sub-committees: [Government Relations](#) and [Coalition-Building](#)

New [CCHW Indigenous liaison role](#) to deepen relationships with National Indigenous Organizations

What's Next

Collaborative work toward a [2024-25 CCHW advocacy action plan](#)

The Influence of a Mature Network

Our Living Waters embraces our role in advocating for federal leadership and policy to support healthy waters by taking an active role on the [Canadian Coalition for Healthy Waters](#) (CCHW) Steering Committee and sub-committees and by contracting government relations support to advise the Coalition. In 2023, Dominique Monchamp (de Gaspé Beaubien Foundation) and Emily Lorra Hines (Forum for Leadership on Water) took on co-chair responsibilities for the CCHW.

The advocacy of water leaders across the country is having an impact. The federal government announced in 2023 that the [Canada Water Agency](#) will be headquartered in Winnipeg, Manitoba. The [November 2023 Fall Economic Statement Implementation Act](#) introduced legislation to establish the Agency as a standalone entity and [promised](#) \$420 million over 10 years for the Great Lakes, \$22.6 million over three years for pan-Canadian freshwater coordination, and \$85.1 million over five years plus \$21 million thereafter for the Agency. Efforts will focus particularly on monitoring, assessment, and restoration work in significant transboundary basins.

Relationship-Building

The CCHW was well represented by Coalition members from October 2023 to March 2024, during [18 meetings](#) on the topic of freshwater through the House of Commons Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development. In March, the Coalition submitted a [brief](#) highlighting recommendations supported by witness testimony, which was made publicly available in April.

In 2023, the CCHW established an Indigenous liaison role to further allyship and deepen relationships with staff at Indigenous-led organizations such as the Assembly of First Nations, Congress of Aboriginal Peoples and the Métis National Council and to ensure that its advocacy doesn't interfere with or counter efforts to realize Indigenous inherent and Treaty Rights. OLW will continue to support the CCHW in its bridge-building between Rights holders and federal bureaucrats.

Bilingual Communications

How We Did

13 e-news or special topic emails with members featured 120 times

60% open rate for the 13 e-blasts, 57% last year (industry average ~40% for 2023)

16% click rate, on par with last year (industry average ~3% for 2023)

1,984 engagements, 1,411 last year

12 bilingual impact stories, with 789 website users*

**from June 15 2023 (date of Google Analytics 4 implementation) to March 31 2024*

What's New

20% increase in francophone member organizations from 20 to 24, reflecting increased bilingualism, now including [LinkedIn](#) (100 followers after 7 posts)

What's Next

Updated strategy to time OLW communications with significant water community events

Amplifying the influence and impact of the water community in Canada

OLW provides e-news and impact stories that help weave our Network together. They inform members about each other's work and provide a sense of belonging to a well knit water community. With our move to bilingualism over the past three years, we have seen how understanding and trust lead to unified efforts to protect water. Moving forward, we'll continue with our bilingual e-news and impact story writing, with a new focus on leveraging LinkedIn and integrating our communications with significant events in the water community to amplify the Network's thought leadership.

Highlights from 2023-24 Impact Stories

Amplifying Collaboration

A [dialogue](#) between Quebec & Atlantic Canada

A [network model](#) from Quebec

[Support](#) for watershed organizations in Atlantic Canada

Uplifting Indigenous and Youth Voices for Water

An off-reserve Indigenous [perspective](#)

[Theatre](#) connecting youth with water

Celebrating Leave-Takings and New Beginnings

A National Director's [departure](#)

A National Director's [welcoming](#)

An [au revoir](#) to our Network facilitator



Right Relations

How We Did

100% of e-news centered Right Relations, creating space to amplify Indigenous voices and reflections on relationships with water and each other

583 web users on our Right Relations page*

**from June 15 2023 (date of Google Analytics 4 implementation) to March 31 2024*

What's New

2 hiring processes that centered our commitment to Right Relations

1 [impact story](#) authored by a water expert at a National Indigenous Organization

What's Next

Publishing a [Right Relations strategy](#) for bridge-building & tracking our accountability

We are relational people at Our Living Waters. Working on behalf of the waters, with all the relationships that entails, is a core value for each member of our team.

Last year, we published our [Right Relations](#) webpage as a response to our own journey. Making space for individual introspection helps us make personal commitments to Right Relations and seeds organizational change. Publishing our story challenged us to be transparent about our [individual](#) place-based narratives and relationships and we followed that by centering OLW's relationship with water in a [water declaration](#). Being upfront about these values has allowed us to engage with the public in a different way. We will continue to centre Right Relations in our hiring processes, Steering Committee recruitment, and Network engagement.

In the 2024 to 2025 fiscal year, we will create an internal Right Relations strategy document detailing steps towards bridge-building and accountability framed by the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) (see the Real Estate Foundation of B.C.'s [Transformative Actions report](#) as an example) and the [94 Calls to Action](#) of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

We will continue to weave Right Relations into all that we do.

Our Living Waters Network Member Organizations

AbbaTek • ACAP Saint John • Adopt A Lake • Alberta WaterPortal Society • Alberta Wilderness Association • Alliance of Canadian Land Trusts • AquaAction • Arrimage.Com Inc. • Athabasca Watershed Council • Atlantic Water Network • Battle River Watershed Alliance • BC Water Legacy • Bighill Creek Preservation Society • Birds Canada • Blood Tribe • Blue Lion Labs • British Columbia Conservation Foundation • Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society - Southern Alberta Chapter • Canadian Wildlife Federation • Carrot River Valley Watershed Association • CentrEau • Centre d'interprétation de l'eau • Centre for Indigenous Environmental Resources • City of Calgary • City of Charlottetown • Coalition for Responsible and Sustainable Navigation • Comité ZIP Jacques-Cartier • completewaters • Conservation Council of New Brunswick • Coquitlam River Watershed Roundtable • Corporation du bassin de la Jacques-Cartier • COVABAR (Organisme de bassin versant Richelieu et zone Saint-Laurent) • DataStream Initiative • Delta N-90 Trappers • de Gaspé Beaubien Foundation • Dragonfly Ventures • Ducks Unlimited Canada • Ecology Action Centre • Ecorana Environmental Ltd. • EcoSuperior • Elbow River Watershed Partnership • Environmental Defence • Environment Funders Canada • EOS Eco Energy • Evergreen Theatre • False Creek Friends Society • First Nations Fisheries Council of BC • Fondation Rivières • Foresight • Forum for Leadership on Water (FLOW) • Fraser Basin Council • Freshwater Future • Friends of Second Marsh • G3E - Groupe d'éducation et d'écovigilance de l'eau • Gault Nature Reserve • GPI Atlantic • Green Communities Canada • Green Roofs For Healthy Cities • International Institute for Sustainable Development • Junction Creek Stewardship Committee • KAIROS Canada • Kennebecasis Watershed Restoration Committee • Lake Ontario Waterkeeper • Lake Windermere Ambassadors • Lake Winnipeg Foundation • Land Based Learning • Lesser Slave Watershed Council • Living Lakes Canada • Lower Qu'Appelle Watershed Stewards • Lush Cosmetics • MakeWay • Manitoba Eco-Network • Muskoka Watershed Council • Nashwaak Watershed Association • Niagara Coastal Community Collaborative • Northern Confluence • Nova Scotia Nature Trust • Okanagan Basin Water Board • Oldman Watershed Council • Olds College • One Cowichan • Ontario Headwaters Institute • Organismes de bassins versants de Kamouraska, L'Islet et Rivière-du-Loup • Organisme de bassins versants de la zone du Chêne • Organisme de bassins versants des rivières Rouge, Petite Nation et Saumon • Organisme de bassin versant de la Yamaska • Organisme de bassin versant du Saguenay • Organisme de bassin versant Matapédia-Restigouche • Organisme des bassins versants de la Capitale • Organisme des bassins versants de la Haute-Côte Nord • Organisme des bassins versants du Nord-Est du Bas Saint-Laurent • Ottawa Riverkeeper • Petitcodiac Watershed Alliance • Pigeon Lake Watershed Association • POLIS Water Sustainability Project • Real Estate Foundation of BC • Red Deer River Watershed Alliance • Re-imagining Atlantic Harbours • Rescue Lake Simcoe Coalition • Resilient Waters • Restigouche River Watershed Management Council • Riparia • Rivershed Society of BC • Rivers Without Borders Canada • ROBVQ - Regroupement des organismes de bassins versants du Québec • Save the River / Upper St. Lawrence Riverkeeper • Shuswap Lake Estates • Sitka Foundation • Souris and Area Branch of the PEI Wildlife Federation • South East Alberta Watershed Alliance • Stewardship Centre for BC • Sunshine Coast Streamkeepers Society • Swim Drink Fish • Synapse Strategies Inc. • T Buck Suzuki Foundation • Tesera Systems Inc. • The Council of Canadians • The District Municipality of Muskoka • The WaterWealth Project • Toronto Green Community • Toronto Region Conservation Authority • U-Links Centre for Community Based Research • Urban Ecology Centre • Waterlution • Water Rangers • Watersheds Canada • Watershed Watch Salmon Society • Water Watchers • Wildsight • WWF-Canada • plus 3 members not publicly listed

2023-24 Staff Team

Julie Wright, National Director starting October 2023

Andrew Stegemann, National Director until October 2023

Rebekah Kipp, Network Communications Lead

Taylor Wilkes, Network Facilitation Lead until December 2023



2023-24 Steering Committee

Chair - Lindsay Telfer: Manager, Capacity Development, Green Municipal Fund, Federation of Canadian Municipalities

Sébastien Cottinet: Engagement & Public Policy Coordinator, Regroupement des organismes de bassins versants du Québec (Quebec Network for Watershed Organizations)

Elizabeth Hendriks: Vice-President, Restoration and Regeneration, World Wildlife Fund Canada

Ross Jameson: Grants Manager, The Sitka Foundation

Tim Morris: Project Director, BC Water Legacy

With thanks to our funders

