

The Moon River is flooding. Again. At the beginning of summer, when its not suppose to. Why? Let's review a Primer on the Muskoka Watershed. Some of this will be familiar to many readers. Others many find new information herein or be reminded of information they may have forgotten.

The Muskoka Watershed - actually referred to as the Muskoka 'River 'Watershed is a huge area that encompasses the three big lakes, many smaller lakes and the Moon River. The head water is in Algonquin Park. One half of the the water flowing through and out of Algonquin Park flows east, down the Ottawa River. The other half flows west, 230km, through the Muskoka River into the three big lakes, over the Bala Falls and down the Moon River. Every drop of water that is not absorbed in wetlands or evaporated or consumed goes past our doors on its way to Georgian Bay. There are over 680 lakes. Twenty years ago that water took 10 days to reach us here on the Moon River. Today, in 2024, it takes just five days. Filling in of wetlands, development, cutting down trees and removing brush means more water gets to us quicker because water is not able to be absorbed into the ground as easily. And when we get heavy rainfall, eventually all that rain flows to us.

There are a series of 42 dams and power generation structures throughout the Muskoka Watershed. NONE are designed for flood control. They were built originally as a way to control the water to move logs and then starting in the 1940s as the Hackner-Holden Agreement as a way to maximize Hydro Power generation. It was amended in 2006 to become the Muskoka River Watershed Management Plan. And That's still the way it is.

Of these 42 structures, 29 are controlled by MNRF (Ministry of Natural Resources & Forestry). The rest are owned and controlled by Ontario Power Generation, Bracebridge Power, Orillia Power, Algonquin Power, Township of Muskoka Lakes (the Burgess Dam on River Street) and Swift River at the Bala North Falls Generating station. These owners have each signed on to the Muskoka River Watershed Management Plan (MRWMP of 2006 and revised in 2019). They are required to and should adhere to the guideline of the Plan AND to the Dam Operator's Manual (1997) which defines the min and max height of the water along the Watershed. And, when and how to manually remove or add the stop logs. It is all manually operated. And there are delays in getting things properly controlled. It's not like just turning off a tap.

The *Muskoka River Water Management Plan* includes:

- Operational plans for each waterpower facility or water control structure (dam).
- Legally enforceable provisions for the management of flows and water levels. Compliance monitoring to ensure that waterpower industry facilities are meeting the requirements of the plan.
- Effectiveness monitoring program to determine whether the implementation of the plan results in the anticipated ecological and social improvements.

The Ministry of Natural Resources & Forestry administers the MRWMP.

Water flow measurement devices confirm the following: Water flows at Bracebridge to Lake Muskoka at the peak rate of 500cm/s (cubic meters per second). Water flows over the Bala South Dam at the rate of 400cm/s. And water flows out at the Moon River Dam at 283 cm/s and at The Chutes choke point at just 80 cm/s. It doesn't take much to see why we flood here on the Moon River.

The Moon River for our area is really a big bathtub. Water cannot drain quickly enough. It will take only a day or two for an increase of 16-20 inches but then will take 8-10 days or more to drain out and return to previous levels. It is therefore critical that the two outlets from the Moon river (Raged Rapids Hydro Plant and the Moon River Dam) are managed proactively and in sync. Frustratingly, often they are not.

After the Big One - the flood of 2019, the provincial government struck several committees and study groups to review what happened, make recommendations and suggestions for action. Studies have been plentiful. The Doug McNeil report of 2020 - an independent review of the 2019 Flood Events in Ontario is a 156 page report with 66 recommendations. The May 2020 Muskoka Watershed Advisory Group report (chaired by Marti Witzel, well respected and long time Muskoka resident) to the Minister of the Environment had 15 recommendations. Most of the recommendations that were enacted resulted in more study. We are all waiting on some concrete actions. You can google each of those reports and more information on the Muskoka Watershed can be found here: www.muskokawaterweb.ca. You are encouraged to review the website. Lots and lots of great information.

The Board of MRPOA along with the Township of Muskoka Lakes Mayor and councillors, The District of Muskoka Lakes, various community associations including the MLA continue to advocate for better management of the Muskoka Watershed. Know that MRPOA, the Township and the District have little or no power nor input into resolving flooding, nor to make things happen quicker.

What we can do is be vigilant in watching our property and those of our neighbours, avoid removing trees and brush from your property and hope that soon, some resolution and action will be taken to help support us.

We can also contact the appropriate authorities to voice concerns. The authority is MNRF. The Township Mayor, Peter Kelley, The Ward councillor, Glenn Zavitz, The District Councillor, Ruth Nishikawa, The District Chair, Jeff Lehman are all willing to listen but its MNRF that holds the keys.

You can call or write to:

Adam Wakefield District Manager MNRF Parry Sound Office

705 746 4201. adam.wakefield@ontario.ca

Graydon Smith MPP Muskoka Parry Sound and Minister of MNRF

1 888 267 4826. graydon.smith@pc.ola.org