GBA UPDATE
News and Information from the Georgian Bay Association

GEORGIAN BAY ASSOCIATION
Your Voice on the Bay

Summer 2025 • Vol. 35 No. 2

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Ecotourism: A Pathway to Sustainable Travel and Conservation

By Mike Robbins, Past Chairman of the Center for Responsible Travel (CREST)



& Allison Needham, *UPDATE* Editor



Over the past few decades, tourism has grown exponentially, becoming one of the largest industries in the world. This growth has brought significant economic benefits and sparked concerns about its environmental, social, and cultural impacts. Traditional mass tourism can contribute to environmental degradation, the depletion of natural resources, and the erosion of cultural heritage.

In many places worldwide, tourism destroys the very attractions that draw visitors. In a destination like Georgian Bay, with provincial, national, and international designations like the two Biospheres, one aspiring Geopark, two national parks, and one national marine park reserve, and an area that will be subject to increasing development pressures from the rapidly expanding Greater Toronto area (GTA), it is critical to ensure the tourism industry adopts more sustainable approaches and practices to divert away from destructive, irresponsible mass tourism common in many destinations.

Against this backdrop, ecotourism has emerged as an alternative to mass tourism. While ecotourism has the potential to support conservation, benefit local communities, and encourage low-impact travel, it may overlook challenges such as poor management, greenwashing, and the economic realities of various regions. We should consider ecotourism as one of many sustainable options, the success of which hinges on careful planning and implementation to genuinely make an impact.

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What Is Ecotourism?

The Global Ecotourism Network (GEN) defines ecotourism as ***responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment, sustains the well-being of local people, and promotes awareness and understanding among travellers***. Authentic ecotourism adheres to principles that balance environmental conservation, economic sustainability, and cultural respect.

What's the Difference?

While these terms are often used interchangeably, it's important to recognize that "ecotourism," "sustainable tourism," and "responsible travel" each have distinct meanings. Understanding these differences is essential for appreciating their unique contributions to the travel industry.

- According to the Global Sustainable Tourism Council (GSTC), sustainable tourism is an aspiration for all forms of tourism, aiming to minimize adverse economic, social, and environmental impacts. The GSTC, initiated by the United Nations (UN) as a sustainable tourism criteria coalition, establishes and manages global standards for sustainable travel and tourism and accredits certification bodies.
- According to the Center for Responsible Travel (CREST), responsible travel is a means of mitigating the negative impacts of tourism on the environment, local communities, and wildlife. It also addresses climate change, overtourism, and the loss of cultural heritage. CREST is a US-based non-profit working to provide solutions, resources, and support to governments, policymakers, tourism businesses, and nonprofit organizations to confront tourism's most pressing issues.

Key Principles of Ecotourism

It is one thing to use terminology like ecotourism, but another to execute the ecotourism promise – to "walk the walk."

To achieve its goals, ecotourism is guided by specific principles as outlined by GEN:

- Produce direct financial benefits for conservation.
- Generate financial benefits for both local people and private industry.
- Deliver memorable interpretative experiences to visitors that help raise sensitivity to host destinations' political, environmental, and social climate.
- Provide positive experiences for both visitors and hosts.
- Design, construct and operate low-impact facilities.
- Minimize physical, social, behavioural and psychological impacts on fauna and flora.
- Recognize the rights and spiritual beliefs of Indigenous and local peoples and work in partnership to create empowerment.

To maintain these principles, ecotourism operates on a small scale, particularly in sensitive natural areas, ensuring minimal environmental and cultural impacts. It is critical to put these principles into action through the tools outlined below.



The Evolution of Ecotourism

Ecotourism has evolved from being a niche segment of tourism to becoming a widely recognized approach to sustainable travel. Its growth can be traced back to efforts to address the negative impacts of mass tourism on the environment and local cultures. Milestones in its evolution include the establishment of principles, guidelines, and certification systems to ensure its integrity, as the following examples illustrate.

1. Certification of operators who meet standards to partner with and use a particular brand (such as in an internationally designated area).
2. Ecotourism charter for a destination.
3. Regulations to limit irresponsible practices.
4. Tools to assist in defining carrying capacities for destinations and attractions.
5. Tourism management guides, manuals and ongoing research.

The Threat of Greenwashing

Greenwashing—when companies or destinations market themselves as sustainable without meaningful action—is one of the most serious threats to ecotourism. It misleads travellers and dilutes the efforts of those genuinely committed to conservation.

Combating this requires greater transparency, robust certifications, and informed choices by travellers. Initiatives like the GSTC and Travalyst promote global standards that can help separate real impact from marketing hype.

Tools are now being developed for Georgian Bay through the emerging Georgian Bay Geopark initiative to support this. These tools will help separate authentic conservation tourism from green branding with no substance. A regional ecotourism toolkit is underway and will include:

- Tourism operator certification
- Codes of conduct for visitors
- Guidelines for municipalities
- Best practices to identify and avoid greenwashing



The Benefits of Ecotourism

Real-world evidence backs this up. In the Great Bear Rainforest, research by the Center for Responsible Travel (CREST) found that bear viewing generated more sustainable and higher long-term economic returns than trophy hunting, while supporting conservation, stewardship jobs, and Indigenous-led enterprises.

Similarly, in *Costa Rica*, ecotourism has been directly linked to the protection of over 85 per cent of the country's old-growth forests through legal land-use protections, conservation financing, and national park zoning.

These examples demonstrate that ecotourism can serve as the backbone of a "conservation economy"—a model in which tourism revenue is reinvested in environmental stewardship and local community development.

When implemented authentically, ecotourism can offer numerous benefits for the environment, local communities, and travellers:

1. **Environmental Conservation**
   Ecotourism promotes the protection of natural habitats and wildlife. Generating financial resources for conservation efforts can help maintain biodiversity and protect endangered species. For example, proceeds from ecolodges or guided tours can fund habitat restoration or anti-poaching initiatives.
2. **Community Empowerment**
   Ecotourism can offer economic benefits to local communities, enabling them to derive direct benefits from tourism. This reduces reliance on environmentally harmful activities, such as mass tourism and resource extraction, and fosters a sense of pride in cultural and natural heritage.
3. **Education and Awareness**
   Ecotourism experiences often include environmental education and can raise travellers' awareness of the importance of conservation. Visitors gain insights into local ecosystems and the challenges they face, which can inspire them to adopt more sustainable practices in their own lives.
4. **Cultural Preservation**
   Ecotourism can help preserve local traditions, arts, and customs by promoting authentic cultural experiences that foster a deeper understanding of these traditions. Travellers are encouraged to engage respectfully with Indigenous cultures, fostering mutual understanding and appreciation.

Prominent Ecotourism Destinations

Several destinations worldwide have successfully embraced ecotourism, serving as models for the most sustainable approach to travel:

The Great Bear Rainforest, BC

A large-scale conservation initiative of global significance, where the 26 First Nations have successfully protected 85 per cent of the old growth, while at the same time developing a thriving conservation economy with cultural ecotourism as one of its pillars.

According to CREST, bear-viewing tourism alone outperformed bear hunting in revenue, and the region now hosts over **23 Indigenous-owned tourism businesses**, making it a living model of how nature— and culture-based tourism can sustain communities and ecosystems.

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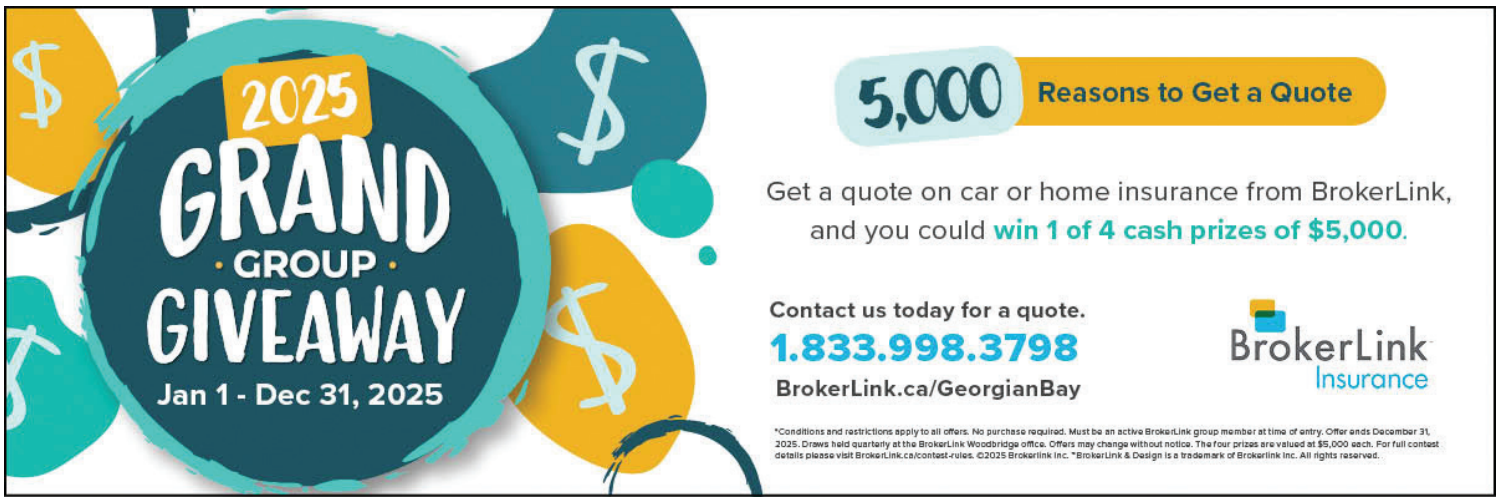

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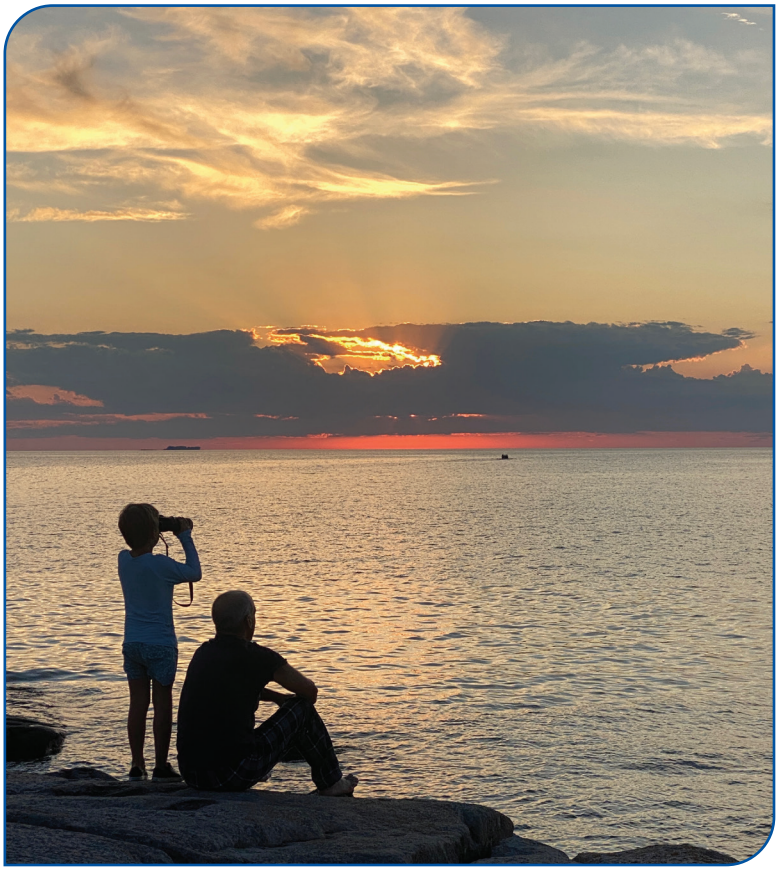

Costa Rica

Renowned for its biodiversity, Costa Rica has established itself as a leader in ecotourism. The country's national parks, ecolodges, conservation initiatives, and ecotourism certification program attract nature enthusiasts while preserving its rich ecosystems.

Australia

The Australian Eco Certification program was a world first, developed in 1981, to address the need for identifying genuine nature and ecotourism operators. It's designed for tours, accommodations, and attractions that prioritize nature in their visitor experiences.

On Georgian Bay, the aspiring Geopark is emerging as a central vehicle to guide tourism toward sustainability. The Geopark aims to:

- Provide **ecotourism certification** and education tools.
- Build **municipal guidelines** for responsible development.
- Partner with **First Nations to support Indigenous tourism**.
- Lay groundwork for **Guardian programs**—stewardship roles that blend traditional knowledge with scientific monitoring.

Funding to support this work is already being accessed through FedDev and FedNor, with additional grants under exploration to support infrastructure like low-impact trails, interpretive signage, and boating initiatives.

The Future of Ecotourism

As awareness of environmental and cultural issues grows, ecotourism is likely to play a significant role in shaping the future of travel in Georgian Bay. By adhering to authentic principles and combating challenges like greenwashing, ecotourism can continue to inspire travellers while supporting conservation and community development. Ultimately, the success of ecotourism depends on collaboration among governments, businesses, civil society, communities, and travellers to prioritize the planet's well-being over short-term gains.

*This work is spearheaded by **Natalie Knowles**, a conservation scientist and policy expert leading the Georgian Bay ecotourism toolkit project. Her experience integrates research, Indigenous knowledge, and community-based environmental justice to ensure this initiative meets global best practices while staying locally grounded. Natalie holds a PhD in Geography and Environmental Management from the University of Waterloo and a Master of Science in Biodiversity, Conservation and Management from the University of Oxford.*




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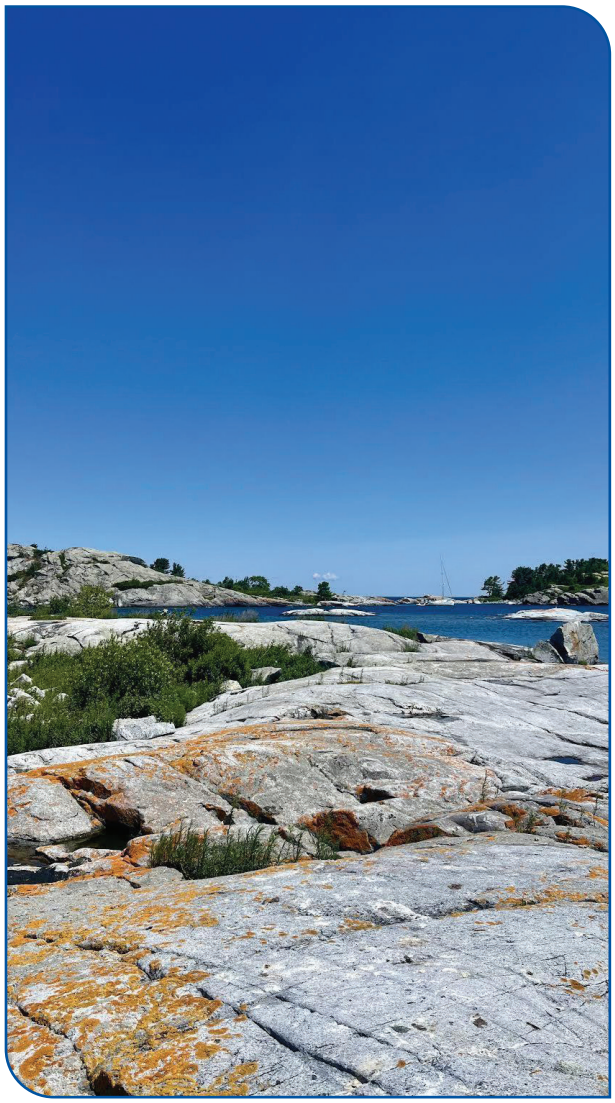
Vision 2050 Project Builds Momentum

By Kate Bentley-Taylor, Vision 2050 Project Coordinator & John Carson







GBA's Vision 2050 initiative is gaining significant momentum. We aim to establish a long-term vision for the region and develop a policy framework to protect and conserve the Bay's eastern and northern coasts in perpetuity.

Mission and Objectives

Vision 2050 was created to conserve and protect Georgian Bay's eastern and northern coastlines' unique natural environment, ecosystems, and biodiversity.

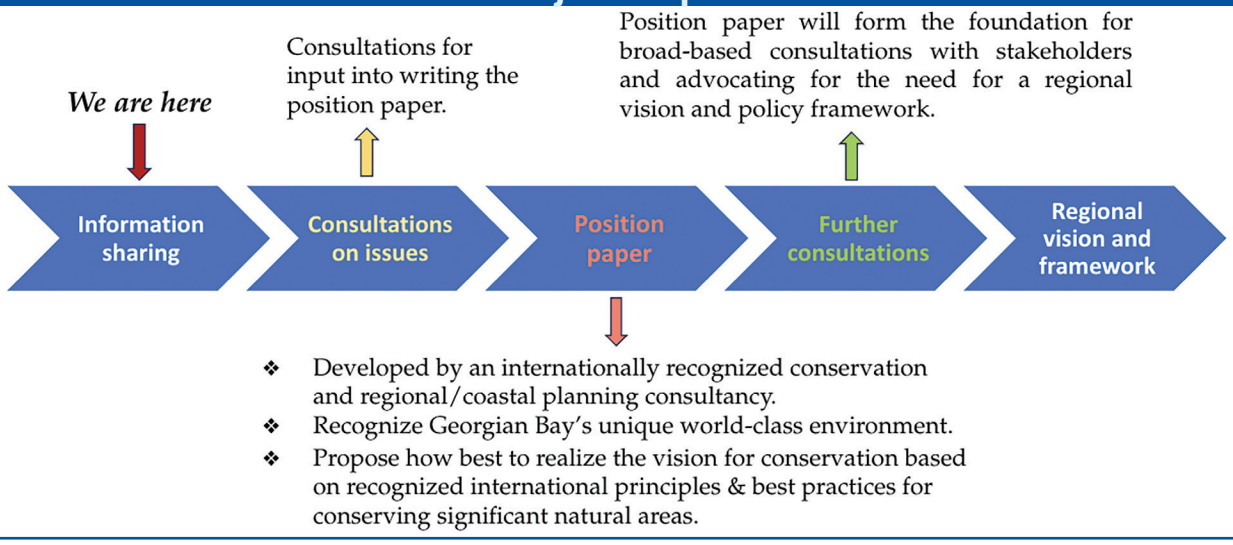
Unfortunately, Georgian Bay currently lacks a regional planning and conservation strategy.

Population growth and development pressures are exploding, and a fragmented patchwork of justification and policies leaves this extraordinary natural area increasingly vulnerable. Vision 2050's goal is to become a catalyst for meaningful, long-lasting protection in the region based on widespread stakeholder engagement, expert input, public awareness, and political engagement. Georgian Bay deserves protection not just today but for future generations.

To achieve this, we've outlined six core objectives:

1. Build a coalition of stakeholders to support this initiative.
2. Retain a reputable planning and environmental team to write a Position Paper to identify best practices for regional coastal protection and potential approaches to developing a regional vision for the Bay.
3. Share our findings and proposals with governments, regional municipalities, First Nations, NGOs, the public and local businesses.
4. Expand the conservation of natural and environmentally valuable areas and improve the protection of these areas.
5. Preserve the region's natural and cultural heritage.
6. Support sustainable and vibrant communities in the region.

Project steps



Why This Work Matters

Georgian Bay is not just a beautiful landscape, it is a UNESCO World Biosphere Region, home to endangered species, sensitive ecosystems, Indigenous communities and one of the world's largest freshwater archipelagos. Yet, it lacks a regional policy framework to protect it from mounting development, pollution, and climate change pressures.

With the GTA expected to grow 50 per cent by 2050, the need for a sustainable, conservation-based regional vision has never been greater. Ontario has existing frameworks for regional conservation, like the Greenbelt and Niagara Escarpment plans. Those models may not be the right approach for Georgian Bay, but it deserves similar engagement and protection.

Outreach to Key Stakeholders Continues

Vision 2050 has carried out extensive outreach to key organizations and stakeholders, including the Georgian Bay Biosphere (GBB), Georgian Bay Forever (GBF), and Georgian Bay Land Trust (GBLT), the aspiring Georgian Bay Geopark, and the Severn Sound Environmental Association (SSEA). Collaborating with these partners and others is essential to building consensus on a sound framework.

GBA Makes Successful Delegations to Coastal Municipalities

To ensure Vision 2050 reflects the needs and values of Georgian Bay communities, we have been engaging municipal stakeholders across the region. These relationships are critical to building support for policy change and advocacy at all levels of government.

In late 2024, we presented to the Township of Georgian Bay (TGB) Council and successfully secured a $10,000 grant for the project. We are sincerely grateful for the Township's continued support.

Over the winter and into the spring, we presented to the Township of The Archipelago (ToA), the Municipality of Northeastern Manitoulin and the Islands, Carling Township, and the Municipality of Killarney. These municipal engagements reflect the widespread recognition that Georgian Bay's future requires thoughtful, unified action. To ensure this happens, we have asked each municipality to have a councillor join our Vision 2050 Advisory Council.

Partnering With Indigenous Communities

Vision 2050 recognizes that meaningful conservation in the region must include Indigenous partnerships, knowledge, and consultation. As a part of our outreach, we engage with the many Indigenous communities. Indigenous perspectives are essential to understanding the region's land, water, and biodiversity. Our policy framework encourages two-eyed seeing by incorporating traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) and scientific and planning expertise. By engaging with First Nations, we hope to collaborate on developing an effective plan for enhanced conservation and stewardship of the region while contributing to the vitality of their communities.

Influential Advisory Council for Leading Stakeholders Launched

We have formed an Advisory Council of leading Georgian Bay experts and special knowledge stakeholders to guide our work. This group brings extensive experience in environmental and conservation protection, land use, municipal governance, and legal frameworks. The Council will ensure the initiative is grounded in consultation, credibility, and collaboration. Members to date include:

- Councillor Peter Cooper, TGB
- Neil Davis, municipal planning and land development lawyer, Former GBLT President
- Councillor Peter Frost, ToA
- Bill Lougheed, Former Executive Director, GBLT
- Greg Mason, Director of Operations, GBB
- David Sweetnam, Executive Director, GBF

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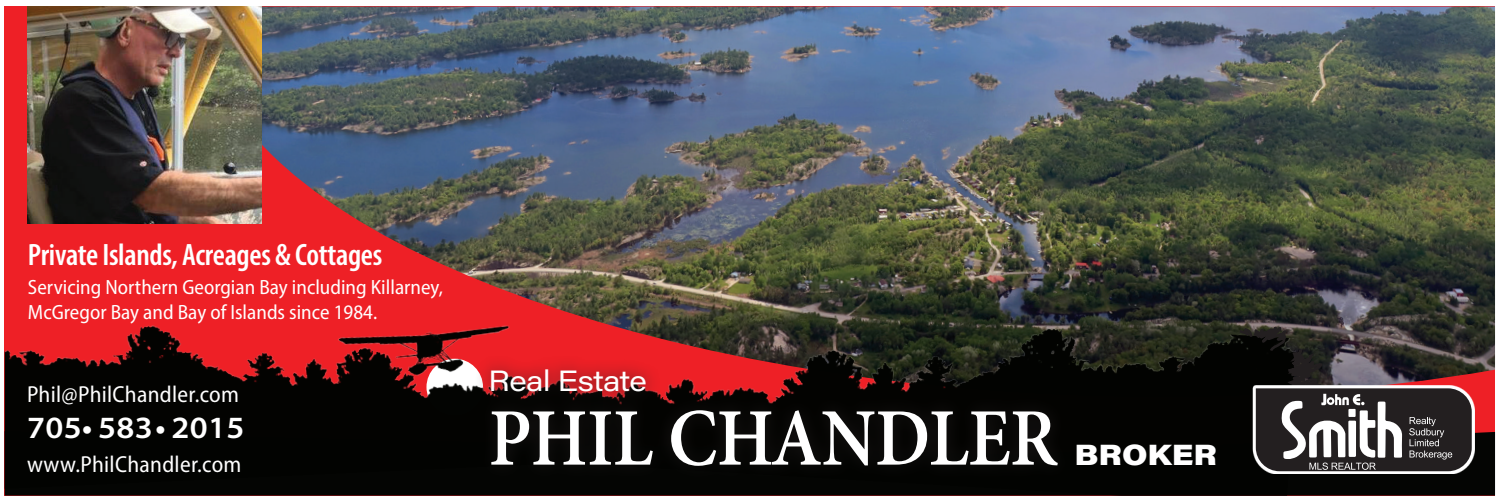

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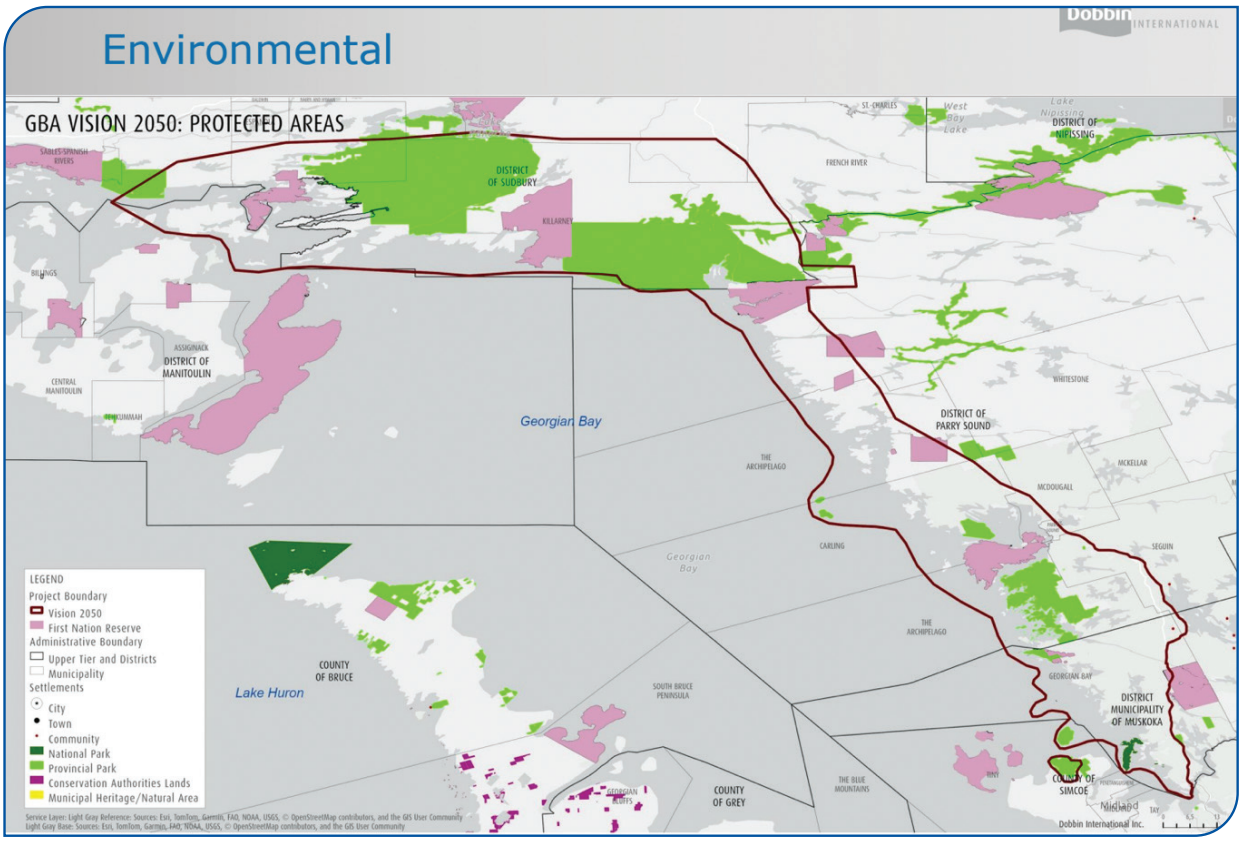
Expert Mapping

To better understand the scope and context of the project area, we commissioned Dobbin International, a global leader in strategic spatial development planning, to create a comprehensive series of maps. These 28 maps provide an in-depth look at infrastructure and transportation, environmental areas and land use, hydrology, geology, and socioeconomic and cultural features of the region. This mapping will serve as input for the Position Paper and other project materials. It also helps us visualize how environmental, political, and social features intersect across the Bay's coastline.



Creating the Position Paper

The primary deliverable of Phase One of this initiative is a Position Paper that expert consultants will develop. This paper will:

- Analyze the threats posed by expanding development.
- Propose a vision for long-term environmental conservation.
- Recommend a regional policy framework for coastal protection.
- Serve as the starting point for consultations and engagement.

We are not proposing a new regional planning authority. The goal is to create a larger a regional framework that will guide stakeholders, municipalities, and governments in making better decisions for the Bay.

Fundraising Progress

We have raised over 80 per cent of the necessary funds to commission the consultants who will write the Position Paper. Fundraising continues, with outreach focused on select donors and GBA member associations.

Next Steps

Our next steps include continuing municipal delegations and outreach with our stakeholders, engaging with First Nations, and meeting with our Advisory Council experts.

How Can You Help?

- Share this update with friends and neighbours
- Raise awareness in your member association
- Volunteer your time and expertise
- Contribute or connect us with potential contributors in the $5,000 range

Together, we can create a lasting legacy of protection and stewardship for Georgian Bay.

New Report Explores Conservation Models for Georgian Bay

As part of the Vision 2050 initiative, GBA is preparing a new report—authored by Kate Bentley-Taylor and the Vision 2050 team—analyzing 16 conservation models from across Canada and beyond. These include government-led, Indigenous-led, and privately governed approaches, each evaluated for their relevance to Georgian Bay's unique ecological and cultural context.

While the report is still under review, it's already proving to be an exciting and valuable resource. It lays the groundwork for more integrated coordinated conservation strategies, drawing lessons from the Niagara Escarpment, Ontario's Greenbelt, the Stockholm Archipelago, and other large-scale protected areas.

Watch for its release on our website later this summer.

Join a GBA Committee – Help Shape Our Impact!

By Allison Needham,
UPDATE Editor



Are you passionate about protecting Georgian Bay and strengthening our community? We're seeking engaged and enthusiastic volunteers to join two vital committees: **Communications** and **Membership**.

Communications Committee

We're looking for passionate storytellers to join GBA's Communications Committee. This team plays a vital role in shaping how we connect with our community—through our print and digital newsletters (*UPDATE* and *eUpdate*), website, social media, and special campaigns like our annual Champions of the Bay Awards.

If you have skills in writing, editing, design, digital media—or just a natural knack for storytelling—we'd love to hear from you. **Help us bring Georgian Bay's most important stories to life.**

Membership Committee

Membership is our foundation—and our future. Our strength lies in our member associations. This committee plays a key role in supporting relationships, boosting engagement, and helping grow our network. If you're interested in outreach, relationship-building, or finding new ways to highlight member value, this is your place.

Why Join?

- Collaborate with like-minded people who care deeply about Georgian Bay
- Contribute your skills and ideas to support GBA's mission
- Help shape strategies that increase awareness, engagement, and community action
- Learn more about how GBA works behind the scenes

These committees meet virtually (typically every six to eight weeks) and welcome both seasoned volunteers and new voices. Whether you're a year-round resident, a cottager, or somewhere in between—your perspective matters.

Interested?

Email Meredith Denning at **executivedirector@georgianby.ca** to learn more or express your interest. Please include a few lines about yourself and what excites you about joining.

Let's work together to keep Georgian Bay thriving—now and for generations to come.





Boating Update

By Andrew Hurlbut,
Chair, Boating, Safety, and
Emergencies Committee



The boating industry is entering its third significant disruption in seven years, following tariffs in 2018–2019 and the COVID-19 pandemic. Now, an uncertain tariff landscape could bring even greater impacts.

In 2023, Canada's recreational boating sector contributed $9.2 billion to GDP, supported 80,500 jobs, generated $5.4 billion in labour income, and $4.6 billion in tax revenue.

In 2024, Transport Canada's Office of Boating Safety reported that 109,072 pleasure craft licences (PCL) were issued. This is required for any 10 hp and up pleasure craft. That brings the number of active PCLs to 2,908,819. Canadians also got 162,027 pleasure craft operator cards (PCOC) last year, which brings the total PCOCs issued to date to 5,478,101.

Transport Canada

First, the modernization of the PCL should be published in *Canada Gazette Part II* in the spring or early summer of 2025 and will become law once this occurs. The changes include making the licence validity period five years, reducing the time frame for license holders to provide information changes to 30 days, requiring licenses for wind-powered vessels over six metres, and implementing a $24 service charge.

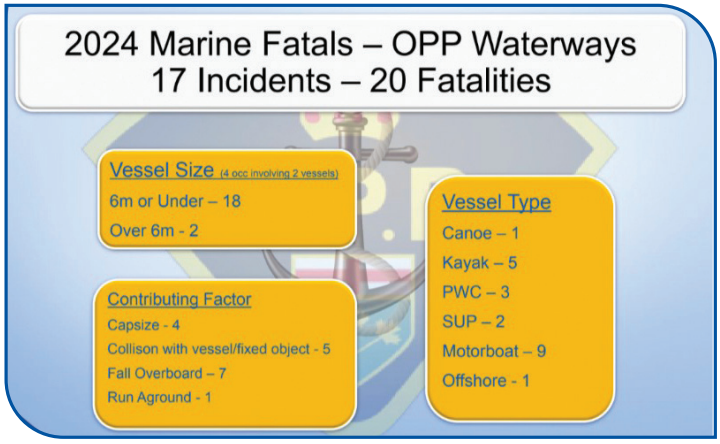
Second, the Vessel Operation Restriction Regulations (VORR) modernization changes are also scheduled to go to *Canada Gazette Part II* in mid-2025. The primary objective of this legislation is to enhance the VORR process by streamlining it through revisions to the Local Authorities Guide and utilizing incorporation by reference to speed up the process.

Other Small Vessel Regulations safety amendments are working their way through the process. These include introducing limits or restrictions for engine exhaust noise emissions, repealing the prohibition on propeller-driven surfboard-type vessels, and introducing regulations for all power-driven surfboard types. Additionally, amendments are proposed to the definition of personal watercraft, and requirements related to installing and using engine cut-off switches on small vessels are introduced.

Another significant issue is the possible requirement for mandatory use of personal flotation devices or lifejackets in specific situations. Transport Canada held a consultation from September 4 to November 4, 2022, which saw participation from over 4,000 respondents in the survey. Additionally, 1,200 comments were submitted via email, and there were 291 responses to open-ended discussion questions. A "What We Heard Report" is expected to be released this summer. It's important to remember that the key factors under review include the age of the individual and the type and length of the vessel. We will keep you informed as developments occur.

The OPP Experience

We observed enhancements in several enforcement metrics tracked by the OPP. Charges for impaired operation under the Criminal Code decreased by 23.5 per cent, totaling 26, while other liquor license offenses saw a 2.6 per cent reduction, bringing the total to 739. Marine charges related to the *Canada Shipping Act* declined from 1729 to 1388. These trends seem to be moving positively, indicating that the messaging might be effective; however, significant challenges remain! The number of 739 liquor license violations is still excessively high.



In 2024, there were 20 fatalities from 17 incidents, and 16 of those fatalities involved people NOT wearing a PFD. There has been some improvement in both the number of fatalities (the best since 2019) and the percentage of people not wearing PFDS (at 80 per cent), but the numbers are still not good enough – most of these fatalities were preventable.

PFD wear is a good place to start. 86.1 per cent of fatalities since 2011 occurred because no lifejacket was worn. That's 286 lives lost.

There are parallels with data from previous years. The majority of fatalities involve males. Last year, there was once more a tie between the 20 to 24 and the 55 to 64 age groups. One might expect that one of these demographics would be more cautious, yet they consistently rank as the highest fatality group each year. Nearly 80 per cent of deaths occurred between 6 a.m. and 6 p.m.

Similar to prior years, about half of the fatalities were associated with human-powered vessels. The long-standing top three types of vessels linked to loss of life are: first, motorboats; closely followed by canoes in second; and kayaks in third. Therefore, just because a vessel lacks a motor doesn't mean one should be any less vigilant. Out of 20 fatalities, 18 involved vessels measuring six metres or less. In fact, over the past decade, 89 per cent of fatalities occurred in vessels of this size.

Lastly, 13 fatalities happened during the colder water seasons before and after the peak summer months. It is especially crucial for us to remain aware of cold water conditions, as temperatures in Georgian Bay stay chilly for an extended period.

Falling overboard was the number one contributing factor for seven of the 20 fatalities in 2024. There was a significant increase in the number of deaths from collisions last year, accounting for 25 per cent of the total. The long-term top three contributing factors are capsizing, falling overboard, and vessel collisions. In each of these instances, immersion is unexpected, so having a PFD nearby is unlikely to help you. Even if you are conscious in the water and have a PFD in your hand, have you ever tried to put on a lifejacket while immersed? It's very challenging even when you're fully aware – in a panic situation, it becomes extremely difficult. And if the water is cold, it's even harder still.

The Shock Factor

The Canadian Safe Boating Council (CSBC) has launched an initiative called The Shock Factor, highlighting the dangers of accidental immersion and emphasizing the importance of wearing lifejackets.

The "shock factor" refers to the body's physiological response to sudden immersion. Many boaters justify their failure to wear a lifejacket by citing confidence in their swimming skills or the perceived warmth of the water.

Through real-life simulations, the campaign's research has demonstrated that unexpected immersion can trigger a deadly gasp reflex, irrespective of water temperature or swimming skills. In early 2023, volunteers participated in Shock Factor experiences to replicate unexpected immersion. Participants wore specially designed shirts that tracked physiological responses, including heart rate, respiration, and air intake. These experiences vividly illustrated the involuntary "GASP" reflex – a reflexive inhalation caused by sudden immersion – and it can be fatal, regardless of water temperature.

In virtual reality (VR) scenarios involving stand-up paddleboarding and fishing boats, participants' tidal volume (air intake) increased by an average of four times the normal level.

During dunk tank simulations, the increase was even greater, with an average of 6.5 times!

These findings confirmed that unexpected immersion triggers an automatic gasp reflex, which, if the head is submerged, often leads to the inhalation of water.

This physiological reaction significantly heightens the risk of drowning, regardless of water conditions or swimming ability.

The danger is immediate — the physiological response occurs within seconds of falling into the water.

The risk is universal — warm or cold water, experienced or novice boater, the gasp reflex does not discriminate.

Wearing a PFD is the best way to prevent drowning. While PFDs must be on board and accessible, actually wearing them provides the best protection. Inflatable PFDs are lightweight and effective, but must be worn to meet legal requirements.

Boating Safety Tips

- Boating requires more awareness than driving—no lanes, lights, or brakes.
- Minimize distractions; stay aware in all directions.
- Avoid close calls—keep distance from vessels, land, and buoys.
- Know your surroundings before turning or slowing.
- Follow shoreline speed limits (10 km/h within 30m unless otherwise posted).
- Your wake is your responsibility.
- Always avoid collisions, even if you have right of way.
- Be cold-water aware—especially in Georgian Bay.
- Share your trip plan and check safety gear.
- PFDs must be onboard and accessible—but wearing them is far safer.



Transport Canada: What's New on the Water

By Andrew Hurlbut, Chair, Boating, Safety, and Emergencies Committee



Transport Canada (TC) has been busy with a suite of proposed regulatory changes aimed at modernizing how recreational boating is managed in Canada. Here's what you need to know:

Pleasure Craft Licensing Modernization: Get Ready for New Rules

Who needs a license?

Short answer: Almost everyone. If you operate a pleasure craft (including a tender or dinghy) with a motor of 10 horsepower (7.5 kW) or more, you must have a valid Pleasure Craft License (PCL). And don't forget—you also need proof of competency, like a Pleasure Craft Operator Card (PCOC).

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Pleasure Craft Licenses (PCL)	111,755	147,798	155,731	133,289	126,697	109,072
Pleasure Craft Operator Card (PCOC)	145,254	251,992	198,292	144,795	158,413	162,027

What's changing?

The key proposed changes include:

- License validity: Reduced from 10 to five years
- Change notification: Down from 90 to 30 days to report changes in ownership or address
- Enforcement: The Minister of Transport's authority to cancel licenses for non-compliance is expanding
- Service fee: A $24 processing fee for all PCL-related transactions
- New vessel category: Wind-powered vessels over 8 metres will now require a PCL

The proposals were published in the *Canada Gazette, Part I*, on **May 13, 2023**, and received **837 comments**. The finalized rules are expected to be in the *Canada Gazette, Part II*, **by spring 2025**.

Check Your License Expiry Date Tool (**bit.ly/pclexpiry**)and the **Pleasure Craft Licensing System** (**bit.ly/apply-pcl**)to stay on top of your vessel's compliance.

Vessel Operation Restriction Regulations (VORR): Faster, Smarter Rule Changes

What are VORRs?

These regulate boating activities in specific areas—like speed limits or zones where vessels are prohibited. Historically, local governments have faced a frustratingly slow and complex process when applying for restrictions.

Phase 3 of modernization brings:

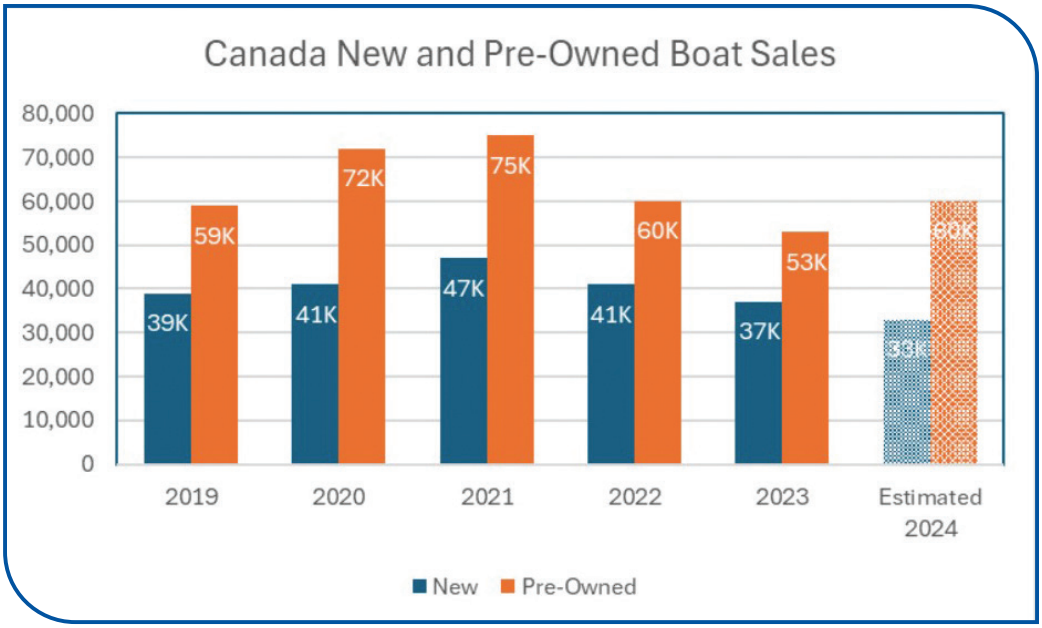
- Faster updates: Restrictions will move to a separate document (TP 15587E), allowing the Minister to update them without full regulatory amendments.
- Clearer applications: A revised guide and template for local authorities to apply for restrictions more easily.
- Simplified enforcement: Officer designations will shift to a more streamlined authority under the *Canada Shipping Act*.
- Technical clarifications: Updates to clarify electric propulsion rules, application forms, and outdated provincial references.

These changes were posted for public comment in *Canada Gazette, Part I*, on **September 14, 2023**. Final publication is expected **mid-2025**.

Small Vessel Safety: More Changes Coming

Still in the pipeline are a number of additional safety and equipment amendments:

- Revised definition of personal watercraft
- Lifting the ban on propeller-driven surfboard-type vessels



- Introducing rules for powered surfboard-type vessels
- Engine noise emission standards
- Mandatory engine cut-off switches
- Potential mandatory lifejacket/PFD wear under specific conditions

Timeline:

- Drafting: **Fall 2024 – Winter 2025**
- Pre-publication: **2025**
- Final publication and enforcement: **Spring 2026**

Mandatory Lifejacket Use: A Life-Saving Discussion

Transport Canada has been exploring mandatory PFD use since 2018. Why? Because **89 per cent of boating fatalities** involve individuals not wearing a PFD.

Key findings from TC's review:

- Most victims were adults not wearing lifejackets
- Most incidents involved powerboats or canoes
- Top causes: capsizing or being thrown overboard

The consultation explored mandatory wear based on age, vessel type, and length, but would only apply while a vessel is underway (not anchored or swimming).

The *Let's Talk* consultation closed in November 2024, with over 4,000 survey responses and 1,200 emails received. A *"What We Heard"* report is on the way.

Comments can still be submitted: **MSSRegulations-ReglementsSSM@tc.gc.ca**

Long-Term Anchoring: Still Under Review

Transport Canada is also examining **long-term anchoring**, particularly in sensitive or high-traffic areas.

Key questions they're asking:

- Should rules apply to all vessels—or only pleasure craft and floating accommodations?
- Should time limits be standardized—or left to local authorities?
- What factors should determine how long a vessel can anchor in one spot?

The consultation closed in Fall 2023, and the ***"What We Heard"* report** was released in summer 2024. TC is still accepting feedback at the same email: **MSSRegulations-ReglementsSSM@tc.gc.ca**

What It Means for You

With multiple proposed regulatory changes on deck, it's clear that boating rules are shifting toward better safety, more accountability, and stronger environmental stewardship. Whether you're a weekend cottager or year-round mariner, now's the time to double-check your documents, gear, and compliance.

We'll keep you posted as these proposals become law, likely beginning in 2025 and continuing through 2026.

A Look Back

By Bob Baines



John Birnbaum was a dedicated and long-serving volunteer Director of the Georgian Bay Association before becoming GBA's first paid Executive Director in 1992. In recognition of his more than 12 years of volunteer service, he was honoured with GBA's very first Honourary Life Membership.

This photo, taken by Bob Baines from an airplane, captures John waving his cap during the inaugural use of the newly established Outside Channel—an important route stretching from southern Georgian Bay all the way to Killarney.



Photo: Bob Baines

John Birnbaum and the OPP navigate the inaugural run of the Outside Channel—from southern Georgian Bay to Killarney—marking a milestone in safe boating access across the region.

Rooted in Resilience

By Alan Stratton,
GBA President



As I write this, tulips are pushing through the soil, and the forsythia, magnolia, and cherry blossoms are in full bloom. Signs of spring abound, fostering a sense of renewal that inspires new initiative and the excitement of planning summer holidays. For many of us, this elation may be tempered by apprehension at the wonderment of possible damage waiting to be discovered on opening the cottage. This season's arrival unfolds against growing economic stress and geopolitical uncertainty. It's a time that can feel unsettling. That's why returning to the Bay feels more important than ever. It's a place of peace and perspective, where the natural world reminds us of resilience and renewal.

Georgian Bay has always been a place of enduring beauty, and part of that is thanks to its slow pace of development. Unlike more easily accessible regions like Muskoka, the Georgian Bay basin has largely been protected from sprawling development—until now. As the Highway 400 extension moves closer to completion, and populations continue to grow in and north of the Greater Toronto Area, development interest in our region is accelerating. This presents opportunities and challenges: with thoughtful planning and strong environmental stewardship, we can guide growth in ways that protect the unique ecosystems and natural beauty that make Georgian Bay special.

These risks make the GBA's mission more vital than ever, but a mission alone isn't enough. We must evolve, stay relevant, and strengthen our collaboration with the other Georgian Bay organizations and communities to maximize our impact. As your new President, I take this responsibility seriously. I aim to ensure that the GBA is well-prepared for the challenges ahead, with the necessary structure, resources, and credibility to thrive for decades.

We have established a strong foundation thanks to past President Liz Phillips and our previous leadership. The Vision 2050 initiative is underway, and we've recruited an outstanding Executive Director, Meredith Denning. I'm excited to work with Meredith—her energy, curiosity, academic background, and binational experience make her a standout leader for this next chapter.

The GBA's strength and success stem from its people—a dedicated collective of passionate volunteers driving initiatives to protect and mitigate threats, seek out and distill information relevant to our members, and strengthen the shared bonds of our community. I'm proud to be part of this committed team.

Please join me in welcoming our newest Directors: **Mark de Pencier (Wah Wah Taysee)**, **Sarah Wilson (Manitou)**, and **Elaine Melchers (Honey Harbour)**. We're thrilled to have them on board and look forward to the insights and energy they'll bring to the table.

At the same time, we extend our heartfelt thanks to our retiring Directors—**David Matthews (Cognashene)**, **Armin Grigaitis (Honey Harbour)**, and **Gord Forstner (Wah Wah Taysee)**—for their dedicated service and meaningful contributions to the GBA.

The next two years will bring political, environmental, and economic change. To remain relevant, we must listen, engage, and adapt. We will seek your input because we want to hear your voices.

As we enjoy the summer, let's hold on to what's constant—this place, this community, this shared responsibility. Take a moment to reflect on what you can do to protect the Bay. Every small act matters, and others are watching.



Welcoming New Faces to the GBA Board

By Allison Needham,
UPDATE Editor



We're excited to welcome the following Directors to the GBA Board this summer. Each brings a strong connection to Georgian Bay and a solid commitment to our shared mission.

Elaine Melchers – Honey Harbour Association



Elaine has been a driving force in the Honey Harbour community for years—leading the HHA HOOTS day camp (2019–2024), supporting the *Day on the Bay* fundraiser, and organizing a variety of youth events. She has also served on the Honey Harbour Association Board and coached sailing. After years of renting, Elaine and her family built a cottage in Honey Harbour and have established strong roots in the community. We are happy to have Elaine's experience, creativity, and energy on the GBA Board.

Sarah Wilson – Manitou Association



Sarah has been coming to Georgian Bay since she was two weeks old, and it's been a cherished part of her life ever since. Now a mother of two adventurous daughters, Sarah enjoys long boat rides, outer island picnics, fishing, and blueberry picking with her family. She is the new GBA Director for the Manitou Association, located at the mouth of Twelve Mile Bay. We're excited to have Sarah's lifelong love of the Bay and her thoughtful perspective on the Board.

Mark de Pencier – Wah Wah Taysee

Mark and his extended family have been valued members of the Wah Wah Taysee community for many years. We're delighted that he'll be joining the Board this summer, bringing his longstanding passion for the Bay.

We Are All Guardians of Georgian Bay

As you read this, we'd like to take a moment to remind everyone: we are all stewards of this place we love. The power to protect Georgian Bay doesn't just rest with organizations or government—it begins with each of us. Every small action, every thoughtful choice we make while we're on the Bay, adds up. To bring about real, lasting change, we need to work together—better, smarter, and more effectively.

Introducing GBA's New Board of Directors

Speaking of collective effort, GBA's work is only possible thanks to the dedication of our volunteer Board of Directors. They give generously of their time and expertise to ensure GBA continues advocating, protecting, and making progress on your behalf.

The following slate of directors was approved at our Annual Members Meeting on Saturday, April 12, 2025.

Directors of the Georgian Bay Association

Association	Director	Association	Director
Bay of Islands	**Liz Phillips**	Northern Georgian Bay	**Freda Klassen**
Blackstone Lake	**Andy Metelka**	PaBIA	**TBD**
BNIA	**Gordon Johnson**	PaBIA	**Hannah Willis**
BNIA	**Doug Ferguson**	Sans Souci & Copperhead	**Katherine Denune**
Cognashene	**TBD**	Sans Souci & Copperhead	**Al Stratton**
Cognashene	**Tom Halpenny**	South Channel	**Steven Sprague**
Honey Harbour	**Dan Busse**	Twelve Mile Bay	**Brett Harris**
Honey Harbour	**Elaine Melchers**	Wah Wah Taysee	**Mark de Pencier**
Key River	**Andrew Hurlbut**	West Carling	**Allison Needham**
Madawaska Club	**Jim Rusak**	West Carling	**Richard Wilson**
Manitou	**Sarah Wilson**	Woods Bay	**Heather Sargeant**
McGregor Bay	**Doug Whitton**		

Officers of the Georgian Bay Association

President	**Al Stratton**
Executive Vice President	**Vacant**
Treasurer	**Tom Halpenny**
Secretary	**Andrew Hurlbut**

Meeting Meredith Denning

By Meredith Denning,
Executive Director



Hello everyone! I'm glad to have this opportunity to introduce myself as my first summer with GBA begins.

Who am I? Well, among other things, I'm an environmental historian by training, a canoe tripper and amateur naturalist. City cycling is a favourite part of my routine: I ride a big cargo bike most days of the week, and I have a mixte step-through for solo rides and a vintage Gitane tandem for date nights.

Growing up, I spent time at several different cottages. I caught my first fish off the dock at 'Kitty Hawk,' my Uncle Doug's place on Bayfield Inlet. At nine, I learned to drive a motorboat on Oastler Lake, near Parry Sound. I fondly remember the rowdy kids' loft at an old friend's beach cottage near Kincardine. I also feel a deep connection to Harwich Port on Cape Cod, where my mother's family had a cottage for generations.

I've built new connections to these places as I've gotten older. Now we open the cottage at Kitty Hawk with Doug and my kids, and they jump off that same dock. Over on Oastler Lake, my now-husband first endeared himself to my family by chopping and hauling firewood for three days straight – proof of his enthusiasm for our August long weekend traditions. Helping to take care of the cottages that belong to my family and my chosen family is something that my husband and I treasure.

I also spent many summers attending and working at Northway Lodge, a canoe-tripping camp in Algonquin Park. My sisters and best friend still trip with me and I'm looking forward to taking my kids on their first trip as soon as everyone can swim!

Two significant drivers in my life are curiosity and a sense of duty. I believe our natural environment needs and deserves all the attention and love I can give it. I look forward to applying those convictions to the Executive Director's role.

My specific interest—how people get organized to take care of our aquatic environments—has been a driving force in my life since my teens. During university and grad school, I found programs, mentors, and jobs that fed my curiosity about grassroots advocacy. I've worked at the International Joint Commission in Ottawa, at the Canadian Embassy in Washington, DC, and for NGOs and consulting firms on both sides of the border.

For my doctorate, I tried to paint a clear picture of how the people around Lake Erie and Lake Ontario perceived their changing environment, learned about it, and organized themselves to improve it.

Whenever I tell people that I specialize in the management of the Great Lakes, individuals from both sides of the border often ask, "Are the Lakes going to be sent away, sold down some river? Are they improving? Are we harming them? Will they be alright?" Their questions come from an awareness that environmental stability is not guaranteed, and that our well-being and economy rely on the health of our natural surroundings. We are shaped by what we eat and drink.

Scarred and invaded though it is, Georgian Bay is cleaner and better-protected than it was a hundred years ago. It is a refuge for plants and animals no longer found on the more heavily populated lakes. The GBA has played a role in that slow turnaround. While it might not make a Netflix series, this history counters the many tales of irreparable damage caused by thoughtless people. We have a good foundation for our work.

In recent years, I have worn a variety of hats - I've been a management consultant, researcher, lecturer, and administrator. I am thrilled to be the Executive Director of GBA because I can bring all of my skills to this one position.

I am particularly drawn to the Georgian Bay Association's culture of friendly curiosity and critical thinking. As an institution, the GBA is committed to



making Georgian Bay more protected and better cared for. It is a welcoming and dynamic forum: many organizations and initiatives that are improving the health of the Bay today started at the GBA, including Georgian Bay Forever and the Georgian Bay Land Trust. And the conversation continues: What does the Bay need now? What must we do to live well here and take care of this splendour? Vision 2050 is our latest big idea, and it will help us strengthen our commitments to healthy ecosystems along the Eastern and Northern shores.

GBA is not static: our Member Associations have maintained their relevance through more than a century of cottaging in a busy world. Many of the issues that our members face today are bigger than our Association: climate change, with all of its extreme weather; reduced political will for environmental assessment; and rising living costs. Given these trends, it is more important than ever for the GBA to keep in close touch with each association and shore up our foundation: our membership.

That's why we're reinvigorating the *Membership Committee: to deepen our relationships with Member Associations and become a more responsive partner. We're also going to enroll new members within our existing associations. It's the fastest, most cost-effective way to boost our revenue and impact. By representing a larger proportion of each community, we'll be a more powerful voice for Georgian Bay.

Allison Needham, Membership Director for the West Carling Association and our former Interim Executive Director, will chair the committee. She brings extensive experience, strong community connections, and a clear vision for what lies ahead. The momentum is real - at the 2025 AMM, our Association Presidents asked for stronger communication and more support. This committee is how we deliver.

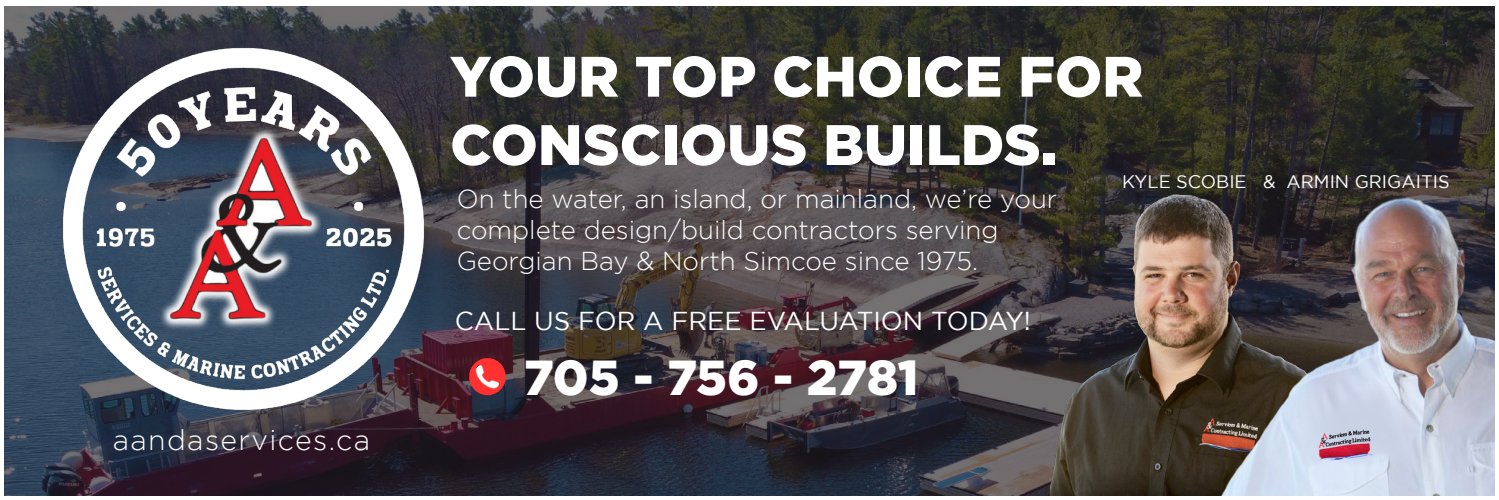


The GBA's volunteers make it all happen - skillful advocacy, coalition building, and education. Our Board, led by our new President, Al Stratton, is working hard to make the best possible use of their gifts of time and effort and we want to hear from you!

My job is to listen and then to amplify our members' voices. This summer I will visit as many of our associations as possible. I want to hear about each marsh, bay and inlet so that I can make your voices heard loud and clear!

I look forward to a busy summer of learning from you all.

*** Want to be part of the effort?**
Read more on page 9 about GBA's Membership Committee and how you can get involved.



Upcoming Events

Our sister Georgian Bay organizations wish to inform you of these upcoming events

The Georgian Bay Association

Pow Wows Across the Region

June 7 and 8
Henvey Inlet Pow Wow

June 12
Climate Action Forum, Parry Sound

June 20 and 21
Georgian Bay Native Friendship Centre, 22nd Annual Pow Wow, Sainte-Marie Park (Hwy 12 Wye Valley Rd.).

June 25
Manitoulin Secondary School Annual Pow Wow, 11 a.m. - 2 p.m.

Honey Harbour Canada Day Festival, 9 a.m. - 2:30 p.m.

June 28 and 29
Dokis First Nation

23rd annual Pow Wow, Giiwejwan Traditional Grounds

August 2 - 4
Wiikiwemikong First Nation Pow Wow

August 16 and 17
Shawanaga 28th Annual Pow Wow

August 17
French River

September
Wasauksing First Nation

October
Wahta Mohawks annual Pow Wow

Georgian Bay Biosphere

Climate Action Forum - June 12 @ 1 p.m. - 6:00 p.m.
Charles W. Stockey Centre

Repair Café - June 14 @ 9:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.

Kids Amphibian Bioblitz - June 27

Turtle Open House - August 4 @ 10:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m.

Glow in the Dark Bioblitz - August 8

Turtle Hatchery Tours - throughout August

For more, visit georgianbaybiosphere.com/events

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GBA THANKS JUNCTION59
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Marc Cooper
416.481.4861
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This publication designed and layout by
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705.636.7319 • www.jcldesign.ca
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Your Voice on the Bay

GBA *UPDATE* is published by the Georgian Bay Association

GBA Mission Statement:
To work with our water-based communities and other stakeholders to ensure the careful stewardship of the greater Georgian Bay environment.

The Georgian Bay Association is an advocacy umbrella group representing 18 community associations and their members – approximately 3,000 families comprising over 30,000 individuals.

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2025 Publication Schedule

Issue	Distribution Date
Spring	**March**
Summer	**June**
Fall	**October**

GBA *UPDATE* is mailed to all members of all GBA member associations, friends, other stakeholders and interest groups. Bulk copies can be made available to full member associations to include with their mailings. Material may be reprinted in GBA member association newsletters provided that the source is acknowledged. Letters to the editor are welcome. Please send address corrections and changes to the address below.

Return undeliverable Canadian addresses to:
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Distributed under Canada Publication Mail Sales Agreement # 40038178

GBA *UPDATE* is printed by Warren's Waterless Printing, Canada's leading environmental printer, using high-quality waterless print technology on Enviro 100% recycled paper. The waterless printing process eliminates the use of fresh water and greatly reduces the use of harmful chemical compounds.

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