

MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

*Strengthen Nature's
Capacity to Cope with
Change*

As we increase our understanding of the health of our watersheds and the factors that impact on their condition, we have more questions than answers. Increasing amounts of research and analysis provide more detailed perspectives, revealing more complex relationships than previously appreciated. For example, the recently completed Muskoka Inventory Project provides new insights into the current condition of our land and its contributions to the overall health of the watershed.

A [watershed](#) is defined as the land area that drains into a particular body of water, such as a lake or a river, and includes all the natural and human communities found there. The report Card looks at the health of the Muskoka and Black/Severn River Watersheds that flow from Algonquin Park through Muskoka, Haliburton, Simcoe, and Parry Sound into Georgian Bay.

For over two decades, measures of the health of the watersheds of Muskoka focused on the quality of the water in lakes and rivers. A more recent and broader view of watershed health considers not only the state of the water, but the quality of surrounding terrestrial and aquatic habitats such as forests and wetlands, and the air in which they function. The following sections on Land, Air and Water detail various indicators of watershed health.

Recent thought challenges us to understand the importance of the local, regional and global interconnectedness of the natural systems. While natural evolutionary change occurs regardless of human activity, people cause other kinds of change. At a global we're seeing the effects of climate change, [acid deposition](#), and exotic species. At the local level we see changes to natural habitats resulting from forestry practices and the way that development is influenced and controlled.

*When one tugs at a
single thing in nature,
he finds it attached to
the rest of the world.*

John Muir

The primary objective of the 2007 Watershed Report Card is to evaluate change in [ecosystem](#) condition and the impact of human actions against a standard of a healthy, functioning and sustainable watershed.

The best insurance against loss of the natural, scenic, economic and intrinsic watershed values that are important to the people of Muskoka is to maintain our watersheds in as natural a condition as possible, buffering whatever stresses they face now and in the future.

Several recent studies confirm that protecting, maintaining and enhancing the health and the diversity of ecosystems is essential to long-term sustainability of watersheds that will be threatened by the changing climate.

Simply put, as a community, we will need to strengthen nature's ability to cope with change.

How is this best accomplished? The 2007 Report Card focuses on four primary dimensions of watershed health where we can make a difference: water, air, land and climate. The Report Card provides the foundation for an initial consideration of the key messages outlined below and described in detail in the following chapters.

*Deb Cumming
Chair*