

THE BAXTER



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To learn more about Baxter Creek Watershed Alliance visit our website at:

<https://baxtercreekwatershed.org/>



“Jail Lands”, 1954. Source: Energy Mines and Resources Canada

Producer: Data, Map, and Government Information Services, Data & GIS Services, University of Toronto.

Date acquired: Late Spring/Early Summer 1954.

BCWA’S 2026-2029 STRATEGIC PLAN

“Strengthening Our Watershed, Strengthening Our Community.”

We’re still here and have been working away! Since our Annual General Meeting this past September, the Board of Directors of Baxter Creek Watershed Alliance (BCWA), supported by our volunteers and partners, have been quietly making steady progress on several fronts. With an updated 2026-29 Strategic Plan approved this month, our bylaws updated and filed with Corporate Canada, and a set of policies and board handbook approved this past year, BCWA is emerging as an evidence-based community partner, combining scientific research informed through Indigenous Knowledge shared by our First Nation partners. Our community-based work is helping local governments and other organizations make informed decisions grounded in real-world evidence.

“The report of my death was an exaggeration.”

- Samuel Clemens / Mark Twain

At its core, BCWA is an ecological and environmental education organization. Everything we do – our research, partnerships, and advocacy – flows from a simple belief: people make better decisions when they understand the ecosystems they depend on.

BCWA produces and shares reliable, place-based knowledge about our watersheds so people living and working in the community can learn, engage, and act

with confidence. Through watershed monitoring, GIS mapping, and ecological research, we generate scientific evidence that can help tell the story of our local environment. This work is strengthened and informed by Indigenous Knowledge shared by our First Nation partners, deepening understanding through both long-standing and contemporary ways of knowing the land and water.

BCWA believes that education is not limited to classrooms, it happens on the land, in the water, and through shared evidence. By documenting ecological conditions and trends, we want to help community members, decision-makers, and future generations better understand how our watershed functions and why it matters.

A core part of this work is our commitment to respecting and affirming the inherent and treaty-based rights of First Nations. BCWA informs, engages, and consults with First Nations before initiating activities that may impact or support Treaty Rights. This approach ensures that our educational and scientific efforts are grounded in respect, relationship, and responsibility.

BCWA also plays a key role in translating science into understanding. We share evidence with community organizations, governments, and First Nation partners to support planning and policy decisions. When plans or proposals are not fully informed, BCWA can help to provide clear, accessible evidence, such as during official plan reviews, to support informed, thoughtful decision-making.

Ultimately, BCWA advocates for what we value most: clean, healthy, resilient watersheds. By focusing on ecological education, rooted in evidence, informed through Indigenous Knowledge, and community collaboration, we hope to help ensure that decisions made today are responsible and beneficial for generations to come.

WE'RE RECRUITING!

Strengthening governance. Expanding community leadership. Preparing for charitable status.

Do you have a passion for conservation? Do you have skills or interest in corporate governance? Do you have an entrepreneurial spirit? Are you keen to give back to your community while developing skills in business and leadership? If so, visit our webpage for more information at: <https://baxtercreekwatershed.org/volunteer>.

After five years of developing our nonprofit, the Baxter Creek Watershed Alliance is entering an exciting period of growth, and we are recruiting new Board Directors, Committee Members, volunteer Advisors, and project volunteers to help strengthen our governance, programming, deepen our community impact, and support our upcoming application for charitable status. This round of recruitment is to build a diverse, skilled, and community-rooted leadership team that reflects the watershed and community we serve.

Board of Directors Recruitment

Why We're Recruiting

BCWA is strengthening our governance, expanding our working board, and preparing for our next step of achieving charitable status. To do this, we are seeking individuals who bring a mix of skills, lived experience, and community connections.

If you are interested in more information or applying, please visit our webpage at <https://baxtercreekwatershed.org/volunteer>.

We are especially interested in candidates who can help us build a **balanced, independent, and skills-diverse board**, including:

- Community engagement and partnership building
- Environmental science or ecology
- Fundraising, business development, or communications
- Financial/accounting expertise
- Legal or governance experience

We also aiming to strengthen representation across gender identity, age, cultural background, Indigenous knowledge, and professional experience.

✿ Succession Planning & Leadership Development

BCWA is committed to building a strong leadership succession plan.

We welcome candidates who are interested in being formally mentored into future executive positions, including:

- Chair
- Vice Chair
- Treasurer
- Secretary

You do **not** need prior board experience. **Curiosity, commitment, and a willingness to learn are more important.**

“We’re seeking new board members who are excited to contribute their skills today while also helping us build a strong leadership team for tomorrow. If you’re passionate about our mission and want to grow into a leadership role with support and mentorship, we’d love to hear from you.”

📄 How to Express Interest - Check the April issue of the Millbrook Times for Board of Directors vacancies.

If you’re interested in joining the Board of Directors, a Committee of the Board, or becoming a volunteer Advisor, or helping as a volunteer with projects, please reach out. Visit our volunteer webpage at <https://baxtercreekwatershed.org/volunteer> or email us at baxtercreekwatershed@gmail.com.

HOW ARE WE SUPPORTTING RICE LAKE PERSONHOOD?

On November 18, 2025, the Alderville First Nation Council voted unanimously to recognize Rice Lake as having its own legal status. This decision came after two years of conversations involving the council, elders, and knowledge keepers, who all helped shape and approve the declaration. Chief Taynar Simpson called it a major moment for the community, which has lived beside and cared for the lake for at least 10,000 years. The resolution reflects that long relationship and the many ways Rice Lake has supported the Nation’s way of life.

Through our Board of Directors, Baxter Creek Watershed Alliance (BCWA) has been engaging with and supporting Alderville First Nation on this initiative. BCWA is acutely aware of the interconnectedness of the Baxter Creek watershed and Rice Lake. With the headwaters of Baxter Creek and it’s many tributaries across the Oak Ridges Moraine and connected landscapes, Baxter Creek meanders and drains in the Otonabee River, which then flows into Rice Lake. So, our activities and actions on the land in the Baxter Creek watershed are reflected downstream in receiving areas.

Stream ecologists describe this relationship in this way: *rivers integrate upstream conditions*.

“Someone’s sitting in the shade today because someone planted a tree a long time ago.”

- Warren Buffett

Streams and receiving water bodies are shaped by everything that happens upstream. They gather water, energy, sediment, and nutrients from the land around them, carrying all of it downstream. Because of this, the health of a stream – its water quality, the plants and animals that live in it, and how the ecosystem functions – depends on the combined activities and conditions throughout the entire watershed. What happens upstream doesn’t stay upstream; it all flows down.

So the activities across our watershed, and the actions we take are reflected in the quality of the water in our streams, rivers, and receiving areas including Rice Lake. While it may not be apparent, even the activities and actions we consider on our properties can have impacts. Urban fertilizers, runoff from our lawns and driveways, much of this flows into streams and rivers through stormwater systems. So even small actions like rain gardens and rain barrels or using of phosphate-free detergents for washing cars, can all mitigate the impacts of urban runoff.

Impacts from other activities can also be mitigated. Many local farmers, for example, are implementing best management practices on their farms to reduce erosion or nutrient runoff. Stream buffer plantings and fencing to keep livestock away from streams. Many local farmers are implementing erosion control projects such as no-till or reduced tillage to keep soil covered, planting cover crops (like clover or rye) to anchor soil, and creating grassed waterways to manage runoff.

BCWA is proud to support the Rice Lake personhood initiative because it will help protect the lake and all the life it supports, for the long run. Whether you enjoy Rice Lake for fishing, swimming, paddling, or simply

spending time by the water, this initiative is designed to help keep the lake healthy and thriving for future generations.

WHAT'S THE FUTURE OF "JAIL HILL"?

The Millbrook Correctional Centre closed in 2003, the property has been vacant since 2015, and surplus for years. In 2018 the property was listed by the province to be sold by 2022. Years later the property continues to be on hold without a record of site condition, complicating its sale, due in part to required environmental clean-up or mitigation of legacy contamination. Yet the property continues to attract interest from the local community, for the benefit as an open greenspace for educational and outdoor recreation. What could the future hold for the property? In our upcoming summer issue of the Baxter, we'll be reporting back in depth on our strategy to address this question. Stay tuned! 🌿



University of Toronto Map & Data Library. (1954). 1954 air photos of Southern Ontario: Flight A123, photo 045 [Aerial photograph]. University of Toronto Libraries (https://maps.library.utoronto.ca/datapub/Ontario/APS_1954/georeferenced/zipped/442.782.zip)



Millbrook Correctional Centre, 1964. Department of Energy, Mines and Resources, 1964. Scanned and georeferenced by the Maps, Data and Government Information Centre at Trent University. © Her Majesty the Queen in Right of Canada 1964.

LIVING WITH AND OBSERVING WILDLIFE ACROSS THE BAXTER CREEK WATERSHED

Wildlife sightings are common across the watershed. Whether you live in the Millbrook settlement area, in the Village, or in the countryside, you are bound to see wildlife in across our rural landscape.



A picture of a Barred Owl which has been wintering in the woods along Station Trail this winter. Photo taken on March 20, 2026.

At some point, if you are out on the trails or out for a drive, you are sure to see a long list of wildlife across the Baxter Creek watershed and connected areas such as Cavan Creek and Squirrel Creek watersheds.

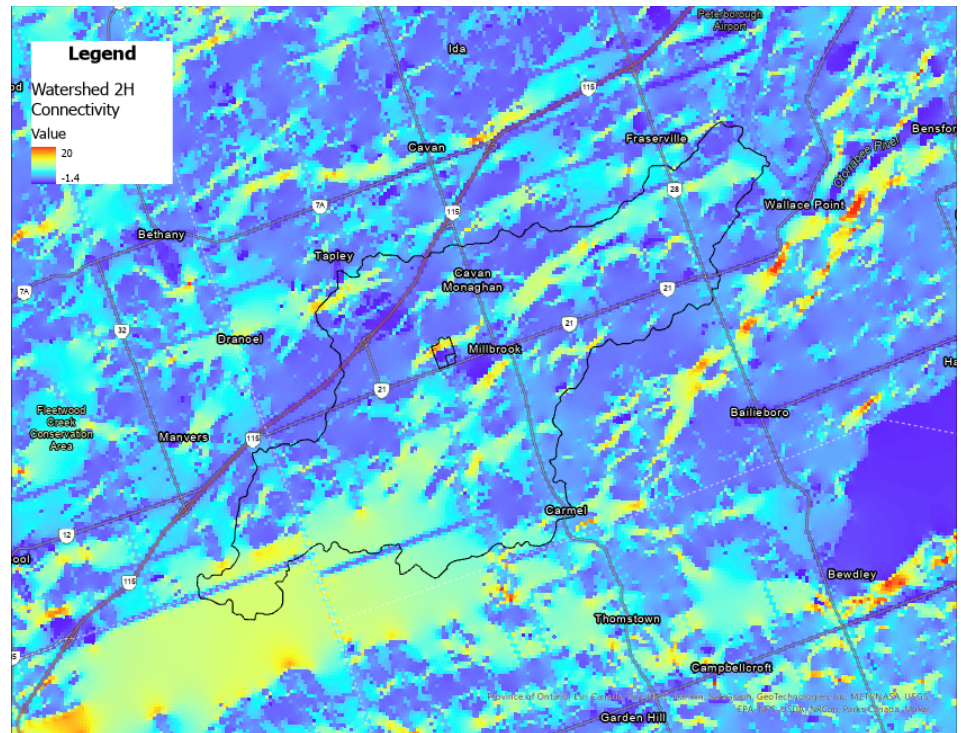
White-tailed deer are still a familiar sight in our area, even though their numbers within the settlement area seem to have decreased as development and population growth continue. Early mornings and dusk remain the best times to spot them – often grazing in farm fields or traversing across larger rural properties. If you keep an eye on the ground, you can also find their tracks along many local trails, including well-used ones like Station Trail in the Village or the trails in the Baxter Creek valley.

We're fortunate to live in a place where nature is never far from home. Living in a rural community means sharing our surroundings with a wide range of wildlife. Coyotes, for example, are very common here, and many of us have heard their evening "chorus." Often called "song dogs," coyotes communicate with a mix of barks, yips, and howls. They're wild animals though, so it's important not to feed them and to keep compost and garbage secured. This helps ensure they stay wild and maintain a healthy distance from people and pets.

Black bears are less common but still make occasional appearances across the watershed. Most sightings involve young males exploring new territory in search of food, especially in early spring. They rarely stay long, but their tracks and scat can sometimes be found along local trails. Last year, for instance, bear prints and scat were spotted right along Station Trail, only a few yards from the old Chevy Bel Air on the former rail line.

As our community grows and regional transportation plans move forward, it's more important than ever to protect the natural corridors that allow wildlife to move safely across the landscape. Have a look at the map in this article, showing the ecological "corridors" in yellow/red within the Baxter Creek watershed (outlined in black). Millbrook and other settlements are labelled, along with the former Millbrook

Correctional Centre property outlined. The yellow and red areas highlight the most suitable corridors for larger mammals (such as deer, coyotes, and black bears) to travel through. Whether you enjoy observing wildlife or participating in local hunting traditions, keeping these corridors intact and connected helps ensure that the animals we share this region with can continue to thrive.



A watershed connectivity model showing high-value ecological corridors (yellow and red areas) that provide passage for large mammals and other wildlife. Ministry of Natural Resources, Great Lakes Basin Landscape Connectivity Project, 2015. Contains information licensed under the Open Government Licence – Ontario.

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Baxter Creek Watershed Alliance (Corporation# 1348381-9) is a Canadian federal nonprofit corporation entity registered with Corporations Canada, located in the Village of Millbrook, Township of Cavan-Monaghan, County of Peterborough, Ontario, Canada.

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