

CONSERVATION COMPANY

www.williamslakecc.org

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Please note that due to the current COVID restrictions, our AGM is postponed until the fall. Further information will be provided when available.

We hope to see you there in person.

GET LOUD -IT'S TIME TO FIX THE DAM!

The WLCC's Dam Committee joined with the Williams Lake Dam Association (WLDA) last fall and have worked together to draw attention to increasingly lower lake levels in recent summers and issues with the deteriorating dam.

Together, we got "loud" on social media, newspapers, radio, TV. An educational letter focused on factors affecting lake levels and issues with the aging dam was delivered to over 1,000 homes in the areas surrounding Williams Lake. The Chebucto News, with a wide circulation beyond the Spryfield area, published our monthly stories of the plight of Williams Lake. The WLDA created a Facebook page with a petition and posted weekly stories, photos and videos to get the need for dam remediation noticed, supported and followed. The petition to fix the dam now has over 660 signatures.

Councillor Shawn Cleary has proven to be a key advocate for the protection of the Williams Lake watershed. Last December, we suggested Councillor Cleary invite the newly-elected HRM councillors for a hike into the Shaw Wilderness Park to view the lake and the dam. Councillors Patty Cuttall of Spryfield, Sambro Loop and Prospect Road, Kathryn Morse of Halifax-Bedford Basin West and Cathy Deagle-Gammon of Waverley, Fall River, Musquodoboit Valley, were able to come. They were joined by representatives of the WLCC and WLDA. Our team briefed the councillors on the history of lake and its dam, on the incredible value the lake represents to HRM as an ecological and recreational resource, as well as the environmental factors and potential developments that threaten the Williams Lake watershed. They were able to see the significant flow of water under the dam superstructure, highlighting the urgency of dam repair. We felt we had their attention and support.

This support was demonstrated later in December with Councillor Cleary's motion to the HRM Environment and Sustainability Standing Committee requesting a staff report to investigate the declining water levels in Williams Lake. The motion was passed and makes recommendations on potential actions related specifically to the dam, but also to investigate the influences of climate change, development and other relevant factors on water levels and quality in the Williams Lake watershed.

(Please see the minutes of the meeting at <https://www.halifax.ca/sites/default/files/documents/city-hall/standing-committees/201207esscspmins.pdf>).

Our combined efforts have brought us to a key point in our mission to save the lake. Responsibility for the Staff Report on the remediation of the Williams Lake dam was assigned to HRM's Department of Parks and Recreation.

EVERYONE WELCOME

The WLCC is a non-profit volunteer organization. We welcome everyone who shares the WLCC's mandate to preserve the health of Williams Lake to become members.

TO FIND OUT MORE ABOUT THE WLCC AND OUR ACTIVITIES, CHECK US OUT

On Facebook: [Williams-Lake-Conservation-Company](https://www.facebook.com/Williams-Lake-Conservation-Company)

On our Website: <https://www.williamslakecc.org/>



The rocky shore line of Williams Lake is exposed by falling lake levels in recent summers. Photo August 2021 courtesy of Cathy Vaughan

Representatives from the Department met with us at the dam, in March 2021, for a briefing and discussion on how we could collaborate to find a workable solution to fix the dam, conserve the watershed and preserve the key, recreational asset of HRM's Shaw Wilderness Park. We felt heard, appreciated and part of the solution.

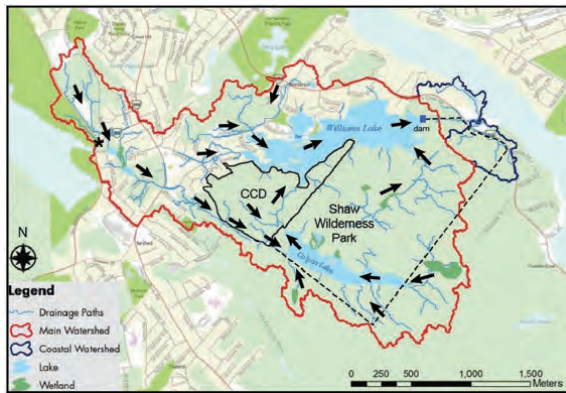
A staff report to Council takes about ten weeks to process, once it is researched and written. The report then goes through several groups and departments to be reviewed, vetted and edited. The final version is due to be sent to the HRM Environment and Sustainability Committee by September 2, 2021 for a final review. Then it is ready to be presented to Council for a vote.

WLCC and WLDA continue to be "loud" to keep the dam in the public conversation, to promote the lake as an HRM recreational asset, to highlight the relationship of the lake to the vitality of the Shaw Wilderness Park, to cover issues that affect the lake's fragile watershed, to foster and maintain relationships with government, and to continue to search for potential collaborative solutions to fix the dam and save the lake for future generations.

Get informed. Get involved. Get loud!
<https://www.facebook.com/FixTheDamSignPetition>

Write your councillor - let them know it matters to you

Article contributed by:
Cathy Vaughan, WLCC Executive
Margo Kerr, Williams Lake Dam Association (WLDA)



The Williams Lake Watershed. All rainfall within the watershed (outlined in red) would normally feed towards Williams Lake. Arrows indicate the direction of water flow within the watershed. See the full Water Flow Report on the WLCC website for more detail. The land comprising three Church of Christ Development (CCD) properties (solid black outline) and the Shaw Wilderness Park (dashed black outline) are shown. The properties on Old Sambro Road, for which a rezoning application is being sought to allow a 13-unit building (see Pg3), are indicated with a black star.



The Backlands. The wilderness area known as the Backlands (outlined in white) and the location of the Shaw Wilderness Park are shown on the main map. Inset shows current zoning in the undeveloped northern portion of the Backlands which overlaps the Williams Lake watershed.

THE UNIQUE VALUE OF THE SHAW WILDERNESS PARK AND THE WILLIAMS LAKE WATERSHED REQUIRES LONG-TERM PROTECTION OF THE BACKLANDS

In last year's newsletter we reported on a parcel of three pieces of land at the west end of Williams Lake which went on the market in late 2019. These lands (see the map) are owned by the Church of Christ Development Company (CCD) (<https://churchdevelopment.ca>), based in Edmonton, Alberta. The largest piece of land is 100 acres and is zoned Urban Reserve (UR). The other two pieces total 36 acres and are zoned Residential Development District (RDD). The UR designation would allow only one house to be built whereas under the RDD designation, duplexes are allowed, and no approval would be required by HRM Council for a dense development of this sort.

Members of the WLCC immediately raised concerns about the negative impact any development on these properties would have on the health of Williams Lake. The properties contain the key stream that feeds water from Colpitt Lake into Williams Lake. They are bordered on their south side by Governor's Brook which supplies water to Colpitt Lake, and they house smaller wetlands and seasonal water courses critical for healthy water flow through Williams Lake.

In response to these concerns, in June 2020, Councillor Shawn Cleary introduced a motion to the Halifax and West Community Council requesting that HRM staff prepare a report on a change in zoning of the 36 acres from RDD to UR. The motion passed unanimously.

WLCC fully supported the motion, and provided various materials to HRM planners: Regional Plan Review +10 submission by the Backlands Coalition; Backlands Birding and Trees, a 2020 update to a 2012 report by birding expert Fulton Lavender; Ducks Unlimited Canada initial summary wetlands assessment commissioned by the WLCC and authored by Emma Bocking; 2020 WLCC Report on Water Flow in the Williams Lake Watershed, authored by Dr. Melanie Dobson. (All reports are available by using the search function on our website at <https://williamslakecc.org>).

Late in 2020 the CCD lands were taken off the market.

The HRM staff report was presented to the Halifax and West Community Council on May 11, 2021. The recommendations were incorporated into a motion by Shawn Cleary; it read as follows:

" THAT Halifax and West Community Council recommend that Regional Council direct the Chief Administrative Officer to:

1. Initiate a process to consider site-specific amendments to the Halifax Secondary Municipal Planning Strategy and Halifax Mainland Land Use By-Law for PID. 00323139, and portions of PIDs 00271585 and 00323147 zoned Residential Development District (RDD), in order to better protect the environmentally-sensitive features identified on Maps 3a and 3b of the Mainland South SPS; and follow the public participation program for municipal planning strategy amendments as approved by Regional Council on February 27, 1997; and
2. Consider amendments to the Regional Municipal Planning Strategy, the Halifax Secondary Municipal Planning Strategy and Halifax Mainland Land Use By-law for lands currently designated and zoned Urban Reserve in the Purcell's Cove Backlands area (see map above), through the ongoing Regional Plan Review (Case 22257) in order to protect environmentally-significant features in the area, consistent with the policy directions outlined in this report." (For full report search under Halifax and West Community Council Meetings at: <https://www.halifax.ca/city-hall/agendas-meetings-reports>).

The motion was unanimously passed and on June 8th, Halifax Regional Council also passed the motion. This is a welcome first step, although the WLCC had hoped that the motion would go further than it did to provide protection of the properties from development in the near term. For now, the WLCC believes the recommendations do move the issue of the CCD lands forward, and wants to take advantage of the opportunity to continue our work associated with the Regional Plan Review.



Location of multi-unit complex development proposed for 48-50 Old Sambro Road. Potential footprint of complex is shown with properties outlined in white. Blue arrows show water courses and direction of water flow from hillsides along Dunbrack Street, under the Old Sambro Road and through the Catamaran Ponds.

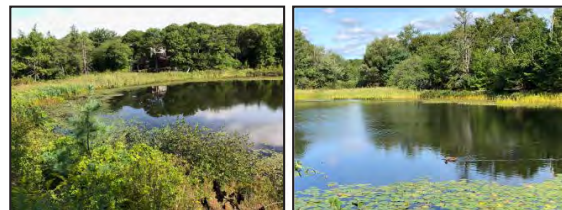
PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT REQUIRES REZONING

In 2020 a local developer made an application to HRM to rezone the lots at 48 and 50 Old Sambro Road (near the intersection with Dunbrack Street) from R2 to R3, to enable the development of a multi-unit (13) dwelling and underground parking. (Case #22890)

These lots are located within the Williams Lake watershed. Water originating from along the sides of Dunbrack Street flows under this intersection, feeding into the Catamaran Ponds. The water ultimately flows into Governor's Brook and from there to Colpitt Lake, a major source of water for Williams Lake. (Please see the WLCC Report on Water Flow in Williams Lake Watershed on the WLCC website for additional information.)

On January 26, 2021, Dana Oakley of the Spryfield Defenders began a petition to oppose the project. The petition now has 506 signatures.

WLCC is of the opinion that the rezoning and development of this land will cause disruption to the feeder stream and to the Catamaran Ponds, an area which also includes significant wetland marshes. We are concerned about the effect development can have on storm water quantity and quality. There is already significant development in the area (Spencer Ave, Lewis St, Lovell Ln, Feruz Cres, Spry Ave, Catamaran Rd); the additional stress created by a large development at this site could be extremely detrimental to the neighbouring wetlands.



Catamaran Ponds 1 (left) and 2 (right), Sept 13, 2020

The steep slopes on the subject properties would require a large amount of movement of soil and would threaten mature trees which help to shore up the banks.

As part of the planning process, HRM sought feedback from local residents via an online survey. WLCC prepared a one-page flyer which was distributed (while masked and keeping socially distanced) in the neighbourhood. The flyer provided residents with the survey link and other contact information, and encouraged them to complete the survey and to get in touch with the responsible HRM planner.

In addition, WLCC contacted Ducks Unlimited Canada. In the limited time available, this organization prepared and submitted directly to HRM a preliminary assessment of the importance of Catamaran Ponds and the connected stream and wetlands, expressing concerns particularly around the proximity of the lots to the water courses.

WLCC is opposed to any further development in the watershed, and is currently waiting for the staff recommendation to be presented to Halifax and West Community Council for a public hearing.

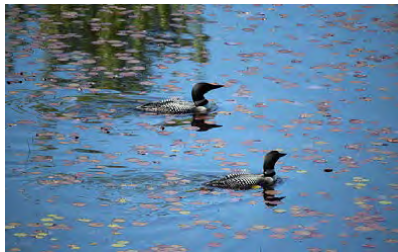
ON THE WING

Our stewardship of Williams Lake has included taking a keen interest in the bird populations that gather on the shores, in the wetlands and on the barrens of our watershed. Over the past few decades North America has experienced a 29% decline in the bird population (<https://www.cbc.ca/news/science/bird-population-decline-1.5288454>). Some of the biggest losses were among common bird species such as Sparrows and Warblers. This shocking situation is unfortunately reflected in the decline in bird populations in Nova Scotia. Here are 10 simple tips for how you can help the birds <https://ecologyaction.ca/issue-area/what-you-can-do-help-birds-nova-scotia>.

Our volunteers have noticed an increase in dogs running off leash in the Shaw Wilderness Park and in other parts of the Backlands. Although this can be fun for the dog, a run-in with a rowdy dog can be fatal for low bush and ground nesting birds and their babies. Please consider the safety and survival of wildlife to be a priority in wilderness areas.

In 2012, the WLCC completed its first bird survey of areas of the Backlands (Williams Lake Road to Powers Pond). Additional species were identified in a 2014 update to that report, and in 2020 we completed a Birding and Tree Study. (Reports available by using the search engine on our website <https://williamslakeecc.org>). This year we have initiated a four-season survey of the birds of the Backlands which covers most of that area that is accessible on foot. Several members of WLCC have volunteered to participate alongside our Bird ID expert, Fulton Lavender. As part of our community outreach, we will collaborate with the Backlands Coalition and the Urban Farm Museum Society of Spryfield to introduce the hobby of 'birding' to more people in our area. We expect to provide useful data for the area regarding species that are breeding, migrating through, or resident year round. Over time, these data will be useful indicators of the health of our watershed and the Backlands in providing habitat for birds.

If you are interested in helping out with this study, see our website to find out how to volunteer.



Loons on Williams Lake, May 2021. Photo courtesy of Graeme Rocker



Great blue heron visiting Williams Lake, June 2021. Photo courtesy of Melanie Dobson

COME JOIN THE WLCC

The Board needs your input and also new members. The WLCC depends on its volunteers. Please see our website to find out how to contact us, to volunteer and to join or renew membership. We look forward to seeing you in person at the AGM this fall.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS 2020-2021

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Murray Coolican	Nick Ross
Melanie Dobson	Craig Smith
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DID YOU KNOW?

That now you can give a one-year gift membership in the WLCC?

Go to <https://williamslakeecc.org/membership/>

WLCC MEMBERSHIP - JOIN US OR RENEW!!

WLCC membership is \$20 per household and runs from July 1 – June 30. To become a member or to renew your membership go to <https://williamslakeecc.org/membership/> and follow the cues, or complete and return the form below. **Please consider a donation to keep our work going.**

The mandate of the WLCC is to protect the health of Williams Lake.

MEMBERSHIP FORM (\$20 PER HOUSEHOLD)

To: WILLIAMS LAKE CONSERVATION COMPANY,
% 9 Hall's Road, Halifax, NS B3P 1P4

NAME: _____

ADDRESS: _____

PHONE: _____ EMAIL: _____

MEMBERSHIP : \$ _____ Optional DONATION: \$ _____



Williams Lake Conservation Company (<https://williamslakeecc.org/membership/>)
A registered non-profit community organization founded 1968