

## CONSERVATION COMPANY

[www.williamslakecc.org](http://www.williamslakecc.org)

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING  
TUESDAY, JUNE 23, 7:00-8:30 P.M.

CAPTAIN WILLIAM SPRY COMMUNITY CENTRE  
MULTI-PURPOSE ROOM  
16 SUSSEX STREET, HALIFAX B3R 1N9

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 come to our AGM. Representatives for BuildNS will be there to provide information on the status of the dam replacement. This is a chance for you to come and hear what is planned and to ask questions. We look forward to seeing you on June 23rd.

### NEW DAM TO SAVE WILLIAMS LAKE

by Murray Coolican, President, Williams Lake Conservation Company

The Williams Lake Conservation Company (WLCC) was created in 1968 to serve as caretakers of the lake and protectors of its fragile watershed. WLCC members have monitored lake water quality and levels for over 25 years, and have been involved in studies of flora and fauna in the watershed. Data amassed from these and other academic studies has helped the WLCC advocate for protection of the lands around the lake, and the vital ecosystems that are key to keeping the lake healthy. We have monitored developments in the watershed that might impact the lake and liaised with developers and HRM to try to mitigate deleterious consequences of building work and road maintenance in the watershed.

Over the past 50 years, a major concern of the WLCC has been our efforts to maintain the 200-year-old dam at the eastern end of the lake.



The Williams Lake dam, Sept. 2016 (Photo -Philip Howard)

As the dam has deteriorated, low lake levels in the summer have become increasingly frequent. In 2001, the WLCC rallied the community to finance an engineering report to find options to repair the earth and rock structure. That report recommended immediate action to replace the dam and included two flood simulation scenarios. We petitioned the city and government departments to save the lake without much success. No one wanted to take on this dam project.

In 2020 the Shaw Wilderness Park was established on Williams Lake by HRM, the Nature Conservancy of Canada, and the Shaw Group. This coincided with a hot summer, and a 5-ft drop in lake level which caused mud flats at the west end of the lake. The shocking photo of the mud flats made the front page of the Chronicle Herald newspaper. But still no level of government would take responsibility for saving Williams Lake by fixing the dam.



Mud flats on Williams Lake, Chronicle Herald (Photo -Tim Krochak)

That's when WLCC's Dam Committee partnered with the Williams Lake Dam Association (WLDA), and started posting our "Save Williams Lake" campaign, and got loud to get public and political attention. We had the science-based data on lake levels plus the blunt engineering report showing the floodplain predictions if the crumbling structure let go. We continued to petition all levels of government for a new dam - built to current standards, which would hold the lake waters to the required levels for a healthy environment and safe recreational use.

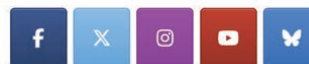
With loud, public support and our local politicians on board, especially MLA Brendan Maguire, the provincial government recognized the importance of saving Williams Lake and took on the task. The Nova Scotia Department of Public Works then tasked Build Nova Scotia (BuildNS), a crown corporation, to oversee the project.

Fast forward to today – BuildNS's tender to replace the old dam was awarded to Dexter Construction, a Nova Scotia contractor experienced in building dams. Dexter has already cleared trees and vegetation from the dam site. They have widened and enhanced the main trail to the dam to handle construction equipment, and by mid-May will move their heavy vehicles into the car park. Once the dam is finished in late fall of this year, the re-vegetation of the site and tree planting will finish off the project in the spring of next year.



Announcement of the new dam, October 2024. (l to r) David Benoit (President BuildNS) , Kathleen Hall (WLCC), Councillor Patty Cuttall, Minister Brendan Maguire, Margo Kerr (WLDA), Minister Kim Masland, Councillor Shawn Cleary and Jonathan Veale (VP BuildNS) (Photo- Michael Herrick)

FIND OUT MORE  
ABOUT THE WLCC



COME JOIN THE WLCC

The WLCC depends on its volunteers. If you are interested in joining or helping out, please feel free to contact us through our website: [www.williamslakecc.org](http://www.williamslakecc.org). Come to the AGM to learn more about the WLCC and the Williams Lake watershed.

## WORK TO BEGIN ON NEW WILLIAMS LAKE DAM by Cathy Vaughan

Construction on the long-anticipated replacement of the Williams Lake dam is set to begin this June, marking a major milestone in efforts to enhance safety for people living in the area, and to protect the ecosystem, and lakeside properties. The Province is investing \$4.965 million in this project, which is being managed by BuildNS.

The entrance to Shaw Wilderness Park off Purcells Cove Road and associated construction area were closed Monday, May 11, for the duration of the project, which is expected to continue to late October. Other trailheads and trail systems outside of the construction area remain open.

Crews will mobilize on site in late May, then begin the initial phase of construction, which will focus on the installation of a coffer dam, a temporary structure designed to divert water flow and create a dry, stable work environment. It allows crews to safely access the existing dam. Once the coffer dam is in place, water will be carefully redirected from the work zone, exposing the current dam structure and lakebed. This controlled process is designed to minimize environmental impact while preparing the site for the next phase.

Following dewatering, crews will begin dismantling and removing the existing dam, a rock and concrete structure that dates to the 1700s. Removal of the old dam is expected to begin mid-June with construction of the new dam beginning about a month later.

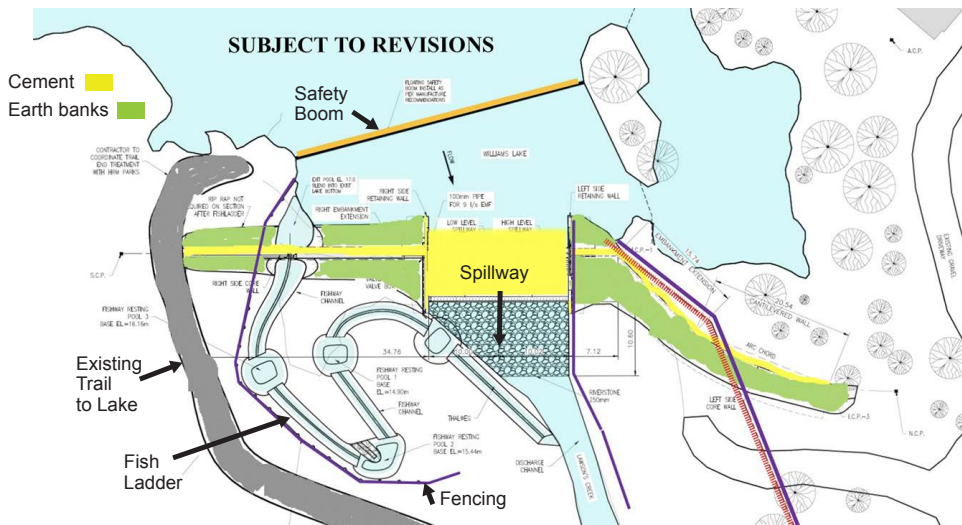
The replacement will be built to modern engineering and safety standards, ensuring long-term reliability in the face of changing climate conditions and the potential of heavy rainfall.



Residents can expect noise due to rock breaking and drilling as the old dam is dismantled. While the parking lot and trail to the dam are closed during construction for everyone's safety, the public is asked to be vigilant due to increased activity and additional traffic in the area.

Throughout the project, environmental monitoring and mitigation measures will be in place to protect local ecosystems and maintain water quality. Pre-construction water and property assessments were carried out, as well as bird and turtle surveys. Water samples will continue to be collected throughout construction.

Construction of the new dam will take place throughout the summer and be completed by the end of September. Project updates will be posted on BuildNS's website (<https://buildns.ca/projects/williams-lake-dam/>) and on WLCC social media.



Engineering schematic by Build Nova Scotia of the new dam on Williams Lake. May 2026.

## SNAPPING TURTLE ALERT by Melanie Dobson

Williams Lake is home to snapping turtles, a species listed as "of concern" under the Species at Risk Act. Watch out for these turtles, especially as they cross the roads in June when females leave the lake to search for suitable nesting sites.

The species is unusual in not being able to pull its head and legs into its shell for protection. Instead, it relies on a long flexible neck and a strong sharp beak-like jaw to rapidly reach out and "snap" at would-be attackers - so it's best not to try to pick one up to move them.

Although adult snappers have few natural predators, the species is endangered due to loss of habitat, the risk of being hit by cars, and because females take 17-19 years to reach reproductive age. Each year, females will dig a nest and lay 20-40 eggs before returning to the water. Only 1 in 350 hatchlings survives to reproductive age. If they do, they can live to be 70.



Last June, some Cunard Junior High School students were treated to the rare sight of a snapping turtle laying eggs in a nest she had dug on the Cunard Pond beach (above left) while another snapper showed support for our Save Williams Lake campaign (Photos- Melanie Dobson).

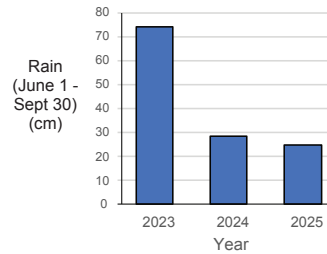
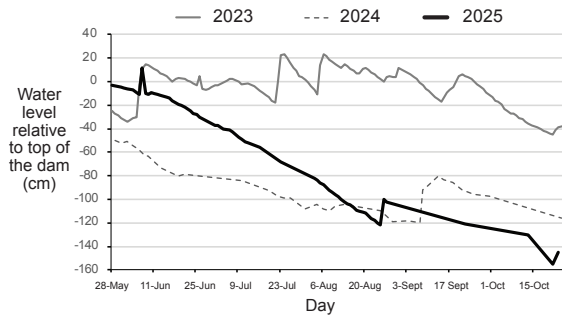


The level of Williams Lake hit a new low last fall (see below). Low rainfall and the high rate of water loss under the failing dam, led to the level dropping more than 1.5 metres (~ 5 feet) below the top of the dam. The photo above taken Oct 21, 2025, shows the water's edge several feet in front of the dam. At the same time, water was still flowing through fissures in the rock, deep under the visible dam structure, and escaping down Lawson's Creek.



In October 2025, at the shallower Williams Lake Road end of the lake, lower levels meant the lake had all but disappeared, replaced by a small pond and grassy mudflats. At least these deer seemed to be enjoying their new grazing spot.

BuildNS indicates a similar 5-ft drop in water level will occur during dam construction. (For context, the central part of the main lake is ~60 ft deep). The level will recover once the new dam is in place although this may not happen until after the fall rains.

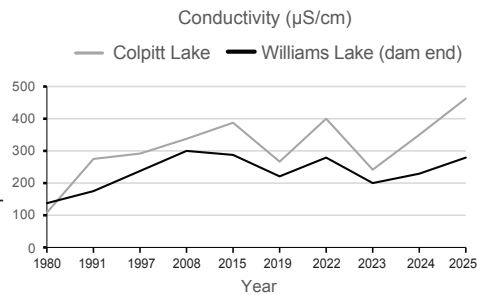


LAKE WATER QUALITY by Melanie Dobson and Katharine Studholme

WLCC membership dues support our continued microbiological and chemical monitoring of Williams Lake and Colpitt Lake. In addition, we have begun accumulating data on Williams Lake as part of the HRM LakeWatchers Program.

Our monitoring showed fecal coliform levels to be negligible for Williams Lake and Colpitt Lake last summer, making them safe for swimming. In other good news, despite the low water levels, blue-green algae blooms were not detected in Williams Lake or Cunard Pond last summer and the Cunard Beach remained open and heavily used for the season.

This is the third year that the WLCC is collecting water quality data for the LakeWatchers Program, led by HRM's Environment and Climate Change team. Sampling occurs at the deepest part of the lake twice a year and is complementary to data the WLCC has been collecting for years. The data indicate that Williams Lake is in good condition and continued data collection will enable us to detect any early signs of declining lake health should they occur, and take corrective action. LakeWatchers program data from 72 lakes around the HRM are already being used to inform municipal planning and development decisions.



Our chemical monitoring has shown increases in conductivity, a measure of salt content, for both Colpitt and Williams Lake water in recent years. This likely reflects road run-off and effects from developments elsewhere in the watershed that ultimately impact the quality of the water entering the lakes. We will continue to advocate for better protection of the watershed as a whole to minimize these impacts.

UPDATE: HRM REGIONAL AND SUBURBAN PLANS by Kathleen Hall

On June 19, 2025, HRM residents attended a public hearing at Regional Council to provide input on revisions to the regional plan, last updated in 2014. Council passed the new plan, but it was later refused by the provincial Minister of Municipal Affairs. The concerns focused on perceived 'environmental restrictions' and infrastructure requirements which might stall housing development. Specifically, the increase of the water course setback from 20 m to 30 m was rejected although this change had been contemplated for more than a decade and had been sought by the WLCC. With the provincial rejection the 2014 plan remains in effect.

HRM planning staff is about to ask the public for input on Phase 5 of the regional plan review. Essentially, this focuses on future growth planning and is especially important for the Urban Reserve zoned lands which exist in areas of Spryfield, including the Backlands (visit [backlandcoalition.ca/](http://backlandcoalition.ca/)).

Another HRM planning initiative is the suburban plan process. Outside the peninsula of Halifax and the Dartmouth area there are a myriad of suburban plans which need to be replaced. The Spryfield plan, also known as the Mainland South Secondary Planning Strategy, dates back to 1987. This review process was initiated at a community event held at the Captain William Spry library on January 29, 2026. Well over 100 people attended and thoughts and ideas of those present were collected and recorded.

Another event, held on April 21, 2026 by HRM Planning, titled "Herring Cove Road, Spryfield Mainstreet Visioning Workshop", was again well attended and enthusiastically received by participants. Community engagement continues with public participation open until June 15. Written submissions and/or completion of an online survey is very much encouraged (please visit [engagehalifax.ca/](http://engagehalifax.ca/)).

## BIRD TEAM ACTIVITIES by Martha Leary

Since 2014, WLCC members have supported the Backlands Bird Team with their dues and donations. The team is very active in our Williams Lake Watershed and other parts of the Halifax Backlands. The Bird Team is comprised of members of the WLCC and the Backlands Coalition, 'friends of friends' and students from Dalhousie University. Consider joining us for bird adventures. If that's not your thing, please consider making a donation to WLCC.

Some of our recent accomplishments:

- Conducted 5 Bird Walks in cooperation with the Halifax Public Library and Bird Friendly Halifax and our District 11 Councillor, Patty Cuttell. Our WLCC Bird Guide was distributed to participants
- Wrote a monthly column for the Chebucto News that highlights local birds
- Partnered with the Captain William Spry Library to develop a circulating Bird watching kit for children that includes binoculars, a field guide to Nova Scotia birds, and the WLCC Bird Guide (*see below*).



Explorer Kit: Birds, Captain William Spry Public Library.  
(Photo: Agnes O'Neill, Library Program Specialist)

- Monitored bird life in the Halifax Backlands as we have done for many years, and conducted a systematic bird survey of several areas in the Backlands
- Invited the public to two meetings where we shared information about birds and our projects
- Maintained an up-to-date list of endangered, threatened or vulnerable species in the Halifax Backlands
- Partnered for a third year with Dalhousie University for research on the Common Nighthawk.

The WLCC has funded specialized equipment for Dalhousie University students to study the Common Nighthawk, a "Species at Risk" in Nova Scotia. Our long-term support of this work has increased our knowledge of the characteristics of the habitats most favoured by the Common Nighthawk. This collaboration has been very successful, indicating at least 4 breeding pairs of Common Nighthawk in the Halifax Backlands.

### ENVIRONMENTAL VOLUNTEER AWARD

Congratulations go to Cathy Vaughan, Chair of the WLCC Dam Committee, and Margo Kerr, head the Williams Lake Dam Association. Last April they were honoured with a "Certificate for the Environmental Volunteer" by MLA Brendan Maguire of Halifax Atlantic. The award was in recognition of their exceptional dedication to serving the Spryfield area community by raising awareness of the current plight of the Williams Lake dam through their "Save Williams Lake" campaign.

### WLCC BOARD OF DIRECTORS 2025-2026

Murray Coolican	Kathleen Hall	Katharine Studholme
Melanie Dobson	Martha Leary	Sanja Trussell
Stephen Glazier	Leslie Randall	Cathy Vaughan
Deborah Hall		

Philip Howard • Webmaster  
David Patriquin • Honorary Director  
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### WLCC MEMBERSHIP - JOIN US OR RENEW!!

WLCC membership is \$40 per household, \$25 per individual, or pay what you can, and runs from July 1 – June 30. To become a member or to renew your membership go to <https://williamslakecc.org/membership/> and follow the cues, or complete and return the form below.

*You can give a one-year gift membership to the WLCC  
Go to <https://williamslakecc.org/membership/>*

Check us out on Bluesky, Facebook, Instagram, X and Youtube or on our website where among other things, you will find links to colour versions of this and previous newsletters and a printable membership form.

**Bluesky:** <https://bsky.app/profile/williamslakecc.org>  
**Facebook:** [facebook.com/WLCCHalifaxNS](https://facebook.com/WLCCHalifaxNS)  
**Twitter:** [twitter.com/williamslakecc](https://twitter.com/williamslakecc)  
**Instagram:** [instagram.com/williamslakecc/](https://instagram.com/williamslakecc/)  
**YouTube:** [youtube.com/@WilliamsLakeCC](https://youtube.com/@WilliamsLakeCC)

### MEMBERSHIP FORM

MEMBERSHIP CATEGORY     \$40 per household     \$25 per individual

To: WILLIAMS LAKE CONSERVATION COMPANY  
c/o Deborah Hall, PO Box 20117, Halifax RPO, Spryfield, NS B3R 2K9



Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_ # of household members: \_\_\_\_\_

Optional emails of other household members: \_\_\_\_\_

Optional donation: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

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