

Source Protection Annual Progress Report

I. Introduction

This annual progress report outlines the progress made in implementing the source protection plans for the Ausable Bayfield and Maitland Valley source protection areas, as required by the Ontario Clean Water Act, 2006 and its regulations. It highlights actions taken to protect the sources of our drinking water, the groundwater aquifers and Lake Huron.

Protecting the sources of our drinking water is the first step in a multi-barrier approach to safeguard the quality and quantity of our water supplies. The source protection plans are the culmination of extensive science-based assessment, research, consultation with the community, and collaboration with local stakeholders and the Province of Ontario.

This is the seventh annual progress report submitted for the Ausable Bayfield Maitland Valley (ABMV) Source Protection Region. It covers the period of April 2015 to December 31st, 2023, and summarizes progress made in the year 2023.



II. A message from your local Source Protection Committee

P : Progressing Well/On Target – The majority of the source protection plan policies have been implemented and/or are progressing.

Following approval of the Source Protection Plans (SPPs) in 2015, the Committee has focused on tasks related to implementation and amendments. This includes assessing progress made by stakeholders in implementing the SPP policies, identifying areas for improvement, and overseeing amendments. In 2023, proposed updates to the SPPs, developed per section 36 of the Clean Water Act, were submitted to the province following extensive consultation. The Committee was pleased with the positive comments received regarding the proposed policy changes.

The Source Protection Committee (SPC) for the ABMV Source Protection Region reviewed the recent implementation results, noting that significant progress has been made since the SPPs came into effect in 2015. All of the policies in the source protection plan are implemented, in progress or require no further action. In addition, 100% of significant drinking water threats have been addressed. The SPC is pleased to see that these threats are being addressed, and that the objectives of the Clean Water Act are being achieved. The SPC feels confident in their assessment that implementation of the Source Protection Plans is 'progressing well / on target'.

The Committee would like to acknowledge the local municipalities, stakeholders, and other implementing bodies for their contribution to this annual progress report, and for their ongoing efforts to implement the SPP policies. The great progress made to date on SPP implementation would not have been possible without their strong support.

III. Our Watershed

To learn more, please read our assessment report(s) and source protection plan(s)

The Ausable Bayfield Maitland Valley (ABMV) Source Protection Region (SPR) is made up of the Ausable Bayfield and Maitland Valley source protection areas (SPAs). The two SPAs overlie the same jurisdiction as the Ausable Bayfield and Maitland Valley conservation authorities. Their jurisdictions abut and their major rivers flow into Lake Huron. The combined watersheds are approximately 5,690 square kilometres in size, with a combined population of 105,000. There are six counties and 24 lower-tier municipalities entirely or partly within the SPR. There are no First Nations within the two watershed areas. The Ausable Bayfield Source Protection Area is adjacent to the Chippewas of Kettle and Stony Point First Nation.

Land uses can have a significant impact on water quality and quantity. Agriculture is the major land use in the region, with small urban areas scattered throughout. Their watersheds share common patterns of landscapes and natural systems. Their towns are small; their economies are based on the economic driver of a thriving agricultural sector, a significant manufacturing sector as well as the additional economic pillars of tourism, heritage and culture. Lake Huron is a major driver of the tourism industry.

In the Ausable Bayfield Maitland Valley Source Protection Region there are 25 municipal groundwater well systems and two Lake Huron intakes. Approximately half of the population is served by these systems; the remainder receive their water from private or communal wells and intakes. There are two great lake intakes - Lake Huron Primary Water Supply System (in Port Blake, near Grand Bend); and the Goderich Water Supply.

The Wellhead Protection Areas for the municipal well systems are: Township of Ashfield-Colborne-Wawanosh: Century Heights, Dungannon, Huron Sands; Municipality of Bluewater: Varna; Municipality of Central Huron: Auburn, Benmiller, Clinton, Kelly, McClinchey, SAM, Vandewetering; Municipality of Huron East: Brucefield, Brussels, Seaforth; Township of Huron Kinloss: Lucknow, Whitechurch, Ripley (well system itself is outside ABMV SPR); Town of Minto: Clifford (well system itself is outside ABMV SPR), Harriston, Palmerston; Municipality of Morris-Turnberry: Belgrave; Township of North Huron: Blyth, Wingham; Municipality of North Perth: Atwood, Gowanstown, Listowel, Molesworth.

The source of water for the wells is typically deep bedrock aquifers, which are protected by a thick overburden. There have been no Issue Contributing Areas identified in the SPR. There has been a number of changes to these well systems since approval of the source protection plans in 2015, triggering the need for several amendments to the Source Protection Plans. An amendment under Section 34 of the Clean Water Act, 2006 was approved by the Province in 2019, with effective date of February, 5, 2019. In 2023, the Zurich groundwater system was removed from the Plan, via a 'section 51' amendment. An update per section 36 of the Clean Water Act was submitted to the Province in March 2023 following extensive consultation.

IV. At a Glance: Progress on Source Protection Plan Implementation

1. Source Protection Plan Policies

The overall progress score on achieving source protection plan objectives in this reporting period is: P : Progressing Well/On Target

All of the legally binding policies that address significant drinking water threats are implemented or in progress.

All of the policies that address moderate and low drinking water threats are implemented or have been evaluated with no further action required. More than 80% of policies that are not directly related to drinking water threat activities are implemented, and the remainder have been reviewed and require no further action. Note that these policies are 'non-binding' on implementing bodies.

2. Municipal Progress: Addressing Risks on the Ground

P : Progressing Well / On Target

The Region contains almost the full extent of Huron County, plus portions of Bruce, Perth, Wellington, Lambton and Middlesex counties. Nine lower-tier municipalities and four upper-tier municipalities in our source protection region have vulnerable areas where significant drinking water threat policies apply.

All of the municipalities in our source protection region have indicated that they have processes in place to ensure their day-to-day planning decisions conform to our source protection plans.

Twelve municipalities in our source protection region are required to review and amend their Official Plans to ensure they conform to the local source protection plans (SPPs). Ten of the municipalities (lower and upper tier) have completed the required Official Plan update. The remainder are in progress. Nine municipalities are required to update their Zoning Bylaws to conform to the SPP; eight are complete. It is anticipated that the remaining Official Plan and Zoning Bylaw updates will be completed within the next year.

3. Septic Inspections

P: Progressing well / On target.

In areas where an on-site sewage system (septic system) is considered a significant drinking water threat, inspections are required once every five years in accordance with the Ontario Building Code's mandatory on-site sewage system inspection program.

In the ABMV Source Protection Region, 204 on-site sewage systems are subject to the mandatory inspection program. For the first round of inspections, 99% of these systems were inspected within the five-year timeline, in accordance with the Ontario Building Code. The inspection results found the majority are functioning as designed and carrying out regular pump-outs.

Almost 80 per cent of systems were re-inspected within the second five-year round of inspections. Although all systems have received an initial inspection, there were challenges meeting the second five-year timeline. Delays are attributed to staffing issues as well as impacts related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The third round of septic system inspections is underway. In 2023, 38 of 51 planned inspections were completed. Delays are attributed to difficulties contacting some landowners; Orders were issued where necessary.

In the ABMV SPR, the inspections were carried out by municipal staff or B.M. Ross and Associates Limited (for the Township of Huron-Kinloss). Educational materials were reviewed with the landowner at the time of the initial inspection.

4. Risk Management Plans

P : Progressing Well/On Target

In the 2023 reporting period, three risk management plans (RMP) were established in our source protection region; two were new RMPs and one was a replacement. Since our source protection plans took effect in April 2015, a total of 127 risk management plans have been established, with 85 remaining in effect. All of the required risk management plans are in place.

Since our Source Protection Plans took effect in 2015, Risk Management Official/Inspectors have carried out almost 450 inspections for prohibited or regulated activities. In 2023, 63 inspections were conducted. This includes inspections required for risk management plans, to ensure compliance with prohibition and to verify threat activities. To date, there is a 100% compliance rate with the risk management plans established in our source protection region.

5. Provincial Progress: Addressing Risks on the Ground

P : Progressing Well/On Target

The Ontario ministries have reviewed previously issued provincial approvals (e.g. prescribed instruments, such as environmental compliance approvals under the Environmental Protection Act) where they have been identified as a tool in our plan to address existing activities that pose a significant risk to sources of drinking water. The ministries have identified prescribed Instruments that may be subject to significant drinking water threat policies and require further review. The provincial approvals are amended or revoked where necessary to conform to Source Protection Plan policies. Our policies set out a timeline of three years to complete the review and make any necessary amendments. The ministries have completed this for 100% of previously issued prescribed instruments in our source protection region.

6. Source Protection Awareness and Change in Behaviour

Eighty-eight Drinking Water Protection Zone signs have been installed in our source protection region. The signs are installed on roads near municipal water sources to alert citizens that their actions in these zones can have an impact on a municipal drinking water source. The signs are an effective way to educate and remind everyone of the need to protect our sources of water. Several of the municipalities in this region have included information about the signs and the Drinking Water Source Protection program on their websites.

Significant efforts have been made by source protection authority staff to implement the education and outreach policies in the Ausable Bayfield and Maitland Valley Source Protection Plans. This successful Education and Outreach program - developed in collaboration between municipalities and conservation authorities - includes an updated website and active social media presence. Fact sheets were created for specific sectors as well as for individual well systems. This focused outreach aims to improve awareness about local sources of water.

Between 2020 and 2023, a series of 10 videos, featuring members of the Source Protection Committee, was created to promote source water protection. The series has received more than 35,000 views to date.

7. Source Protection Plan Policies: Summary of Delays

Significant progress has been made on implementing all policies related to significant drinking water threats. In 2023, all Ausable Bayfield and Maitland Valley Source Protection Plan (SPP) policies that directly address significant drinking water threats are implemented or in progress.

With our Region's Source Protection Plans coming into effect in April of 2015, we are in year eight of the established five-year timeline for implementation of our significant drinking water threat policies. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, several implementing bodies were unable to meet these timelines. However, all of the required Risk Management Plans are now in place. Several municipalities encountered delays regarding the Official Plan updates required to conform to the SPPs. However, steady progress has been made, with only two remaining to complete.

8. Source Water Quality: Monitoring and Actions

In our source protection region, no Issues have been identified in our local science-based assessment reports regarding the quality of the sources of municipal drinking water.

9. Science-based Assessment Reports: Work Plans

No work plans related to water budget, GUDI or ICA were required to be implemented for our assessment report(s).

10. More from the Watershed

To learn more about our source protection region/area, visit our local website home page:
<https://www.sourcewaterinfo.on.ca>

