

Source Protection Annual Progress Report – 2024

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. This report 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 eighth annual progress report submitted for the Ausable Bayfield Maitland Valley (ABMV) Source Protection Region. It covers the period of April 2015 to December 31st, 2024, and summarizes progress made in the year 2024.



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.

The Source Protection Committee is pleased to mark the completion of two amendments to the Source Protection Plans (SPPs) in 2024. These updates, completed per sections 34 and 36 of the Clean Water Act (CWA), include updated mapping of wellhead protection areas, plus considerable policy changes to meet current Technical Rules.

The Committee reviewed the implementation results for the ABMV Source Protection Region, noting the important progress made since the SPPs came into effect. All SPP policies are implemented or in progress. Threats to drinking water are being addressed, and the objectives of the CWA are being achieved. The SPC feels confident in their assessment that SPP implementation is 'progressing well / on target.'

The Committee was pleased to support local 'Water Wise' events in 2024, in support of the Best Practices for Non-municipal Water Systems initiative. These events were an excellent opportunity to increase awareness about drinking water threats, and encourage private well owners to test their water; protect their water; and maintain their well and septic system. We are pleased that the Province of Ontario continues to provide free bacterial water testing for private well owners, as this is a vital service to our rural communities.

The Committee would like to acknowledge the ministries, municipalities, and other implementing bodies for their contribution to this report, and for their ongoing efforts to protect drinking water. The great progress made 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. 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* (CWA) was approved by the Province in 2019. In 2023, the Zurich groundwater system was removed from the Plan, via a 'section 51' amendment. In March 2024, an update per section 36 of the CWA was approved, following extensive consultation. In July 2024, an amendment per section 34 of the CWA was approved, incorporating changes to the Century Heights and Lucknow wellhead protection areas.

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.

Approximately 80% of significant threats are addressed. This decrease from 100% in the previous year is due to new or revised wellhead protection areas, plus changes to the provincial Technical Rules that define the risk level.

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, and underwent consultation in 2024. 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. 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.

In the ABMV Source Protection Region, 202 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.

The third round of septic system inspections is now underway. In 2024, 10 of 29 planned inspections were completed. Delays are attributed to difficulties contacting some landowners; Orders will be issued for compliance where necessary.

4. Risk Management Plans

P: Progressing Well/On Target

In the 2024 reporting period, one risk management plan (RMP) was renewed in our source protection region. Since our source protection plans took effect in April 2015, a total of 128 risk management plans have been established, with 80 remaining in effect.

Since our source protection plans took effect in 2015, Risk Management Official/Inspectors have carried out 503 inspections for prohibited or regulated activities. In 2024, 54 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 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.

No significant threats were identified in 2024 through screening by the provincial ministries.

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 raise awareness about protecting 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.

Ongoing efforts are made by source protection authority staff to implement the education and outreach policies in the Ausable Bayfield and Maitland Valley source protection plans. Education and Outreach tools include a website and active social media presence. Fact sheets were created for specific activities 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.

7. Source Protection Plan Policies: Summary of Delays

Significant progress has been made on implementing all policies related to significant drinking water threats. In 2024, all Ausable Bayfield and Maitland Valley Source Protection Plan (SPP) policies that directly address significant drinking water threats are implemented or in progress.

Several municipalities encountered delays regarding the Official Plan updates required to conform to the SPPs. However, steady progress has been made, and the remaining two Plans underwent consultation in 2024, with anticipated approval in 2025.

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 (groundwater under direct influence) systems or ICA (Issue Contributing Area) were required to be implemented for our assessment report(s).

A comprehensive update to the Source Protection Plans and associated Assessment Reports was completed in March 2024, per section 36 of the Clean Water Act, as directed by the province. In addition, a locally initiated update per section 34 of the Act was approved in July 2024 to incorporate changes to two water supply systems.

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>

