

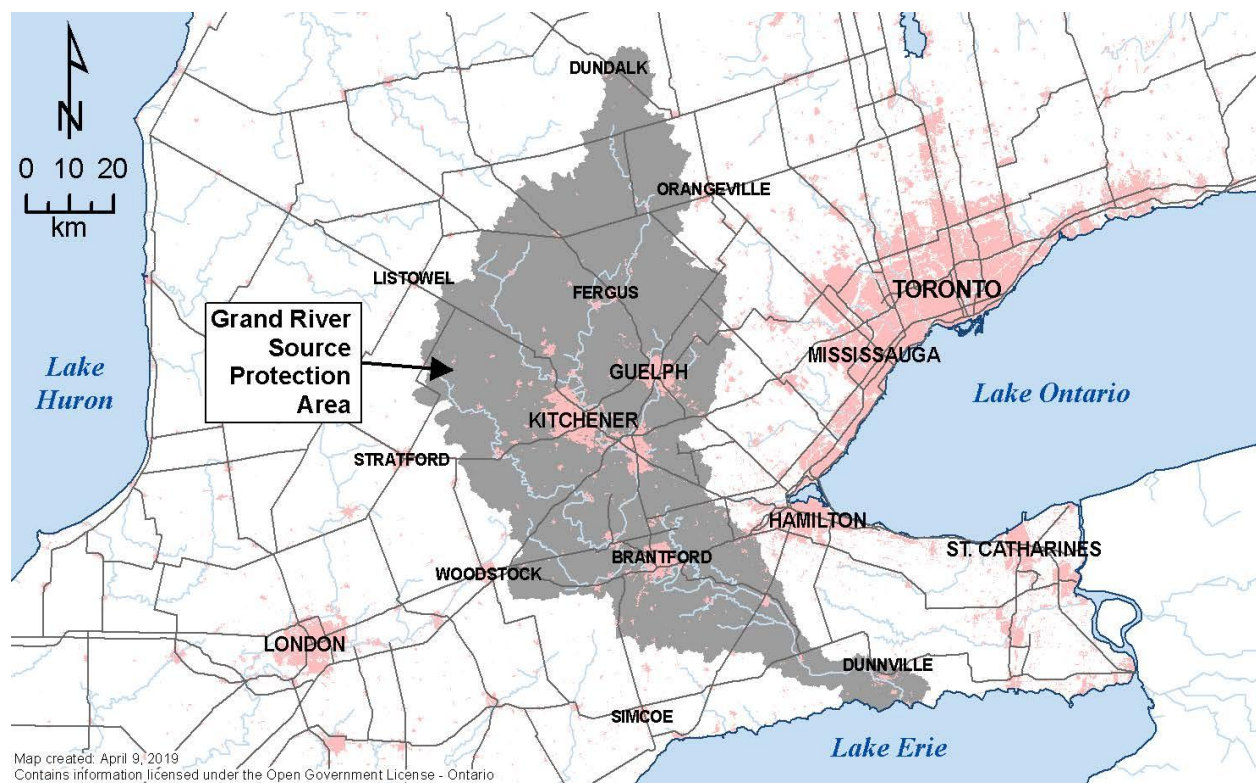
Grand River Source Protection Area Annual Progress Report 2025

I. Introduction

This annual progress report outlines the progress made in implementing our Source Protection Plan for the Grand River Source Protection Area, as required by the *Clean Water Act, 2006* and its regulations.

The Source Protection Plan is the culmination of extensive science-based assessment, research, consultation, and collaboration with local stakeholders and the provincial government. When policies in the plan are implemented, it ensures that activities carried out near municipal wells and surface water intakes will not pose significant risk to the sources of our drinking water.

We acknowledge and recognize the efforts made by our local municipalities, stakeholders, and Source Protection Committee in the development and implementation of the Plan.



Map 1 Grand River Source Protection Area

II. A message from your local Source Protection Committee

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

Each year, the Source Protection Committee considers information provided by policy implementors and rates the extent to which Source Protection Plan objectives are being achieved. A key component to the Committee's approach is that the overall rating for meeting Plan objectives is determined by the percentage of policies that are implemented or in-progress.

As of December 31, 2025, **100%** of legally binding Plan policies that address significant drinking water threats are implemented or in progress for the Grand River Source Protection Area.

The primary consideration is whether forward progress is being made on policy implementation and whether implementing bodies have processes in place for addressing significant drinking water threats. All municipalities in the Grand River Source Protection Area have internal processes in place to ensure planning decisions conform to the Plan and are managing or prohibiting new threats as appropriate. Similarly, provincial ministries continue to implement standard operational procedures to address significant threats regulated under provincial approvals.

Previous annual reports quantified the number of significant drinking water threats identified and managed within the Source Protection Area. While the number of threats are still considered, it is not the primary measure for rating overall progress. The reason for this is that year-over-year comparisons of threat counts can be misleading. Several factors affect the number of identified threats and whether they are reported as managed, such as Plan amendments (can result in addition or removal of vulnerable areas and threats), changes in property ownership, and updates to the Technical Rules for identifying threats.

III. Our Watershed

The Grand River Source Protection Area (watershed) is the largest in southern Ontario, covering an area of approximately 6,800 square kilometers. The Grand River begins as a small stream in the Dufferin Highlands and travels about 310 kilometers before emptying into Lake Erie at Port Maitland.

A key feature of the watershed is its major moraine systems, including the Orangeville, Waterloo, and Paris and Galt moraines. The moraines have extensive sand and gravel deposits and their overburden aquifers provide groundwater for municipal and private use. The extensive sand and gravel deposits associated with the Norfolk Sand Plain yield substantial water supplies to local users. Bedrock aquifers, including the Gasport, Guelph, and Salina formations, are also an important source of water.

There are 39 municipalities and two First Nations communities within the Grand River Source Protection Area, with a total watershed population of about one million people. Most of the population resides in the larger urban areas Kitchener, Waterloo, Cambridge, Guelph and Brantford. The Grand River is home to the Six Nations of the Grand River and the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation.

The residents of the Grand River watershed receive drinking water supplies from both private and municipal supplies. There are currently 42 municipal systems and one First Nation system in the Grand River Source Protection Area, including 7 surface water intakes and 216 wells. The watershed is also an intensive agricultural area, with farms making up about 70% of the watershed.

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

1. Source Protection Plan Policies and Addressing Significant Risks

P: Progressing Well / On Target

Of the legally-binding plan policies that address significant drinking water threats, 100% are implemented, in progress, or implemented because policy outcome(s) have been evaluated and it is determined that no further action(s) is required.

2. Municipal Progress: Addressing Risks on the Ground

P: Progressing Well / On Target

Within the Grand River Source Protection Area, 33 municipalities have vulnerable areas where significant drinking water threat policies apply. Planning departments and building officials are screening applications for locations within vulnerable areas where threats to drinking water sources are possible and Source Protection Plan policies may apply.

A total of 24 municipalities are required to review and update their Official Plan to ensure it conforms with the Source Protection Plan the next time they undertake an Official Plan review under the *Planning Act, 1990*. As of December 31, 2025, a total of 10 municipalities reported their Official Plans conform to the Source Protection Plan. A total of 14 municipalities have Official Plan amendments in progress or pending. These conformity exercises are to address recent Source Protection Plan amendments or to adopt new Official Plan policies as result of legislative changes introduced in Bill 23, the *More Homes Built Faster Act, 2022*.

3. Septic Inspections

P: Progressing Well / On Target

There are 1,688 on-site sewage systems in the Grand River Source Protection Area that are significant drinking water threats and require inspection every five years in accordance with the Ontario Building Code.

Of the 402 systems that were due for inspection in 2025, 354 (88%) of the inspections were completed. Of the systems that were inspected, results found 9 systems (2.5%) required remedial action (e.g. maintenance work).

Municipalities are working with landowners to obtain additional information needed to complete outstanding inspections. Where landowners refused entry, compliance orders are being sought. Some inspections were not completed for other reasons, such as houses being vacant and systems not being in use.

4. Risk Management Plans

P: Progressing Well / On Target

The Grand River Source Protection Plan contains policies that require the development of Risk Management Plans to manage certain drinking water threats. All Plan policies that require a Risk Management Plan have been reported as implemented or in progress.

A total of 624 Risk Management Plans are in place in the Grand River Source Protection Area. In 2025, 117 new Risk Management Plans were agreed to that manage 136 significant drinking water threat activities.

There is no timeline for establishing Risk Management Plans in the Lake Erie Source Protection Region. Municipalities continue to prioritize areas and properties that pose the highest risk when establishing Risk Management Plans. Additionally, significant effort is spent on conducting inspections to verify whether perceived threats are actually occurring on the ground. If threats are determined to no longer exist, Risk Management Plans are revoked. This impacts the cumulative total of reported Risk Management Plans in place each year.

In 2025, Risk Management Officials completed a total of 233 inspections to achieve compliance or to verify threats for activities designated under Section 58 of the *Clean Water Act, 2006*. Zero cases of contravention were reported; however, 16 inspections in the Township of Centre Wellington found non-compliance with the contents of the Risk Management Plan. An additional 216 inspections were carried out for activities prohibited under Section 57 of the *Clean Water Act, 2006*. Zero cases of contravention were reported.

The increase in the number of potential existing threats in recent years has substantially increased the workload for some municipalities. Risk Management Plan negotiations are complex and lengthy processes. In some cases, landowners voluntarily address threat activities on their property; however, executing the formal agreement is a challenge. Under Section 61 of Ontario Regulation 287/07, a landowner may request an exemption from a Risk Management Plan if their provincial approval already includes source protection risk management measures. Risk Management Officials must wait to receive this statement of conformity before reporting a threat as addressed, even if the risk to drinking water is being managed.

To manage future threat activities, municipalities have screening processes in place to ensure development applications are reviewed for potential threat activities and for the applicability of Plan policies. Significant effort is required for this screening. In 2025, a total of 91 notices were issued for activities to which a Risk Management Plan policy applied. An additional 784 notices were issued where the activities did not trigger a Plan policy.

5. Provincial Progress: Addressing Risks on the Ground

P: Progressing Well / On Target

Ontario ministries review applications for new or amended provincial approvals (i.e. prescribed instruments, such as Environmental Compliance Approvals issued under the Environmental Protection Act) where they have been identified as a tool in the Plan to address activities that pose a significant risk to source water.

The Province has established Standard Operating Policies to ensure that approvals take into account the science generated through the Drinking Water Source Protection Program and policies in the Source Protection Plan. Provincial approvals are issued, denied, amended, or revoked to conform to Plan policies. Where necessary, conditions are added to approvals to ensure that the activity does not pose a significant threat to sources of drinking water.

The Plan sets a timeline of three years to complete a review of previously issued approvals and make any necessary changes to address source protection requirements. In 2021 the Technical Rules for identifying threats was updated. Most ministries have completed a review of previously issued approvals under the 2021 Technical Rules; however, some branches within the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks (MECP) are still completing this process.

The Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Agribusiness (OMAFRA) reported one newly identified existing instrument that required a review for source protection. The approval was amended to include standard source water protection conditions.

In 2025, Ontario ministries reported that 18 new applications for prescribed instruments underwent a detailed review for source protection in the Grand River Source Protection Area. Of these applications, six are subject to a Source Protection Plan policy that requires the significant drinking water threat to be managed through conditions. Three prescribed instruments have been issued or amended with conditions, while three of the applications remain under review. None of the applications reviewed involved significant drinking water threat activities prohibited by the Source Protection Plan.

6. Source Protection Awareness and Change in Behaviour

To raise awareness about the protection of local drinking water sources, source protection signs have been installed on Provincial highways and municipal roads surrounding vulnerable areas.

Municipalities across the Lake Erie Source Protection Region have established education and outreach programs and other successful initiatives to enhance Plan implementation and increase awareness of source water protection. For example, Wellington County reported a total of 45 education and outreach events completed in 2025.

Examples of programs and initiatives include:

- Distribution of online and printed information to properties engaged in significant threat activities and with transport pathways
- Source Water Protection content created and delivered at Children's Water Festivals for school aged children
- Public campaigns and outreach programs promoting sustainability, water conservation, wastewater treatment and source protection
- Research, information sharing, and monitoring of growing drinking water concerns (e.g. chloride, PFAs)
- Streamlining development review processes through improved internal protocols and resources (e.g. online screening forms)
- Improvements to internal municipal protocols and practices related to source water protection (e.g. salt management plans, standard operating procedures).
- Spill prevention, spill contingency, and emergency response plans
- Incentive programs to help landowners protect water quality and to promote best practices
- Adoption and implementation of climate change strategies and initiatives
- Stewardship, restoration projects and watershed improvements
- Development of water quantity policies for incorporation into the Source Protection Plan

7. Source Protection Plan Policies: Summary of Delays

Not applicable to the Grand River Source Protection Area.

8. Source Water Quality: Monitoring and Actions

As of December 31, 2025, there are 11 drinking water systems in the Grand River Source Protection Area with identified drinking water Issues (i.e. chloride, nitrate, sodium, and trichloroethylene).

Nitrate Issues have been identified in five drinking water systems in the County of Brant, City of Guelph, and Region of Waterloo. A decreasing concentration/trend was reported for the Mannheim Village Well Supply and Shingletown Well Supply (Wilmot Centre), while no change in concentration/trend was reported for the Guelph Well Supply. An increasing concentration/trend was reported for the St. George Well Supply and Paris Water Supply, except for no change reported at Paris wells P31 and P32.

Trichloroethylene (TCE) Issues have been identified in five drinking water systems in the Township of Centre Wellington, City of Guelph, and Region of Waterloo with no change in concentration/trend reported; except for the Cambridge Well Supply which saw a decreasing concentration/trend.

Chloride Issues have been identified in seven drinking water systems in the Township of Centre Wellington, Guelph / Eramosa Township, Region of Waterloo, and County of Brant with an increasing concentration/trend or no change reported. No wells reported a decrease in chloride concentrations in 2025.

Sodium Issues have been identified in five drinking water systems in Guelph / Eramosa Township, the Region of Waterloo and the County of Brant with an increasing concentration/trend or no change reported for most wellfields. No wells reported a decrease in sodium concentrations in 2025.

Issue Contributing Areas (WHPA-ICAs) have been delineated for all Issues with the exception of the identified Chloride and Sodium Issues at the Rockwood Well Supply, which are currently under review.

Municipalities continue to implement risk management strategies to address threat activities associated with Issue Contributing Areas. All municipalities have monitoring and treatment systems in place to ensure that municipal drinking water meets the requirements of the *Safe Drinking Water Act, 2002*.

Municipalities have used the results of ongoing monitoring to determine where further investigation is needed and to conduct assessments to identify sources and/or explain concentration variability. Continuous, long-term monitoring will

help determine if implementation of Plan policies and other actions are improving raw water quality for these systems.

9. Science-based Assessment Reports: Work Plans

An order was received from the Ministry in June 2020 (revised November 2025) providing for a comprehensive review and update to the Grand River Assessment Report and Source Protection Plan under Section 36 of the *Clean Water Act*, 2006. The Plan update is currently underway.

Examples of tasks in the workplan include incorporation of:

- Growth and infrastructure changes (e.g. new drinking water supply wells)
- Technical Rule changes
- Transport pathway updates
- Results of environmental monitoring programs (e.g. review of monitoring data to evaluate existing or the potential for Issues identified at municipal drinking water wells)

10. More from the Watershed

To learn more about the Grand River Source Protection Area, visit the [Lake Erie Source Protection website](#).