

# Who's looking out for our water?



## Myths and fairy tales about drinking water

### Myth 1: We have an inexhaustible supply of drinking water

- There is a finite amount of water on the earth. It just keeps on getting recycled over and over in the watercycle. If we take more than can be replaced naturally, we run short of water.

### Myth 2: All sources of water away from urban areas are pristine and clean

- Groundwater, lakes, streams and wetlands are impacted by other ecosystems and human activities within a watershed.
- All things are connected in a watershed and what occurs upstream eventually affects people and conditions downstream.

- Although our groundwater, lakes, rivers and streams can tolerate limited stress, long-term problems can develop if we use too much water or allow long-term contamination. Surface and groundwater sources are contaminated from air, land and water contamination.

- These problems can be expensive or, in some cases, impossible to treat.

### Myth 3: We don't have to protect sources of drinking water when we can just treat the water and make it clean enough to drink

- Treatment systems do not remove all contamination from water, particularly chemical contamination.
- Ontario has 2 million residents who draw their drinking water directly from untreated groundwater sources. They do not have access to treated water.
- It is cheaper to protect sources of water than to treat the water later with expensive treatment systems.
- It is better for all of us, overall, if we protect sources of water and their ecosystems (plants, wetlands, forests) that have an impact on these sources.

## Getting to the source: protecting our drinking water

### Source water protection

Source water protection is a phrase used to describe the idea of ensuring safe sources of drinking water. This means keeping our rivers, streams, lakes, wetlands and groundwater healthy. All these sources of water are linked in a watershed and everything we do ultimately impacts the health of our watersheds. Rather than always relying on expensive technology to clean our water, let's make sure we take the first step to prevent our lakes, rivers and streams from being contaminated in the first place. This is source protection.

### Wetlands: the workhorses of watersheds

Did you know that wetlands play a crucial role in helping to ensure safe drinking water for Ontario?

The vegetation in a healthy wetland helps to trap any sediment, nutrients and pollutants in the water, preventing them from traveling downstream in the watershed. The plants take up the nutrients, and the soils and microbes in the wetland break down the contaminants, rendering them less harmful.

Wetlands can be found all throughout Ontario: along our lakes, rivers, and streams; around our farm ponds; or all alone in a field or low-lying area. They also

create good fish and wildlife habitats. They all have a unique and important role to play in helping to ensure that our water is safe to drink.

So, next time you see a swamp or marsh in your community, think of your kitchen

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tap and the job that wetlands do to help keep your drinking water clean!

### Multi-barrier system

Our drinking water is best protected by using an approach that prevents contamination from entering our drinking water sources and then to our taps. While it is important to ensure we have safe water

treatment and distribution systems, it is also effective and more cost efficient if we take the first steps to care for our lakes, rivers, and streams and preventing their initial contamination.

The Government of Ontario is mapping out an approach to strengthening safeguards to protect drinking water in Ontario. The *White Paper on Watershed-Based Source Protection Planning* outlines the government's proposal for a watershed-based source protection program. As well, the White Paper explores different approaches to water taking in Ontario to ensure that we have a sustainable supply of water. To review the White Paper, please visit [www.conservation-ontario.on.ca](http://www.conservation-ontario.on.ca).

## Watershed Viewpoints

### Water Source Protection

Conservation Halton supports the development of a Water Source Protection Plan for its watershed. Water source areas, such as creek headwaters and wetlands that are connected to groundwater, need to be protected to ensure the quality and quantity of our drinking water.

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