

Feds make significant investment in local watershed health



Efforts to improve ecology in the Lake Simcoe watershed received Federal dollars this month.

Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill MP Leah Taylor Roy, accompanied by Newmarket-Aurora MP Tony Van Bynen, recently announced a Federal investment of \$1 million for three freshwater projects spearheaded by the Lake Simcoe Region Conservation Authority (LSRCA), that could have a significant impact on Lake Simcoe and its watershed.

The projects, which are designed to address phosphorous flowing into the lake through agriculture, urbanization, and other paths, comes as the LSRCA celebrates its 75th anniversary this year.

“As you can imagine, over those seven decades being involved in environmental restoration and stewardship, we have seen a lot of changes in this watershed from when there weren't 400 highways to the growth,” said Rob Baldwin, CEO of the LSRCA. “Now we're facing one of the more existential changes that we are experiencing: climate change. The funding provided through the Freshwater Action Funding being announced today is to help us assess the best management practices to help our farmers and our rural landowners in mitigating and responding to those climatic changes, where the practices of 30 years ago are still as effective today, and that is what this project is really looking at: to make sure we're implementing the best management practices that will be resilient into the future.

“This work is being coordinated in partnership with TMU (Toronto Metropolitan University) and the University of Waterloo as our academic partners where they will be looking at the effectiveness of these traditional best management practices but also exploring what are the new and emerging techniques that might exist out there in the agricultural best management world.

“We're able to assess what is going to give us the best bang for the dollar to ensure that we are achieving that phosphorus reduction that we all value in Lake Simcoe.”

Knowledge that will be gleaned from these projects will be shared across Canada, he noted.

“Farming is an incredibly important part of our economy and we have to do more to protect our farmland to ensure that farming is sustainable, to ensure it doesn't damage the environment, and that we're working together to make sure farmers are supported and we can do even more,” said MP Taylor Roy. “We need more farming, we need more local farmers, and we need more sustainable farms.”

This month's funding, she said, was “an important step in protecting one of Southern Ontario's most vital fresh water resources” in Lake Simcoe, a body of water that supports “recreation, biodiversity, agriculture, tourism, economic prosperity, [and] Indigenous culture.”

“It's essential that we work together to protect it for generations to come,” she said. “Water is life; it quenches our thirst, sustaining us and our environment and our economy. Clean, fresh water is something we must never take for granted. For so many of us, Lake Simcoe represents more than just a body of water; it's part of our communities, our families, our way of life — whether it is through walking along the shores, fishing, boating, swimming in it, or simply knowing it provides drinking water for hundreds of thousands

of people. It really does play an essential role in our communities.

“For me, protecting it is not just a policy or a priority; it really is a personal commitment,” she continued. “We have heard about this money coming for quite a while, we kept waiting [and now] it is here, and as part of a \$650 million initiative over the next 10 years to restore and protect our most vital freshwater ecosystems.”

By Brock Weir