

# TAKING ACTION TO PRESERVE A CANADIAN ICON

GEORGIAN BAY  
**FOREVER**



**Annual Report 2014**



“  
**THE BAY IS  
WHERE OUR  
HEART AND  
SOUL ARE.  
PROTECTING  
THE BAY  
MEANS  
EVERYTHING  
TO US.**

”  
Mary-Elizabeth Flynn

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Georgian Bay Forever extends its sincere thanks to all volunteers who served on the Board and its committees in 2014.



Georgian Bay Forever is a proud member of the Waterkeeper Alliance.

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## Georgian Bay Forever

# PROTECTING YOUR WATER THROUGH RESEARCH AND EDUCATION

Georgian Bay is a national treasure. Its pristine waters, rugged landscapes, vast shorelines and natural beauty make it home to First Nations, attractive to early settlers and a favourite destination for cottagers, boaters, fishermen and tourists, and a place that many are proud to call home. Sometimes called the sixth Great Lake, the Bay is part of the largest body of fresh water on Earth and its wetlands are considered to be among the most productive and diverse ecosystems on the planet. More importantly, the Great Lakes, including Georgian Bay, provide drinking water for 40 million households and are home to a robust fishing industry.

Generations have lived, worked and played on these waters, but never before has the Bay been at greater risk—environmentally and economically—than it is today. Extreme fluctuations in water levels, threats to water quality, the influx of invasive species, and erosion of the Bay's sensitive wetlands are all the alarming side effects of climate change. Even more shocking is the projected \$18.8 billion impact that climate change could have on the region's economy by 2050 if we don't take action now to protect Georgian Bay and its precious ecosystems.

Georgian Bay Forever (GBF) is a registered Canadian charity dedicated to protecting, preserving and enhancing the aquatic ecosystems of Georgian Bay through accredited scientific research and public

education. We are committed to ensuring that our waters remain swimmable, drinkable and fishable, and that tourism, property values, shipping and other key industries continue to flourish on the Bay and adjoining Great Lakes.

Over the years, our investments in environmental research have not only made an impact locally, they have drawn national and international attention, allowing us to forge strategic partnerships with an impressive array of like-minded individuals and organizations, and to inform important environmental policy on both sides of the Canada-U.S. border.

Taking action to protect our water today will ensure that it continues to be here for generations to come.



**WE WANT OUR GRANDCHILDREN TO THANK US FOR BEING GREAT STEWARDS.**



**Peter and Cathie Singer**

Joint message from the Board Chair and Executive Director

# PARTNERING WITH OTHERS TO GENERATE REAL SOLUTIONS

Georgian Bay provides an amazing backdrop for memorable moments shared with family, friends and colleagues. Your vivid stories about life on the Bay, some of which are shared in this report, reinforce the importance of GBF's investments in scientific research and education.

Understanding the effects of fluctuating water levels, changes in water quality and ecosystems, and invasive species on the Bay is something we should all be concerned with given their potential impact on the local economy and the life we have come to know and enjoy on the Bay.

In 2014, GBF continued to work tirelessly on your behalf to help preserve this magnificent Canadian icon, aided by an impressive \$505,000, plus in donated funds—many of them to support the Mowat Centre study, *Low Water Blues*.

We made our first presentation to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development in April 2014, where we raised awareness of the widespread consequences of climate change on the Great Lakes, including its alarming impact on the economy.

This point was reinforced with the June release of the Mowat Centre study, *Low Water Blues*. Funded by GBF and sponsored by the Council of the Great Lakes Region (CGLR), this groundbreaking study confirmed our long-time stance that sustained low water levels in the Great Lakes will not only result in serious ecological upset, but in grave economic impacts as well.

This year, we also completed the first microbial source tracking assessment of water quality in the Township of Georgian Bay, funded DNA barcoding sample collection in Parry Sound, and forged an important partnership with NASA to monitor changes in the Bay's wetlands using satellite technology.



Public education remained a priority as we worked with communities in Collingwood and Honey Harbour to remove the invasive phragmites plant, and partnered with the Georgian Bay Biosphere Reserve (GBBR) to deliver a series of talks in Cognashene, Pointe au Baril and Sans Souci on how to take care of the Bay's fragile coastline.

Invitations to join the advisory committee of the University of Michigan Graham Institute's Integrated Assessment Study of non-structural climate adaptation measures, the Georgian Bay Research Consortium, and the steering committee for the CGLR/Mowat Centre study on the economic impact of structural climate adaptation measures, all speak to the national and international regard we have earned for our work.

To further strengthen our Board, we welcomed Terry Clark (Pointe au Baril), Erwin Stuart (Tiny), Jennifer Ferguson (Collingwood). We sincerely thank departing Board members Hugh Wilkins and Leslie Hayes, as well as Mike Hensel and Dr. Gail Krantzberg (who will now join our Science Advisory Committee).

Special thanks to everyone who supported us in 2014 with donations and volunteer work. We look forward to another productive and exciting year ahead!



**BRENDA DRINKWALTER**  
Board Chair



**DAVID SWEETNAM**  
Executive Director



# WATER LEVELS PRESERVING CHILDHOOD MEMORIES FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS

Helen Bryce has spent every summer at Pointe au Baril since she was born. Throughout her life, it has remained a magical place; no time more so than during the many summers she spent as a child at her grandparents' cottage on Champlain Island. Every afternoon after lunch, she and her brother joined her grandfather on a walk to the boathouse.

The boathouse was dark inside but the water in the slip was a brightly lit aquamarine and all the living things in it were clearly visible—like a giant fish bowl. “It was a magical sight. We fished for rock bass (they’ve since disappeared) and I remember catching them and throwing them back until Grandpa would say, “You’ve caught that one three times now, Helen, time to go back.”

Over time the water began to recede so much that the boathouse became high and dry. “When the cottage was sold, the new owners tore the boathouse down. It broke my heart.”

Helen's childhood memories reflect the changes we are seeing in the Bay due to fluctuating water levels. Low water levels affect all of us. Ships are forced to reduce their loads. Boats are more vulnerable to hull damage. Shoreline property owners face declining property values. Reduced access to the water affects tourism. And marine life relocates or disappears entirely taking its toll on the fishing industry.

While we welcomed a return to average water levels in 2014 following the devastatingly low levels of 2013, scientists agree that the Great Lakes will continue to be vulnerable to the effects of climate change, which include extreme fluctuations in water levels. Doing nothing to address the issue is not an option.

With this in mind, GBF funded a study by the Mowat Centre to look at the impact of low water levels on the Great Lakes/St. Lawrence River economy. *Low Water Blues* was released in the spring of 2014 and estimated that the economic impact on five sectors alone in the \$5.5 trillion Great Lakes/St. Lawrence Region would be a whopping \$18.8 billion by 2050 if no action were taken to manage water levels.

The threat posed by low water levels requires integrated systems thinking and, because these are boundary waters, involvement of a range of interests on both sides of the border. To that end, we are pleased to be participating in the University of Michigan's integrated assessment study, an initiative to develop tools to help decision-makers address the challenges posed by water level variability.

What is needed next is a comprehensive engineering study to identify viable, flexible structural solutions to manage increased volatility in fluctuating water levels throughout the Great Lakes. Working together, we can ensure that future generations have the opportunity to create their own memories similar to those that Helen so fondly remembers.

# WATER QUALITY NEIGHBOURS WORKING TOGETHER TO KEEP OUR WATER CLEAN

Bob Kinnear is passionate about preserving the natural and picturesque environment that he and his family enjoy in the Cognashene area of Georgian Bay. Cognashene features a network of three small lakes that are shared by a community of cottagers and long-time area residents. When low water levels threatened the quality of the area's water a few years ago, Bob discovered he was not alone in his passion for the Bay. He and his neighbours, led by Gordon Walker, Chair of the Canadian section of the International Joint Commission, quickly banded together to form 'CLEAN'.

CLEAN, which stands for Cognashene Lake Environmental Action Network, was born out of a shared concern for phosphate levels in the water. Following several meetings with concerned cottagers and residents, and with the added insights of local experts, two thirds of cottagers committed to going "phosphate-free." To further reinforce their efforts, they committed to update their septic systems and routinely pump out holding tanks.

Their actions are making a difference. Water tests have shown a marked improvement. "This is a great example of the impact we can have when we work together." GBF applauds the efforts of communities like Cognashene that are contributing to sustaining water quality in the Bay.

In 2014, GBF continued to do its part with the completion of a three-year Water Quality Monitoring Program redesign in the Township of Georgian Bay that included the introduction of 'microbial source tracking'. This novel diagnostic tool is used to help identify the source of microbial contaminants in our waters. It allows us to determine if the source of a contaminant is human or animal (e.g., animal feces vs. a leaking septic system) and inform decision-making regarding solutions to water quality issues.

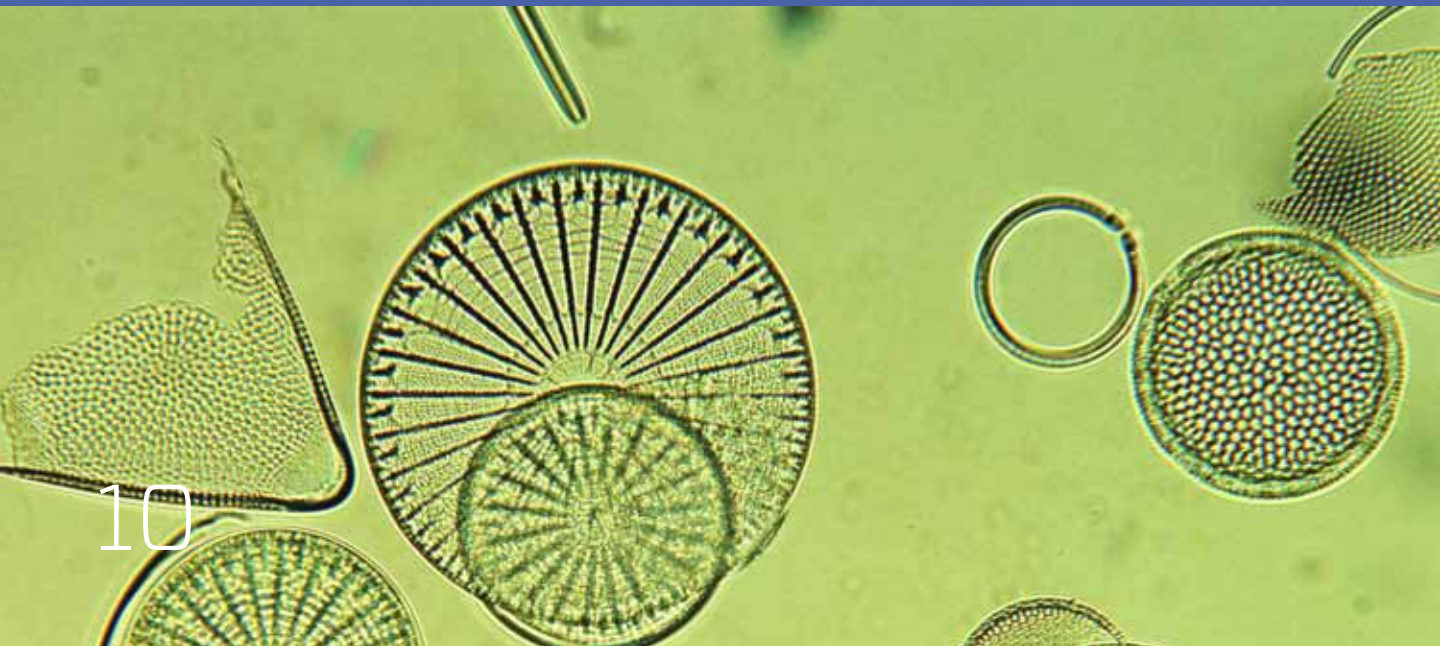
GBF also started a project with the Georgian Bay Biosphere Reserve to harmonize water-testing protocols across the Bay. By standardizing our water testing practices, we can compare our findings with other coastal monitoring programs through the Ministry of the Environment and Climate Change Lake Partner Program.

In terms of the threat posed by algal blooms, we certainly want to avoid the situation Toledo, Ohio found itself in last summer when nearly half a million people were left without water for drinking and bathing due to toxic algal blooms in Lake Erie.

GBF has worked with researchers to determine what is causing these algal blooms and water quality testing remains an important tool for monitoring the presence of dangerous contaminants.

GBF also sponsored an in-depth paleolimnology study that reconstructed the Bay's history by looking at freshwater sediments located in deep waters. The results have helped us to establish baseline conditions against which to evaluate current water quality conditions to better understand changes over time.

These approaches, together with the self-directed efforts of communities like Bob's, will serve the Bay well in continuing to protect our waters against unwanted contaminants.





# ECOSYSTEMS DISCOVERING THE SOLITUDE OF THE WETLANDS

John and Pam Mitchell welcome the seclusion of their cottage, tucked away at the end of a long bay on the north side of Monument Channel, with wetlands to the north and east. The cottagers often take to their canoes, paddling through the narrow back channels that connect one bay to the next while admiring the beauty of the wetlands along the way.

“The gar pike—quiet giants of the shallow backwaters—always intrigue us as they glide under our canoe, barely an arm’s length away,” says John.

But over time, as water levels have fluctuated, the couple has watched the wetlands in their area transform, with wild rice and cattails disappearing to be replaced by mud banks heavily laden with grasses and new tree growth. Where the gar pike once spawned, white-tailed deer now graze.

“Many of our long-favoured canoe routes through quiet back channels are no longer passable,” says John. “We can only hope that the waters rise again and that the fish and wetland plants return.”

As John’s story reflects, the Georgian Bay wetlands are vulnerable to extremes caused by climate change. Often referred to as the ‘water treatment plants’ of the Great Lakes, these delicate ecosystems contribute to keeping our water clean and provide precious habitat for many species of fish, birds, reptiles, and frogs.

Sometimes you have to look back to look forward. In 2014, GBF teamed up with the NASA, the Great Lakes/St. Lawrence Cities Initiative and the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry to measure changes in wetlands around Georgian Bay over time (using NASA Earth observation satellites). During Phase 1, the team compared satellite observations of the Bay taken in 1987 and 2013—times of historical high and low water levels—to determine how wetlands react to significant fluctuations in water levels.

GBF also sponsored a paleolimnology study that reconstructed the Bay’s history by looking at fossils found in deep water sediment. Experts identified microscopic plants and animal fossils and then used well-documented research to describe the conditions that favoured those organisms. The results will help us better understand past environmental conditions on the Bay, and predict future impacts.

Our investment in DNA barcoding sample collection in the Parry Sound region this year supported further work on building a biodiversity library for the Bay. This digital library tells us what species of fish, plants and other marine life inhabit the Bay now, and will enable us to track changes in biodiversity over time based on their DNA sequences.

Our mission is to protect precious ecosystems of the Bay and to keep our waters pristine and healthy so that people like John and Pam can continue to enjoy the natural surroundings and solitude they provide.

# INVASIVE SPECIES

SPENDING TIME WITH FAMILY LEADS TO IMPORTANT DISCOVERY



Never a day goes by that Paul Elliott doesn't thank his lucky stars that he lives and works on Georgian Bay. The owner of Henry's Restaurants on Frying Pan Island in Sans Souci, and Wye Heritage Marina in Midland, has lived and worked on the Bay for over 25 years.

"Georgian Bay is an experience," says Paul. "It has an energy all its own and every view is picture-perfect. You sometimes see things you never would have imagined. There's always something new to discover."

Paul made one such discovery about four years ago, while fishing off his dock with his young grandson. Looking down into the water, his grandson spotted a black fish and asked Paul what it was. "At first, I thought it was a baby catfish, but later discovered it was a species called a goby."

The round goby, as it turns out—is one of the 183 aquatic invasive species that currently inhabit the Great Lakes, including Georgian Bay.

Another aggressive species that has invaded the Bay is the plant, phragmites. Introduced to the region several years ago, the tall, pale green stalks initially have the appearance of an ornamental grass. Left unattended, the plant poses a serious threat to the Bay's beaches and wetlands.

In 2014, GBF kicked off a pilot project to eradicate phragmites in Eastern Georgian Bay. As part of a four year project that began in 2013, and funded by Environment Canada's Lake Simcoe South Eastern Georgian Bay Clean-Up Fund, we engaged Collingwood and Honey Harbour area residents to help remove the plant.

Improvements due to the removal of the phragmites were immediately evident. Views of the Bay improved, native vegetation reappeared, and birds and wildlife starting returning to the area.

Controlling the spread of phragmites will require the ongoing vigilance of local residents and cottagers. In 2015, communities will be offered the opportunity to work with GBF, the Georgian Bay Association and other groups to help eradicate the plant. GBF's phragmites projects are supported by grants from Environment Canada's Lake Simcoe South Eastern Georgian Bay Clean-Up Fund, the RBC Foundation's Blue Water Project and an Ontario Guardian Council Grant as well as donations from shoreline communities.

GBF continues to monitor other invasive species, including the Asian carp, Eurasian water-milfoil, round gobies, zebra and quagga mussels. Without adequate controls in place, the potential damage from these species is devastating.

Business owners like Paul, cottagers, and local residents can all play a part in identifying the presence of these species—and work with GBF, GBA, and other like-minded organizations to help eradicate them.



# OUR NUMBERS

# REVENUES & EXPENDITURES

For the year ended December 2014.

Revenues	2014	2013
Donations and Grants	\$505,897	\$695,868

Expenditures	2014	2013
Water Levels	\$231,204	\$157,744
Communications & Education	\$83,287	\$92,749
Ecosystems	\$37,254	\$0
Water Quality	\$35,081	\$57,741
<b>Total Program</b>	<b>\$386,826</b>	<b>\$308,234</b>

<b>Total Operating</b>	<b>\$87,045</b>	<b>\$65,106</b>
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<b>Total Expenditures</b>	<b>\$473,871</b>	<b>\$373,340</b>
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<b>Excess of Revenues over Expenditures</b>	<b>\$32,026</b>	<b>\$322,528</b>
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Audited statements available online at [GBF.org](http://GBF.org).

# FINANCIAL POSITION

	2014	2013
Current Assets	\$582,673	\$609,724
Capital Assets	\$26,912	\$26,882
<b>Total Assets</b>	<b>\$609,585</b>	<b>\$636,606</b>

Liabilities	\$44,276	\$103,324
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<b>Net Assets</b>	<b>\$565,309</b>	<b>\$533,282</b>
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 Jane Jeffrey  
 Duncan & Robyn Jones  
 Rainer Kaufmann & Madeleine  
 Arsenault  
 Hartmut Kayser  
 Richard Kelley  
 Lynn Kennedy  
 John & Patricia Keyser  
 Andrew Kilpatrick  
 Charles King  
 Raymond Knowles & Marguerite  
 Doritty  
 Cully & Jackie Koza  
 Jeff & Cindy Kuchman  
 Elizabeth Lahti  
 Nancy Langmuir  
 John Lawson  
 Reginald & Sheila Lewis  
 Harland & Moira Lindsay  
 Jim Lisowski & Suzanne Benett  
 Tom & Nancy Lofft  
 Albert & Joan Longo

Jane Loughborough  
 Mr. & Mrs. Robert Lovett  
 Geoffrey Lowe  
 Tom Lundy  
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 Jane Maher  
 Geoffrey & Jane Martin  
 David Martin  
 Elizabeth Martin  
 Roger Matthews  
 William & Elizabeth Maxon  
 John McAllister  
 John McClean  
 Thomas & Emily McClintock  
 William McCoy  
 Rene & Carol McCron  
 Ian & Maureen McGibbon  
 Reg McGuire  
 Charles & Shaaron McKinney  
 Mary Lou McKinnon  
 David & Jean McLay  
 Marion McLeod  
 John McMullen & Beth Stewart  
 William & Brenda McNeill  
 Sally Mead  
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 Richard Miller  
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 LaRea Moody  
 William & Sally Moore  
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 Cooper  
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 Robert & Joan Northey

Michael Nowlan  
 Peter Ortved & Maureen  
 O'Shaughnessy  
 Brett Ostrom  
 Ted Overton & Julia Gluck  
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 Wendy Parker  
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 Ray & Kit Sawyer  
 Cindy Scanlon  
 Michael & Marianne Schafer  
 David Schatz  
 Werner & Inge Schmalz  
 Howison Schroeder  
 Reed & Ann Schroeder  
 Paul & Christel Schwarz  
 Greg Scott  
 Peter & Diane Selover  
 Terry Sheard  
 Steve & Patsi Siskind  
 Chris Skelton  
 William Skerratt  
 Peter & Dallis Smith

Jack & Dorothy Smith  
 Alice Smith  
 Mark Smith & Anne Larson  
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 Gordon Smith  
 Douglas & Ruth Smith  
 Peter & Linda Smith  
 Douglas & Doris Smith  
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 Mary Taggart  
 Nory Takata & Susan Sheard  
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 Terence & Carole Thompson  
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 E.L. & Barbara Van Sickle  
 John Vanstone  
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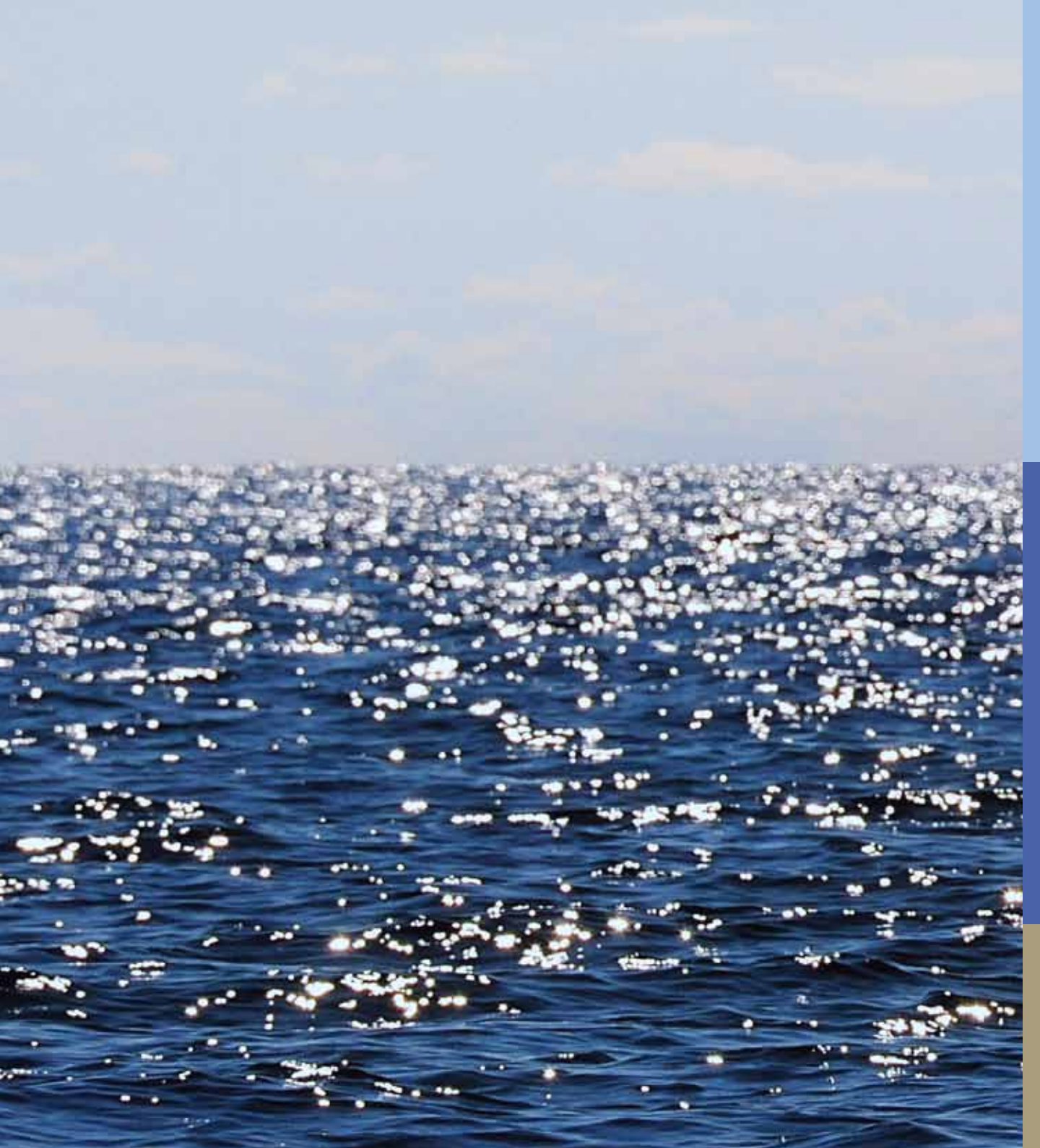
*Memories-are-forever gifts:  
 Individuals listed below have  
 had gifts made in their honour.*

## In Honour

Ashley & Keith  
 Douglas Boothe  
 Bruce Chambers  
 Brenda Drinkwalter  
 Kevin Hall  
 Heather Kidd  
 Laureen Kinnear  
 Peter & Judy Perry  
 Andrea Reekes  
 Lucille Horner Steffey  
 Brian Thomson

## In Memorium

Joan Margaret Atkins  
 Bill Ballard  
 Mike Bannon  
 Sally Beausoleil  
 Clayton Bond  
 Laura Hamilton  
 George Kilpatrick  
 Hugh & Dorothy Macaulay  
 Neil MacNaughton  
 Robert McClean  
 Keith McMullen  
 June Mullen  
 William Joseph Smith  
 Maurice Whidden  
 Morton P. Woodward



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### Contact David

David Sweetnam  
*Executive Director*  
ExecutiveDirector@  
GeorgianBayForever.org  
905.880.4945 ext 1

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