# GEORGIAN BAY FOREVER

NEWSLETTER Vol. 15 Issue 1 WINTER 2024

# FEATURED IN THIS ISSUE

AFORWARD-THINKING SCIENTIFIC PEDAGOGY

ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

#### VOLUNTEERING AS IMMERSIVE LEARNING AT GEORGIAN BAY FOREVER



# EDUCATION AND PEDAGOGY

One of the four pillars of Georgian Bay Forever's mission is education – along with science, research, and action. The purpose of education in terms of our mission is to inform the public of the most up-to-date and objective research in the field of environmentalism, specifically pertaining to aquatic ecosystems. Our aim through education is to engage local and global communities with a sense of empowerment, so that people are better equipped to understand the pressing ecological issues facing the health of Georgian Bay.

This newsletter highlights some of the methods implemented in our educational programming, and our philosophies on how to foster active engagement in communities when teaching about environmentalism.





# A MESSAGE FROM TERRY CLARK, CHAIR OF

GEORGIAN BAY FOREVER

Life is for learning, and there are many methods to experientially learn about nature and the environment. GBF is dedicated to constant growth and learning through our various technologies, scientific research, and programs focused on how best to share our learning with the public. Examples of the many learning/teaching methods abound in all the work we do for the benefit of Georgian Bay.

In the field, GBF uses its multi-spectral drone capabilities, underwater AUV, and deep water ROV to research, measure and evaluate changes in the ecosystem, coastal wetland resiliency, nearshore water quality, and the effects on stakeholder communities. We then reflect on the results, integrate them into our previously developed knowledge and construct methods and programs to best transfer this new knowledge to municipalities and the public.

GBF has collaborated and contributed to shared outcomes with volunteers and the public to develop best practices and various methodologies for eradicating invasive Phragmites, extracting plastic microfibers using washing machine filters, collecting massive amounts of tangled fishline through The Critical Catch program, and teaching students to label and bring attention to preventing all but rainwater from flowing through city storm drains with the Yellowfish Road project.

Our efforts also make their way into the classroom, where GBF shares experiential learning opportunities with students who observe, inquire, investigate, journal, and collaborate on their own nature-related projects. We hope you enjoy the articles in this edition that connect learning/teaching to GBF's work and research.

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Georgian Bay Forever is a community response to the growing need for major research and education to sustain the Georgian Bay aquatic ecosystem and the quality of life its communities and visitors enjoy.

We help monitor Georgian Bay's well-being, throughout the seasons, year after year.

We fund the research needed to protect the environmental health of Georgian Bay and the surrounding bodies of water. Using our research findings, we inform and educate the general public and governments about threats to environmental health, and propose possible solutions.

Through workshops, seminars, and online communication, we are educating the Georgian Bay community. By teaming up with reputable institutions, we enhance the credibility of our research and strengthen our ability to protect what's at stake.

Georgian Bay Forever is a registered Canadian charity (**#89531 1066 RR0001**). We work with the Great Lakes Basin Conservancy in the United States, as well as other stakeholder groups all around the Great Lakes.

Georgian Bay Forever is steered by our esteemed board of directors, a group of dedicated individuals who are committed to ensuring the functionality and purpose of our organization. They bring their experience and expertise to all aspects of operation, with the common goal of protecting and conserving Georgian Bay.

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You can reach David Sweetnam, our Executive Director at ed@gbf.org or at 905-880-4945, ext 1.

Canadian citizens may send their donations to the address above. U.S. citizens wishing to make a donation to support our work can do so by giving to: Great Lakes Basin Conservancy PO Box 504, Gates Mills, OH 44040-0504, USA

This newsletter is just a snapshot of our work. For the most up-to-date information on our projects, longer versions of newsletter articles, and breaking news about Georgian Bay, please become a regular visitor to our Facebook page and website:

#### GBF.ORG

Design and Editing by Laura Thipphawong

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# HOW TO TALK TO KIDS ABOUT CLIMATE CHANGE

**BY LAURA THIPPHAWONG** 



Talking to children about environmental stewardship and the preciousness of the natural world can help foster a sense of accountability and responsibility later in life, but by contemporary standards, learning about the environment also entails the heavy burden of extraordinary and often disastrous circumstances linked with human behaviour. The severity of these circumstances has risen exponentially in the last fifty years, leading many children and youth to harbour anxious feelings of resentment about their inherited situation. This resentment often accompanies a host of negative emotional responses, like fear, malaise, a sense of impending doom, and anger.

Despite the difficulty of navigating such a loaded topic with children, it is also a necessary part of today's discourse. Here are a few key steps to keep in mind when discussing climate change and the world's future with children.



# LEARN TOGETHER

Remember that this is an abstract concept. You don't have all the answers – no one does, and that's okay. If you don't know the answer to a question, take it as an opportunity to research it together. Doing this research also provides a chance to teach about reliable resources, and biased opinions versus objective facts. Try to stick to clear and reasonable logic and scienceinformed explanations for how the planet has changed.

# VALIDATE FEELINGS

Climate change may be a scientific concept, but it's above all an emotional topic. If you feel like the threat of wildfires, floods, storms, and the last nine years being Earth's hottest on record is scary, imagine what it's like for a child. Leave room to hear about the feelings these topics provoke. If you are the child's caretaker, it might help to look into emotional literacy tools, self-regulation, and ways in which you can help temper a child's ecoanxiety or climate-anxiety.

# **BE SOLUTIONS-MINDED**

Once emotions are validated, the next step in this conversation is empowerment. Avoid framing the issue as a political or divisive one – we're all in this together. Remind kids that there are lots of smart people working on these problems, and remember that the global nature of this issue can be overwhelming to anyone. Pushing things like public activism and the idea that the planet's future depends on them can be counterproductive, especially for introverted children. Focus on local action for global results, and remind kids that even though it's not all up to them to solve the world's problems, there are things they can do to help, and that caring for the planet does make a difference.

# A Forward-Thinking Scientific Pedagogy

By David Sweetnam

"The scientific way of thinking is at once imaginative and disciplined. This is central to its success. Science invites us to let the facts in, even when they don't conform to our preconceptions. It counsels us to carry alternative hypotheses in our heads and see which best fit the facts. It urges on us a delicate balance between no-holds-barred openness to new ideas, however heretical, and the most rigorous skeptical scrutiny of everything — new ideas and established wisdom. This kind of thinking is also an essential tool for a democracy in an age of change."

- Carl Sagan, The Demon-Haunted World: Science as a Candle in the Dark

Georgian Bay Forever has played a role in the education of the public in the Georgian Bay area for almost thirty years – since we were granted charity status back in 1995. We have enthusiastically embraced our passion and mandate to educate residents of the Georgian Bay area and the public on issues of environmental protection, conservation, safety, and preservation of the water and natural features in the Georgian Bay area of Ontario. We love to share stories and talk about the wonder of our Bay.

The educational tools we make use of are anchored firmly on scientific foundation by a strong chain of facts. The information we uncover is shared with the public through numerous vehicles: stories told visually with pictures and video or through the written word; data driven graphs, charts, and tables; meticulous scientific reports; or published peer reviewed papers. They have all made successive towards qualitatively steps or quantitatively revealing the intrinsic truths already known intimately by the members of those ecosystems.

There are clever and innovative techniques employed in revealing the stories laid down in the sediments revealed through layered paleontology investigations of lakebed core samples showing measurable impacts of industry and climate change, or the DNA fingerprinting revealing the traces of hidden organisms. All of these data points are evolving our collective knowledge of the Bay so that we can better protect it.

According to the Oxford dictionary, science is the systematic study of the structure and behavior of the physical and natural world through observation, experimentation, and the testing of theories against the evidence obtained. One obvious step missing in this definition is the interpretation of results. As described in the University of Toronto guidance, "The interpretation of your results is the section where you explain the meaning and implications of your findings in relation to your research objectives, questions, and hypotheses. It is also where you discuss how your results fit with the existing literature, theory, and practice in your field."

Our role is to be curious, ask questions and seek out answers. The answers will be forthcoming, but in science are typically revealed one incremental chain-link at a time, with the occasional serendipitous eureka discovery – often occurring after years of frustrating effort. Each answer we attain leads us to ask the next informed science-based question. However, we also recognize that the questions and observations are linked by the pedagogic system we have been exposed to, educated in and employed in our public education work.

In the article, "Pedagogic Theories" from the journal Childhood Studies, Professor Juha Hämäläinen reveals that, "A pedagogic theory deals with the nature and structure of educational action, teaching, and upbringing. Pedagogic theories are connected with belief and value systems, concepts of man and society, and philosophies of knowledge and political interests. Thus, it is rather difficult to define a pedagogic theory exactly. In general, the concept of pedagogy refers to a systematic view of organizing education." (Hämäläinen)

To that end, Georgian Bay Forever isn't focussed solely on education, but rather must spend time questioning and probing the limitations of our own current pedagogy. The previous system has obviously been leading society to the precipice of the major environmental impairments that we are now seeing impact our ecosystems, and we are recognizing the previously invisible economic costs of the kind of thinking that must be incorporated into new models.

The philosophy we have used is based on the belief and value systems of the participants. Implementing changes to the theory means challenging those same systems. Many in society find that to be threatening, but what we have in front of us now is an amazing opportunity open ourselves to the two-eyed approach and accelerate our understanding, which will lead us towards new insights. As the saying goes, two heads are better than one when it comes to problem-solving.





"Avoidable human misery is more often caused not so much by stupidity as by ignorance, particularly our ignorance about ourselves. I worry that, especially as the Millennium edges nearer, pseudoscience and superstition will seem year by year more tempting, the siren song of unreason more sonorous and attractive. Where have we heard it before? Whenever our ethnic or national prejudices are aroused, in times of scarcity, during challenges to national self-esteem or nerve, when we agonize about our diminished cosmic place and purpose, or when fanaticism is bubbling up around us-then, habits of thought familiar from ages past reach for the controls. The candle flame gutters. Its little pool of light trembles. Darkness gathers. The demons begin to stir."

- Carl Sagan, The Demon-Haunted World: Science as a Candle in the Dark

Hämäläinen, Juha. "Pedagogic Theories." *Childhood Studies*, 23 Mar. 2012, https://doi.org/10.1093/obo/9780199791231-0015.

Sagan, Carl. *Demon-Haunted World: Science as a Candle in the Dark.* Paw Prints, 2008, pp. 26–27.





## **BY LAURA THIPPHAWONG**

he exponential rise of environmental and disaster- ${f I}$  related issues affects everyone on a global scale, and has changed the way people talk about the prospects for a sustainable future. Only in the last fifty or so years in Earth's history has environmental education become integrated into the Western school system and the public education sphere. Where once an environmentalist was seen at best as quirky and unconventional, by today's standards environmentalism and an interest in environmental issues is a universal part of the zeitgeist. The ubiquity of environmental discourse - in schools, social media, news publications, the internet, and other platforms for disseminating information have begun changing the way in which environmental issues are prioritized. The prevalence, however, of salacious and oftentimes nihilistic media coverage for the sake of attracting attention to a platform has resulted in an age of (mis)information-overload and the constant bombardment of stand-alone facts and figures without the necessary context to share that information in a productive way.

One of Georgian Bay Forever's primary mandates is to educate, but there is a vast difference between environmental information, and environmental education; from a pedagogical standpoint, information alone is insufficient for cultivating a sense of understanding or inspiring positive action. A functional pedagogy of environmentalism involves active participation over passive listening, and problem-solving and critical thinking over recitation. This approach diverges from a more traditional rote style of learning prevalent in Western schools and public forums, but is not necessarily a radical departure from many contemporary learning models. Our aim at GBF is to continue advocating for and creating educational programming and materials for the public in keeping with a content-appropriate pedagogy for environmentalism and stewardship.

## EDUCATING

- ENCOURAGES CRITICAL THINKING AND EVALUATION.
- CONSIDERS VARIOUS
  PERSPECTIVES AS PART OF
  EVALUATION AND ANALYSIS.
- HELPS DEVELOP INQUISITIVE REFLECTION AND PROBLEM-SOLVING SKILLS.
- PROMOTES UNDERSTANDING, LOGIC, AND REASON.

### INFORMING

- PROVIDES FACTS AND OPINIONS.
- WITHOUT INTERDISCIPLINARY NUANCE, THE PURPOSE OF CITING INFORMATION OFTEN ENCOURAGES ROTE LEARNING.
- BEGINS AND ENDS WITH THE INFORMATION GIVEN - IS NOT OPEN FOR INTERPRETATION.
- CAN BE BIASED TOWARDS POLITICAL, EMOTIONAL, OR SOCIAL VIEWPOINTS.

# FISH IN THE CLASSROOM

#### BY ASHLEY MORRISON

Our desire to care and protect is inherently related to our connection and understanding of the land. We must engage with nature to have a true appreciation for the complexities of the natural environment. In my experience as an educator, youth have a better understanding of land-based animals over aquatic-based. This is a direct result of having greater access to seeing a squirrel running across a fence line, or a rabbit grazing in the yard. Even for those who live along the Bay and have an appreciation for it, it's often hard to truly visualize what is taking place beneath the water's surface.

Trout

Working with the Georgian Triangle Anglers Association (GTAA), and the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry, we have equipped 10 schools in the southern Georgian Bay area with a Brook Trout Hatchery Program. Each school was provided all necessary materials to successfully raise brooke trout, along with 200 eggs, and a curriculum connections guide to facilitate teaching about raising fish. Most schools have set the aquarium in the library, allowing access for all grades to engage in learning.

The likelihood of a significant die-off between egg delivery and the end of the program is high and normal. If we consider 200 eggs laid in a river, the probability of even 70% of them surviving is quite low because of turbidity, weather conditions, predators, and shelter. The eggs were delivered in late November and will stay with the schools until June. At that point, the GTAA will pick up the fish, and return them to their hatchery where they will be raised for another year. This allows the fish to get bigger in size, increasing their survival rates when returned to nature.

While this program is self-guided, there are supports in place to ensure the successful delivery of the program, including regular check-ins with teachers, and private Google Classrooms for schools in the same board to share lesson plans, photos, stories, etc. The limiting factor with Google Classroom is that you cannot add external emails to the classroom, meaning GBF staff, and other school boards cannot join this virtual classroom. To mitigate this, all teachers have been shared each other's emails to be able to communicate and further share resources.

## **MICROPLASTICS IN A BACKPACK**



The Microplastics in a Backpack program teaches students about the impacts of human-created waste in the environment. The program focuses on Grade 1 - 10, and aims to bring attention to microplastics in the daily lives of the participants. Utilizing digital microscopes, students examine various samples of matter from daily life in an attempt to find microplastics and microfibres. Examples include dryer lint, water, dirt, and sand samples from around Georgian Bay. Students take small amounts of each material and comb through them to identify and separate the plastics from the natural elements. This program also incorporates venturing into their environment to show how humans have shaped some of the nature surrounding them. We encourage students to dive deeper into identifying elements such as paths, ditches, and other human-made details that could influence how and where microplastics enter our environments.

The Enviroscape program also aims to educate students from Grade 1-10, but focuses on the impacts of pollutants on watersheds and the various ways society can make positive changes to benefit overall water health. The Enviroscape itself is a tabletop landscape that simulates different constructed and natural environments such as subdivisions with new buildings, farmland, water

treatment facilities, and forests both before and after harvesting. By teaching participants about the different affects each location has on watershed health, the Enviroscape program facilitates the creation of ideas about how to divert and reduce pollutants before they can impact the environment.

# NATURE JOURNALING

@BILLIEJOOUTDOORS

Nature journaling is a method of recording observations, curiosity, and wonder, and it holds significant value due to its potential to deepen our connection with the natural world, foster a sense of mindfulness, and contribute to scientific understanding. While there are no rules on how this is done, John Muir Laws and Emilie Lygren cowrote the book How to Teach Nature Journaling Curiosity, Wonder and Attention which highlights a foundational practice using guided statements like, "I Notice, I Wonder, and It Reminds me of," along with words, pictures, and numbers as a starting point for many. Educators find these steps particularly helpful when introducing these concepts to their students.

As an outdoor educator of 25 years in public education, with a focus on canoeing instruction, guiding, and



nature journaling, I've noticed that educators lack an understanding of the true value of nature journaling. Nature journaling is a crosscurricular tool that can be used to build on the curriculum being taught in the classroom. For example, recording metadata in mathematics such as date, time, weather, and location, while simultaneously studying scientific concepts such as animal habitats, natural structures, and mapping movements can all easily incorporate nature journaling. Learners are guided utilizing the scaffolding template of, I Notice, I Wonder, It Reminds me of, and are encouraged to use words, pictures, and numbers to organize their observations, questions, and thoughts. Nature journaling is the tool that connects all observation, wonder, and curiosity together.

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The creative process of nature journaling is incredible. When given time and permission to sit in nature and explore one's curiosity without fear of a right or wrong answer, a world of wonder and learning is unleashed. I was teaching nature journaling to a Grade 10 class where a student was interested in markings on a leaf. I prompted them by asking what they thought was going on with the leaf. With a very common "I don't know" answer, I once again asked what they thought but this time added, "I don't know the answer and I am really curious what you think." Again, with some hesitation, they began to share their thoughts. They believed the markings were a type of fungus entering the plant through the soil, based on their direct observations of the tree as a whole. The student and I were able to share ideas back and forth about other possibilities and ideas. I encouraged them to write it all down. Upon my return the student had filled their page with questions and possible answers.

Nature journaling does not start or stop with the written word, making it accessible for all learners. I have spent much time nature journaling with kindergarten students



• Howd • Will H • Did J • How and students with learning differences, where we focus on oral observations, wonder, connection, and image. As an educator, you can scribe for them, or have them record their thoughts, which they can then scribe from later. During an online class I had a student with learning differences who was stronger in oral communication than in written. Using the scaffolding method, we utilized their skillset when documenting their observations of a grape. They began noticing that there were seeds, which they counted while asking lots of questions. This student was completely engaged with this single grape for the entire forty-minute class.

Nature journaling is not only good for students, but educators as well. I strongly believe that the educator must also keep a nature journal,

as it will give them a foundation and understanding in journaling, allowing them to guide their students with confidence. As with any skill, practice is needed to become proficient. Asking a student to sit for an hour in their very first sit spot would lead to much frustration. As educators, we need to acknowledge this is a process where students need to be guided in becoming comfortable sitting in

#### 00 TELL ME, WHAT IS IT YOU PLAN TO DO WITH YOUR ONE WILD AND PRECIOUS LIFE? $\nabla \nabla$

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the lion attact it?

ong will it take before it

#### - MARY OLIVER. "THE SUMMER DAY"

silence with their own thoughts. Without an educator's experience, it becomes increasingly difficult to assist a student. There is another Vervet Eagle OWl Does Not Lookgoon "Panting eyes Keepe w 10ft from Pride common feeling that will arise from a beginner nature journaler: the feeling of "I'm done." It is the educator's job to let the students know that this feeling is natural, and ask them to push past it, as this is where the deeper thoughts and questions will arise.

> Numerous scientific publications emphasize the significance of nature journals and the health advantages associated with outdoor activities. Through personal practice and education, I've heightened my awareness, constantly seeking answers in my surroundings. This heightened awareness has



also been observed in staff and students I've worked with. Witnessing students' expressions of wonder and engagement in profound conversations about the natural world has fostered remarkable connections. A student's confidence and enthusiasm for exploration are evident when given the freedom to do so.

A question that comes up often is, "how do I get started". The answer is always: paper, pencil, a clipboard, and time outside. While there are many resources available, I encourage new nature journalers to check out the book How to Teach Nature Journaling Curiosity, Wonder, Attention by John Muir Laws and Emilie Lygren, and the Wild Wonder Foundations website at wildwonder.org for a plethora of free resources and videos.

Time spent outside with your thoughts and a nature journal is never a waste. It starts with one page.

Billie Jo is a seasoned

outdoor education professional and **ORCKA** Instructor with over 20 years of experience. She integrates her passion for nature journaling into her work, collaborates with the Wild Wonder Foundation, and co-leads a safari trip with author and educator John Muir Laws. Her extensive outdoor education background enriches her ability to connect people with nature through her teaching and workshops.



### Volunteering as Immersive Learning at Georgian Bay Forever By Laura Thipphawong

Volunteering is one of the staple facets of nearly any charity or non-profit organization, and the benefits of volunteering are numerous. For students and people in the early stages of their career, volunteering can be the chance to learn practical skills and gain job-relevant experience in a low-pressure environment. For civic-minded individuals, it's a chance to give back to your community or to a cause that matters. The satisfaction for the volunteer and the contribution made to the hosting organization are clearly recognizable, but there is also a profound learning opportunity at play in the volunteer structure that is likely to occur whether intentional or not.

When volunteers experience the real-time effects of their work, they are in turn able to make better logical, emotional, and practical connections between the volunteer work and their day-to-day lives. Immersion in an environment where volunteers can personally witness the cause and effect of their work contributes to an understanding of that issue, which should likely affect their mindset, even when that work is done in a limited timeframe or in a microcosm of the larger issues of which they are concerned. Picking up trash off the beaches of Georgian Bay, for example, crystalizes the notion of littering and the effects of littering in the mind of the volunteer, thereby affecting that person's outlook when it comes to buying and disposing of wasteful products in the future. The strengthened practice of reflection on the given issue naturally works to alter behaviour outside of the volunteering sphere, and can often lead to a role-modeling effect where the volunteer inspires others to participate as well.

In 2023, Georgian Bay Forever saw a significant increase in volunteer participation for our fifth year of shoreline cleanups. Our volunteers totalled 455, many of whom



became regulars alongside their families and friends. Initiatives were introduced such as raffles and interactive information booths designed to educate the public and volunteers with regards to where trash ends up once it's discarded. The focus on engagement and the uptick in volunteer participation has been greatly encouraging, especially when we see the evidence of practical learning paired with powerful results. With over double the amount of shoreline cleanup volunteers since 2021, we were able to remove 1,417.84 pounds of litter from local public beaches.

When volunteers work directly to improve upon their community, they of course are left with a deeper sense of value for that community. If you would like to volunteer with us this summer, please reach out to info@gbf.org or visit the volunteer page of our website at gbf.org.





was born and raised in St Catharine's Ontario and my Lchildhood haunt was the Niagara Escarpment, where my friends and I would play games and dig for fossils. But for two weeks every summer my family would visit the beaches of Lake Nipissing near to where my mom grew up. This is where I first fell in love with the water, granite, sand, and pine - the Canadian Shield - and this love led me to Georgian Bay. I believe strongly that every person who enjoys Georgian Bay has a personal responsibility to treat it like the unique place it really is, so when my wife and I moved to Carling Township several years ago, I knew that I wanted to get involved with a local "on-theground" organization that educates people and helps them to understand how their behavior impacts this fragile ecosystem. I was told to check out Georgian Bay Forever, and after learning more, I knew this was the organization I wanted to join and support.



Science, research, and education have always been a big part of my life. I grew up tinkering with chemistry sets, ruining our carpet with unknown chemicals, and blasting my sense of smell with the noxious gases I created. As an academic , I consider myself a researcher first and teacher second, but frankly, they are two sides of the same academic coin, that if you are fascinated with science and nature, you can inspire others to become fascinated as well. I am thrilled to be part of Georgian Bay Forever because it is the premier



research and educational organization for pan-Georgian Bay. Among the many organizations that see Georgian Bay as their purpose, who want the best for it, I believe the only one approaching conservation from scientific and education perspectives is Georgian Bay Forever. Georgian Bay is an incredibly complex set of interconnected ecosystems, and it is only through science that we can tease out the ecological levers and switches that need to be pulled or flipped in order to preserve what we have. By working collaboratively with other scientific communities, Georgian Bay Forever provides important answers and solutions to aid in the preservation of our beloved Bay.

The team here is dedicated to preserving the Bay, and truly, I have never seen a more committed group. Having spent my adult life doing research, I know the financial costs and dedication it takes for researchers to investigate and communicate solutions clearly.

Getting more involved and learning about the organization has made me feel confident that every dollar I and others donate goes directly to furthering the science-based mission of understanding and preserving the Bay.

Preserving Georgian Bay is truly important to me and my family; we feel a solitude here that we have never found elsewhere, and through this solitude it is possible to find peace. I feel fortunate to be a member of Georgian Bay Forever, and look forward to our continued efforts to combat the threats to the Bay, and to expand our research and education capabilities. I hope you will join me in supporting these efforts.

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For more information go to waterkeeper.org



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