ONTARIO SOURCE WATER PROTECTION PROGRAM

The Ontario Ministry of Environment, Conservation and Parks (MECP) Source Water Protection program facilitates the creation of watershed-based protection plans that act as the first line of defense in a multi-barrier approach to protecting drinking water.

The program was created as a result of the province’s 2006 Clean Water Act, which requires the assessment of threats to sources of drinking water and the implementation of protection plans. This program covers both groundwater and surface water sources. To comply with this requirement, Ontario established source protection areas based on natural watershed boundaries and created local multi-stakeholder source protection committees to engage in planning efforts for each area. Source protection authorities provide local program delivery. Source protection plans have been developed by these committees for all source protection areas and received the official approval of MECP. Copies of these plans as well as other locally-focused resources related to source water protection planning and implementation are available online. These watershed-based plans are implemented mainly by provincial and municipal levels of government. Plan policies require actions to reduce, eliminate or manage identified risks. Examples of these actions range from changing land uses, to prohibiting or restricting activities that pose a threat to source water or setting up septic system inspection programs through local health departments.

Information on Ontario’s efforts, including wellhead and intake protection area boundaries, specific vulnerabilities of different sources of supply and relevant land use information are tracked within their Source Protection Information Atlas, an interactive online map. Ontario has invested over $275 million Canadian dollars into the Source Water Protection program since 2004, and has trained more than 200 risk management officials and inspectors to help with its implementation.

The province’s investment to date includes CA$235 million to fund technical and scientific studies, develop local protection plans and advance outreach efforts to encourage early voluntary actions by landowners. An additional CA$24.5 million was made available through the Ontario Drinking Water Stewardship program to assist over 3,000 local actions by landowners to protect public supplies including implementing runoff and erosion control measures, inspecting and upgrading septic systems and closing or upgrading wells. In 2013, an additional CA$14.1 million was awarded to 199 small, rural municipalities to assist with source water plan implementation. The regional protection plans created through Ontario’s Source Water Protection program encompass more than 450 municipal drinking water systems across the province, many of which are located within the Great Lakes basin.

**TYPE**

Investment
ISSUE
Source Water